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From women's learning (Fuxue) to gender studies: Feminist challenges to Modern Confucianism

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FROM WOMEN'S LEARNING TO GENDER EDUCATION: FEMINIST CHALLENGES TO CONFUCIANISM

Sor-hoon Tan

Introduction

The promotion of Confucianism to offer solutions to contemporary problems, better alternatives to the patently unsatisfactory *status quo* of our world and the tired ideals that have dominated academic and global discourses, should not be mistaken for naïve traditionalism advocating the revival of Confucianism as it was understood and practiced in its historical milieu. This is especially pertinent in the area of gender relations. Chenyang Li pointed out nearly two decades ago: as "the philosophical-religious tradition that originated in Confucius and was further developed by scholars and supporters of later times … there is little doubt that the answer to our first question of whether Confucianism has oppressed women has to be affirmative."[1] Reviewing late twentieth century studies of Chinese women in traditional society that challenge earlier literature depicting them only as oppressed victims, Li concluded that "While Confucianism's oppression of women was quite severe – indeed undeniably severe – it must have left some room for women's moral cultivation and even social participation." [2]

Li believes that the exploration of common ground between Confucianism and feminism to "find out whether Confucianism is able conceptually to accommodate women's equality" could help to overcome Confucianism's "gender complex."[3] If there is so much affinity between Confucianism and feminism or feminist perspectives, as many interesting explorations of the philosophical common ground between the two have shown, why was Confucianism complicit in the oppression of women in traditional Chinese society? Li suggests two possible answers: 1) aspects of Confucianism that are women-oppressive could be traced to additions by some specific thinkers of later dynasties after Confucius and Mencius, whose core doctrines are free from sexism; 2) restrictive application domain of values or perspectives that have affinity with feminism: "sexist interpretations of *ren* and other core values of Confucianism may have been responsible for excluding women in ancient China. It does not, however, necessarily imply that the concept of *ren* itself is sexist."[4]

Even a scholar who judges that not criticizing the prevailing sexist social arrangements of gender segregation and male dominance rendered Confucius "an accomplice to the continued cultural minimalization of women," sees Confucius as supporting equal

[1] Chenyang Li, "Confucianism and Feminist Concerns: Overcoming the Confucian "Gender Complex"," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2000): 188.
[2] Ibid., 191.
[3] Ibid., 192.
[4] Ibid., 193.

opportunity to learn that can be extended to women.[5] While not quite egalitarian in its approach to education for both genders, Confucianism's emphasis on learning provided a way to promote Chinese women's education during historical periods when many societies did not permit women to be educated, let alone see any need to do so. Despite the fact that Confucius had no female student – even his own daughter and niece are mentioned in the *Analects* only on the occasion of Confucius finding them good husbands (*Analects* 5.1, 5.2) while the text recorded his teaching his own son (*Analects* 16.13) – his views about learning as a central value and "in education, there should be no distinction of kind/class (*youjiao wulei* 有教无类)" (*Analects* 15.38) have been cited as justifying women's equal access to education by contemporary scholars.[6] Given that equal access to education has been granted, at least formally, to women in East Asian societies with Confucian legacies, it seems unproblematic to re-read Confucian texts to discard its sexist accretions in favor of gender equality today.

However, "gender neutral" readings and applications of Confucian ideas despite sexist intentions of their original authors may not be enough to reconcile Confucianism and feminism, let alone construct a Confucian feminism that will offer "a sense of cultural recovery for Chinese feminism."[7] Beyond acknowledging the complicity of Confucianism in past oppressions of women, and resolutely rejecting sexist interpretations, closer scrutiny of how ideas that are not intrinsically sexist have nevertheless supported or even encouraged oppressive practices which diminished women is necessary to prevent Confucianism, if revived today, from repeating its historical errors. Chinese women were not excluded from education by an oversight in limiting the application of Confucian ideas of learning to men. The next section will examine textual historical evidence to show that, throughout China's long history, Confucians paid explicit and serious attention to the education of women; rather than denial of education to women, applying Confucian ideas of learning to women resulted in the gendered education established within Confucian tradition that discriminated against women and entrenched their inferior social position. This exemplifies Lijuan Yuan's observation that, "in a deeply gendered social context, an ostensibly gender-neutral theory may have consequences that are disproportionately damaging for women."[8]

Have the social contexts in today's China, and other Confucian societies, changed sufficiently that Confucian ideas no longer pose a sexist threat? Equal formal access to educational institutions notwithstanding, systematic variations structured along gender as an axis of inequality persist in many aspects of education in many countries, including East Asian countries; gender equality or parity remains an elusive goal even today. Recent empirical studies have shown gender relations worsening insofar as women's well-being and self-realization are concerned despite their impressive gains in education. Whether gender equality or parity is desirable, how to achieve it, and the role of education in that endeavor, are issues that a modern (and feminist) Confucian philosophy of education needs to reflect upon so that it could contribute to that conversation, and it needs to do so by going beyond abstract philosophizing to pay serious attention to the multidisciplinary studies of gender, in

[5] Terry Woo, "Confucianism and Feminism," in *Feminism and World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 116-17.
[6] Ann A. Pang-White, "Introduction: Rereading the Canon," in *Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender*, ed. Ann A. Pang-White (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 6; Yu-ning Li, "Historical Roots of Changes in Women's Status in Modern China," in *Chinese Women through Chinese Eyes*, ed. Yu-ning Li (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 112.
[7] Li, "Confucianism and Feminist Concerns," 194.
[8] Lijun Yuan, "Ethics of Care and Concept of Ren: A Reply to Chenyang Li," *Hypatia* 17, no. 1 (2002): 124.

order to solve real problems confronting women today. Beyond the fact that "*conceptual possibilities* of a traditional idea do little for historically grounded oppressions that are usually tied to conventional interpretations of that very idea," some who are interested in the cultural revival of Confucianism in mainland China advocate revivals of traditional gender roles as well.[9]

> Being a good daughter, a good mother, a good wife, are the necessary demand of women's natural and family attributes, the most basic value basis for measuring the meaning of Chinese women's lives, hence the basis of Chinese women's sense of achievement and belonging. As for participating in the public life of society, being a successful career woman, these are not necessary demands on Chinese women …[10]

Jiang's recommendation for modern women's self-cultivation is to revive traditional gendered education based on didactic texts used in the past, such as the *Biographies of Women* (*Lienü Zhuan* 列女传) and *Classic for Daughters* (*Nüer Jing* 女儿经). Given that the social reality in China (and probably all other societies with Confucian influence) still retains significant degree of traditional gender bias associated (even if erroneously so) with Confucianism, there is a real risk of Confucianism repeating and continuing to perpetuate oppression of women. Simply offering contending interpretations of Confucian ideas in the ivory tower is not enough. This paper will explore what more those who value Confucianism but reject sexism might do to meet feminist challenges.

Education of women in Confucian texts and historical practice

Education is central to Confucian philosophy. Confucius described himself as one who "study without respite and instruct others without growing weary" (*Analects* 7.2).[11] He urged his students to "make an earnest commitment to the love of learning and be steadfast to the death in service to the efficacious way (*shandao* 善道)" (*Analects* 8.13). Whether a Confucian follows Mencius in believing that we are born with four sprouts of humaneness (*ren* 仁), appropriateness (*yi* 义), ritual propriety (*li* 礼), and wisdom (*zhi* 知), constituting natural human goodness, or is more persuaded by Xunzi that the natural qualities of human beings are bad in tending towards greed and conflict in inevitable circumstances of scarcity, she would affirm that personal cultivation, which could be understood as education, is indispensable to becoming human, not the biological human as an animal species, but the normative human as an accomplishment. Mencius' ideal government goes beyond ensuring material prosperity to undertaking the responsibility of educating the people:

> This is the way of the common people: once they have a full belly and warm clothes on their back they degenerate to the level of animals if they are allowed to lead idle lives, without education and discipline. This gave the sage king further cause for concern, and so he appointed Hsieh as the Minister for

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[9] The criticism by Indian feminists identified by Vrinda Dalmiya applies to the appropriation Confucian resources for Chinese feminism as well. Vrinda Dalmiya, "Caring Comparisons: Thoughts on Comparative Care Ethics," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2009): 205.

[10] Jiang Qing 蒋庆, "Only Confucianism Can Settle Modern Women: the *Biographies of Women* is a Good teaching Resource (只有儒家能安顿现代女性)," *The Paper* (澎湃), 12 August 2015, http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1362813, accessed 18 May 2017. For responses to this interview, see Dai Jinhua 戴锦华, "There exists a profound phantom of 'polygamy' in Current Gender Imagination (当下的性别想象中，深刻地存在着"多妻制"幽灵)," *The Paper* (澎湃), 15 December 2015, http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1409159; and several postings in the *Confucianism* website (儒家网), http://www.rujiazg.com/category/page/1/type/9/small/53/, accessed 19 May 2017.

[11] Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent in-text citations of *Analects* from *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Jr. Rosemont (New York: Ballantine, 1998).

> Education whose duty is to teach the people human relationships: love between father and son, duty between ruler and subject, distinction between husband and wife, precedence of the old over the young, and faith between friends. (*Mencius* IIIA4)[12]

Was the learning valued by Confucians and the education to be provided for the people by good governments accessible to women as well as men, or only restricted to the latter, which would render Confucianism a sexist philosophy? While there is no explicit statement in the *Analects* pertinent to this issue, the absence of female students was probably due to Confucius following the tradition ritual norm of segregated education for men and women, a norm that Mencius referred to without criticizing:

> Have you never studied the rites? When a man comes of age his father gives him advice. When a girl marries, her mother gives her advice, and accompanies her to the door with these cautionary words, "When you go to your new home, you must be respectful and circumspect. Do not disobey your husband." It is the way of a wife or concubine to consider obedience and docility the norm. (*Mencius* IIIB2.)

While rejecting obedience and docility as incompatible with being a "great man (*dazhangfu* 大丈夫), Mencius apparently took for granted that that these are appropriate norms for women. The relation between husband and wife Mencius included in the five basic human relationships is one governed by distinction, this became a more general "distinction between men and women (*nannü you bie* 男女有别)" in the ritual canon and conventional vocabulary of China.[13] In practice, a gendered approach to education fitted into a larger structure of gender differentiation and segregation defining the ritual order of social relations and cosmic harmony endorsed by the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记). "If no distinction was observed between men and women, then disorder would arise and grow – such is the nature of heaven and earth."[14] Unlike "measures of weight, length and volume, the fixing of the elegancies of ceremony; the commencement of the year and month; the color of dress; differences of flags and blazonry; vessels and weapons; distinctions in dress," which rulers may change, the "distinction between men and women," together with "what concerned affection for kin, the honor paid to the honorable, the respect due to the aged" among the people, are norms that even sage kings cannot change.[15]

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[12] Unless otherwise stated, citations from the *Mencius* are from D.C. Lau, *Mencius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970). See also passages describing "humane government (*renzheng* 仁政)" in *Mencius* IA3, IA7, and *Analects* 13.9.

[13] In the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记), where this phrase appears in the *"*Single victim at the border Sacrifice (*Jiao Te Sheng* 郊特牲, p. 708) chapter, the context is the marriage ceremony, in which the man and woman referred to are (soon to be) husband and wife. Elsewhere in the same text, the distinction is between men and women, for example in the "Record of small matters in the dress of mourning (*Sangfu xiaoji* 丧服小记, p. 871)," the "Great Treatise (*Dazhuan* 大传, p. 907), "Record of Music (*Yueji* 乐记, p. 986)," "Different teachings of the different kings (*Jingjie* 经解, p. 1257), and "The meaning of the marriage ceremony (昏义, p. 1418)." Page numbers are from Sun Xidan 孙希旦, *Record of Rites (Liji 礼记)*, 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989).

[14] "Record of Music," ibid., 994. Translated in *Li Chi*, trans. James Legge (Forgotten Books, 2008)., part II, p. 63.

[15] "The Great Treatise" in *Liji*, 907. *Li Chi*, II: 37. For a discussion of other pre-Han and Han texts on the distinction between men and women as definitive of human civilization, see Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 207. Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 76-77.

Central to the gender distinction is not so much essential nature or biological characteristics but the segregation between the inner (*nei* 内) and outer (*wai* 外) in the division of roles and functions for men and women according to the normative arrangements of family life.

> The observances of ritual propriety commence with a careful attention to the relations between husband and wife. They built the mansion and its apartments, distinguishing between the exterior and interior parts. The men occupied the exterior; the women the interior. The mansion was deep, and the doors were strong, guarded by porter and eunuch. The men did not enter the interior; the women did not come out into the exterior.[16]
>
> The men should not speak of what belongs to the interior, nor the women of what belongs to the exterior. Except at sacrifices and funeral rites, they should not hand vessels to one another. … They should not go to the same well nor the same bathing house. They should not share the same mat in lying down; they should not ask or borrow anything from one another; they should not wear similar upper or lower garments. Things spoken inside should not go out; words spoken outside should not come in.[17]

Given the emphasis on division of labor and functional differentiation in the "distinction between men and women," it is not surprising that, insofar as education prepares a child for his or her respective functions as an adult when he or she takes his or her proper place in the family and society, the classical model prescribes different education based on gender.

Differences between the genders are accompanied by commonalities, as evident in the instructions of the *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 礼记) for educating young girls and boys:

> When the child was able to take its own food, it was taught to use the right hand. When it was able to speak, a boy (was taught to) respond boldly and clearly; a girl, submissively and low.
>
> At six years, they were taught the numbers and the names of the cardinal points; at the age of seven, boys and girls did not occupy the same mat nor eat together; at eight, when going out or coming in at a gate or door, and going to their mats to eat and drink, they were required to follow their elders: the teaching of yielding to others was now begun; at nine, they were taught how to number the days.[18]

Gender differentiation is rare in at the earliest stage of education, for which most instructional texts of later dynasties addressed "children" even though boys were in fact their main concern. One exception is the *Words for Little Girls* (*Nü xiaoer yu* 女小儿语) written in the sixteenth century by Lü Desheng 吕得胜, who also authored *Words for Little Children* (*Xiaoer yu* 小儿语). Lü apparently wrote the former due to a perceived inadequacy or unsuitability of the latter for educating girls. The *Words for Little Girls* explicitly steers girls toward domestic life as good wife and mother, whereas teachings for boys to become good husband and father are glaringly absent from the *Words for Little Children*. Nevertheless, despite somewhat different tones, Ping-chen Hsiung finds more similarities than differences between the two, implying that "the lines separating grown-ups from children were immeasurably clearer than those distinguishing gender in early childhood. Furthermore, class

[16] "The pattern in the family (*Neize* 内则)," Sun Xidan 孙希旦, *Liji*, 759. *Li Chi*, I: 268.
[17] "The pattern in the family (*Neize* 内则)," *Liji*, 735. *Li Chi*, I: 259.
[18] "The pattern in the family (*Neize* 内则)," *Liji*, 768-69. *Li Chi*, I: 272-73.

or socioeconomic status was unquestionably the second leading factor in formulating these rules and codes, much more so than the separation of the sexes."[19]

Gender differences widened with stricter segregation from ten years old – girls keeping to the inner quarters, and boys no longer allowed in the women's apartments.

> At ten, the boy went to a master outside, and stayed with him even over the night. He learned the different classes of characters and calculation; he did not wear his jacket or trousers of silk; in his manners he followed his early lessons; morning and evening he learned the behavior of a youth; he would ask to be exercised in reading the tablets, and in the forms of polite conversation.[20]
>
> …
>
> A girl at the age of ten ceased to go out from the women's apartments. Her governess taught her the arts of pleasing speech and manners, to be docile and obedient, to handle the hempen fibres, to deal with the cocoons, to weave silks and form fillets, to learn (all) woman's work, how to furnish garments, to watch the sacrifices, to supply the liquors and sauces, to fill the various stands and dishes with pickles and brine, and to assist in setting forth the appurtenances for the ceremonies.[21]

A growing literature for instructing girls and young women written by both men and women over the centuries testifies to the attention given to Chinese women's education. The more famous examples among them include the *Biographies of Exemplary Women* by Liu Xiang 刘向 (ca. 79 - 8 BCE) and subsequent compilations modelled on it, *The Lessons for Women* (*Nüjie* 女戒) by Ban Zhao (ca. 45 - 117), *Teachings for Women* (*Nüxun* 女训) by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192), *The Book of Filiality for Women* (*Nü Xiaojing* 女孝经) by Madam Zheng 郑氏 of the Tang dynasty, *The Analects for Women* (*Nü Lunyu* 女论语) by Song Ruoxin 宋若莘 (died 820) and Song Ruozhao 宋若昭 (761-828), *Teachings for the Inner Court* (*Neixun* 内训) by Ming dynasty Empress Xu 徐 (1362-1407), *Short Records of Models for Women* (*Nüfan jielu* 女范捷录) by Madam Liu 刘 (ca. 1480-1570), *Regulations for the Women's Quarters* (*Guifan* 闺范) by Lü Kun 吕坤 (1536-1618), *Women's Learning* (*Nüxue* 女学) by Lan Dingyuan 蓝鼎元 (1680-1733), *Women's Learning* (*Fuxue* 妇学) by Zhang Xuecheng 章学诚 (1738-1801). Four of these, *The Lessons for Women*, *The Analects for Women*, *Teachings for the Inner Court*, and *Short Records of Models for Women*, all written by women, were compiled and edited with commentaries by Wang Xiang 王相, the son of the Madam Liu who authored the last of the these works, to form the *Women's Four Books*, published in 1624. Rather than denying women education, gender distinction both in Confucian texts and historical practice had been understood to imply different kinds of education required to cultivate the persons of men and women and prepare them for their different roles in life.

The Chinese didactic literature for women's education all affirm not only the importance of educating women to the flourishing of the family but also its impact on the outside world through the connection between ordering the family and bringing peace to the

[19] Ping-chen Hsiung, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 189.

[20] "The pattern in the family (*Neize* 内则)," Sun Xidan 孙希旦, *Liji*, 769. *Li Chi*, I: 273.

[21] "The pattern in the family (*Neize* 内则)," *Liji*, 772-73. *Li Chi*, I: 273.

world in the Confucian ethical project as set out in the "Great Learning" chapter of the *Record of Rites*. According to Liu Xiang's biography in the *Han History*, he composed the *Biographies of Women* to persuade Emperor Cheng to recognize the influence of women on the state at all levels of society, but especially at the level of statecraft.[22] His message was explicitly endorsed by Tang dynasty's Madam Zheng in her *Book of Filiality for Women*.

> It was because of women that the kings of these three dynasties [i.e. Xia, Shang, and Zhou] lost the realm, their lives, and their states. This is even more true at the level of feudal lords, greater officers, and the common people. … When viewed in this way, there are women who deserved credit for founding their families and others who destroyed their families.[23]

Empress Xu of the Ming dynasty saw women "assisting both family and state from the inner quarters," and maintained that, "since ancient times, the foundation of family and state all rely on the virtue of the assistance from the inner quarters."[24] Nor is such impact the sole prerogative of royal ladies, as Madam Liu's *Short Records of Models for Women* intended for a less elevated audience argued that "the way of women's education is even more important than men's. The correct model of the inner realm is prior to the external realm."[25] This was not just a biased gendered perspective of women, as Lü Kun's very popular text of the sixteenth century, *Regulations for the Women's Quarters*, begins by noting that "the ancient kings emphasized the teachings of *yin*, hence women have female teachers … Behind the doors of the women's quarters is the source of ten thousand transformations."[26]

Taking the cue from the *Record of Rites*, didactic texts for women from Han dynasty onwards seek to impress upon women the "three obediences (*sancong* 三从)" and inculcate in them the "four virtues (*side* 四德)" required of an obedient wife, beginning with what is probably the most famous and influential text of this genre, Ban Zhao's *Lessons for women*.[27]

> A woman (ought to) have four qualifications: (1) womanly virtue; (2) womanly words; (3) womanly bearing; and (4) womanly work. Now what is called womanly virtue need not be brilliant ability, exceptionally different from others. Womanly words need neither be clever in debate nor keen in conversation. Womanly appearance requires neither a pretty nor a perfect face and form. Womanly work need not be work done more skillfully than others.[28]

While advocating the extension of the *Record of Rites* model of boy's education to girls as well, Ban Zhao counselled humility, gentleness, purity and quietness, being "correct in manner and upright in character in order to serve her husband with "whole hearted devotion," obedience toward parents-in-law, harmony with brothers and sisters-in-law.[29] Written nearly seven centuries later, the *Analects for Women*, despite its ambitious title obviously comparing itself to the *Analects*, confines its teachings for women to mundane instructions to conduct themselves with modesty in dress and demeanor, observing ritual propriety in their very

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[22] Gu 班固 Ban, *Han History (Hanshu 汉书)* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 36: 1957-58.
[23] Robin R. Wang, ed. *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 390.
[24] Yanli 黃嫣梨 Huang, *Women's Four Books with Selected Commentaries (女四書集注義證)* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2008), 109, 16, 28, 46. Translation modified from Ann A. Pang-White, "Confucius and the Four Books for Women," in *Feminist Encounters with Confucius* ed. Mathew Foust and Sor-hoon Tan (Brill, 2016), 34.
[25] Huang, *Women's Four Books*, 168. Pang-White, "Confucius and the Four Books for Women," 34.
[26] Kun 吕坤 Lü, *Regulations for the Women's Quarters (Guifan 闺范)* (Unknown: Unknown, 1927), 236b. author's translation.
[27] Sun Xidan 孙希旦, *Liji*., p. 709, p. 1421; cf. justification of translating "*sancong*" as "threefold dependence or following" instead of "three obediences" in Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 89-90.
[28] Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (New York & London: Century, 1932), 86.
[29] Ibid., 83-90.

limited social sphere, humility and obedience in serving parents, husband and parents in law, industriousness in rising early retiring late, preparing food and sewing clothes for family members, receiving guests with appropriate hospitality, teaching the younger family members, good management of family's resources with frugality and hard work. The *Analects for Women* advises them to value harmony, be filial and respectful above all else, be affectionate toward the younger family members; and should the husband unfortunately die young, a woman "should wear heavy mourning for three years and remain faithful with determination, preserve the family and manage its property, tend to his grave and teach his children diligently to honor him even in death."[30] Given the social limitations placed on women, such gendered education seems to feminists to be little more than survival mechanisms adopted to cope with, and thereby perpetuate, an oppressive patriarchy.

Rather than Chinese society consistently failing to implement Confucian ideals that were relatively more favorable to women, there were times when Confucians resisted social trends that benefitted women, for example, Confucians, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) among them, argued against the expansion of women's property rights during the Song dynasty, citing classical authority of the "descent-line system (*zongfa* 宗法)."[31] The triumph of the Confucian patriarchal view that only males, as "heads of households," should own property from the Yuan dynasty onwards has left a legacy of gender bias in property rights and ownership that, even today, has resulted in Chinese women missing out on what is arguably the biggest accumulation of residential property estate wealth in history.[32] Joanna Handlin suggests that the turning point in Confucian attitudes towards women during the Song dynasty could be viewed as "reactions to the aggressive behavior of women, as described in the vernacular fiction, and to the expansion of opportunities for women living in cities."[33] Notwithstanding the increasing sexism endorsed by Confucian ideologies and social practices from late Song dynasty onwards, with the increase in women's literacy and contrary evidence, some Confucians in late imperial China did have doubts about the alleged inferiority that apparently excludes one half of humanity from self-cultivation and ethical accomplishment.

Lü Kun, in many ways a conventional Confucian (who was given a place in the Confucian temple after his death), writing for a female audience of different social classes, offered new commentaries on the biographies of exemplary women that praise the heroines "not for their submissiveness, but for independent thinking … and for their ingenious use of

[30] Ruozhao 宋若昭 Song，Ruoxin 宋若莘; Song, "Analects for Women (Nü Lunyu 女论语) " in *Five Kinds of Transmitted Regulations (Wuzhong Yigui 五种遗规)*, ed. Hongmou 陈宏谋 Chen, Sibu Beiyao (四部备要) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935), 233b. author's translation. Cf. translation in Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, 340.

[31] Bettine Birge, *Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Song and Yuan China (960-1368)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 143-99. Cf a study that confirms the deterioration of women's property rights between Song and Yuan dynasties, but seeks its causes in the different customs and the considerations of political interests rather than the adoption of Confucian views in You Huiyuan 游惠遠, *Changes in Women's Statuses between Song and Yuan Dynasties (宋元之際妇女地位的變遷)* (Taipei: Xin Wen Feng, 2003), 203-62.

[32] Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2014), 113; Lisa Rofel, "Gender as a Categorical Source of Property," in *Unequal China: The Political Economy and Cultural Politics of Inequality*, ed. Wanning Sun and Yingjie Guo (New York: Routledge, 2013); Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 24-25.

[33] Joanna F. Handlin, "Lü Kun's New Audience: The Influence of Women's Literacy on Sixteenth Century Thought," in *Women in Chinese Society* ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 14.

persuasion."[34] Rather than exemplars of fidelity, he cited women who supported or saved their menfolk through "expediency in managing matters," maintaining that "the sages value virtue, but more than that, they value virtue accompanied by talent." [35] Lü went so far as to imply that women can be exemplars not only for women but also for "gentlemen aspiring to be exemplary persons" (*shijunzi* 士君子):

> Those who do not have confidence in themselves are unable to trust others. For someone like Mu-lan, how could others gossip about her losing her purity? The multitude of three armies over a period of 12 years did not know that she was a girl. How could they gossip about her? A gentleman in managing the world has a mind of which he alone is aware and which can be tested before the sun in heaven; and his sympathy with others reaches the standard of being able to mix without blighting his splendor with dust. Indeed, Mu-lan is my teacher.[36]

It might seem that, due to the inner-outer gender segregation, only men benefitted from the system of schools which operated outside the family residence, dating back to antiquity.[37] In these institutions, the males were taught various subjects that prepared them for a career outside the family home, while the education of females in the inner quarters was intended to prepare them for lives as wives and mothers taking care of the family and home. Despite girls not attending outside schools before the end of the nineteenth century, we have historical records of Han empresses who were patrons of scholarship and the arts, and Ban Zhao's literary accomplishments. Furthermore, every Chinese dynasty witnessed outstanding women, whose accomplishments which far exceeded domestic care have inspired many, and some of whose writings have been preserved for future generations.[38] Some might think, with good reason, that these are exceptions that proved the rule. However, by the late imperial period, there is ample evidence that literary and even classical education for daughters was a wide-spread practice among gentry families, to the extent that there were millions of literate Chinese women (even though this amount to no more than 10 to 20 percent of the female population) during the Qing dynasty, and "places like the Lower Yangtze area were saturated with women who possessed a classical education."[39] Contrary to Xunzi's claim that "a mother can suckle the child but is unable to instruct and correct it," many biographies of Chinese women, often written or commissioned by their sons who were accomplished Confucian scholars testify to their important role as their sons' first teacher who taught them to read the classics.[40] It has been argued that increased literacy among women – together with disaffection of the scholar official class and the increased economic power of women from

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[34] Ibid., 19.
[35] Ibid., 21.
[36] Translated in ibid., 23. Lü, *Regulations for the Women's Quarters (Guifan 闺范)*, II:32b.
[37] Mencius (IIA3) mentioned these institutions set up by ancient rulers of the *Xia*, *Shang*, and *Zhou* dynasties for the people's education; the "Record on Education (*Xueji*)" of the *Record of Rites* also identifies different educational institutions in antiquity, Sun Xidan 孙希旦, *Liji*, 957. *Li Chi*, Part II, 50.
[38] For such writings translated into English, which amount to only a fraction of the total, see Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung, eds., *The Orchid Boat: Women Poets of China* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972); Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 76-120; Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women of Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Kang-i Sun Chang, Haun Saussy, and Charles Yin-tze Kwong, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).
[39] Hsiung, *Tender Voyage*, 205.
[40] John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols., vol. III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 71.

the Ming dynasty onwards – prompted some Chinese men, such as Lü Kun and later Yuan Mei (1716-1798), to question traditional sexism and argue for the comparability of the two sexes.[41]

Ming dynasty gentry were often accommodating, even indulgent towards their daughters, partly in reaction against "the rigid gender prejudice, deplorable social bias, and abhorrent restraints and hardship that daughters had to endure beyond their girlhood."[42] Among the favors they showered their daughters with was an education that they hoped would guarantee their welfare in the long run. Besides the daughters' personal development, education also enhanced their eligibility in making good marriages as capable spouses and resourceful mothers.[43] Daughters often shared lessons with their brothers before the latter started attending school outside; in families with no sons, they were tutored on their own in the home. In many cases, the education of daughters was not limited to domestic skills, even though such skills continue to be emphasized even after the first public school for girls was established in Shanghai in 1898 and arguably even today.[44] In the Ming dynasty, daughters' education was not confined to the didactic literature of "women's learning," but often included the Confucian classics that sons were introduced to, sometimes by their own mothers or some other educated female relatives, although fathers or male relatives often undertook that role. Some families even hired special tutors or set up "family school for girls (*nüshu* 女孰)" at home. Besides practical skills and moral inculcation, young women were also trained in the classics, history, literature, arts, and philosophy during the Ming dynasty, to the extent this era saw a significant increase in publication, circulation, and marketing of poetry, drama, novels, calligraphy, and paintings by women. Some educated women earned a living selling their literary works or hired themselves out as teachers.[45]

The positive attitudes towards women's education exemplified by Lü Kun in the Ming dynasty continued and broadened during the Qing dynasty, although education for women remained curtailed, and other gender oppressive beliefs and practices – cults of chastity and virginity, seclusion, footbinding, concubinage, among others – persisted.[46] The eighteenth century poet, Yuan Mei, accepted female students and encouraged women poets to publish their works.[47] His views and practices were attacked by Zhang Xuecheng, often viewed as an

[41] Handlin, "Lü Kun's New Audience," 27. See also Woo, "Confucianism and Feminism," 134-37. Woo notes that despite his feminist views on women's ability to learn and excel in all areas and the importance of women's economic independence, Lü was a conservative in gender relations who insisted on the differentiation between husband and wife and the gender seggregation of women and men (*ibid.*, 137). That those who held pro-women attitudes are not without contradictions in their overall outlook is also evident in Yuan Mei's treatment of women, see J.D. Schmidt, "Yuan Mei (1716-98) on Women," *Late Imperial China* 29, no. 2 (2008).
[42] Hsiung, *Tender Voyage*, 201.
[43] Ibid., 215-16.
[44] Western missionary schools for Chinese girls were established from the eighteen forties. While early twentieth century Chinese schools for girls taught subjects such as ethics, Chinese and foreign languages, arithmetic, history, geography, drawing and physical education, they nevertheless paid particular attention to "household and family matters" contributing to the cultivation of "virtuous wives and good mothers (*xianqi liangmu* 贤妻良母)." Paul J. Bailey, *Gender and Education in China*, Routledge Contemporary China (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 2, 83-104. For emphasis in the curriculum on domestic education for women in contemporary China, see Sucharita Sinha Mukherjee, "More Educated and More Equal? A Comparative Analysis of Female Education and Employment in Japan, China, and India," *Gender and Education* 27, no. 7 (2015): 863.
[45] Hsiung, *Tender Voyage*, 205-08.
[46] Mary Backus Rankin, "The Emergence of Women at the End of the Ch'ing: The Case of Ch'iu Chin," in *Women in Chinese Society*, ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 40.
[47] Schmidt, "Yuan Mei (1716-98) on Women," 140-50.

opponent of women's education in his work, *Women's Learning*. Zhang was defending the traditional Confucian view on gendered education, rather than denying that women are capable of learning and should be educated. Concerned with contemporary moral decline which he associated with poetry, he argued that the popular maxim "Lack of talent is a virtue in women (女子无才便是德)" meant that women should first study to acquire the traditional virtues, Ban Zhao's formula of womanly virtue, words, bearing, and work (德言容功), and poetry should be studied only to improve understanding of propriety, not as substitute for the latter.[48] Susan Mann points out that Zhang's own treatment of exemplary women portrays them in diverse roles: "He took care that women of talent found a place in the panoply of women's biographies …Most notably, Zhang took women seriously as historians in their own rights." Zhang's praise for Ban Zhao in *Women's Learning*, makes it clear that he considered "a woman as capable as a man of speaking 'public' language," and rather than supporting the traditional confinement in order to limit their capacity, in Zhang's view, "the inner quarters were the sanctuary where women in the family sustained the pure Dao, free from the corruption that overwhelmed upright men."[49] Notwithstanding Confucian criticisms, by the end of the eighteenth century, women's achievements in poetry, painting, and calligraphy were becoming publicly recognized. Published works by women, which had already appeared in the Ming and early Qing dynasty, increased during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[50] However, the gender divide in society, with women assigned to the household and men without, remained largely intact, prompting Mary Rankin's remark, "Education and literary skills, which for men were stepping stones to power and prestige, remained largely an adornment even for the most admired and able women."[51]

Learning from texts and history

The historical practice of gendered education in China was sexist insofar as it involved a belief that certain differences exist between female and male human beings, which justify unjust social and political arrangements whereby men have power and dominance over women. Confucianism's complicity goes beyond passive acquiescence to pre-existing practices, as Confucian texts from various periods provide important justification for traditional gendered education in its conception of the relation between such education and differentiated gender roles, understood as constituting Confucian social order, sometimes premised on cosmic order. However, dissenting voices have existed from the earliest Confucian discussions of women's roles.[52] While the practice of gendered education as traditional norm did not completely preclude women from receiving education similar to men from the earliest times, what were only exceptions not worthy of philosophical debates became more common in late imperial times and raised questions for traditional norms and generated debates within the Confucian discourse on women's education. From the interaction between textual prescriptions, which may take the form of implicitly or explicitly defending or critiquing existing practices, and historical practices, one may draw a number of lessons for constructing a modern Confucian view on the question of gender in education.

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[48] Zhang Xuecheng 章学诚, "Women's Learning (妇学)," in *Conshu Jicheng Xianbian* (Taipei: Xin Wen Feng Publishing, 1984), 484.

[49] Susan Mann, "Women in the Life and Thought of Zhang Xuecheng," in *Chinese Language, Thought, and Culture: Nivison and His Critics*, ed. Philip J. Ivanhoe (La Salle: Open Court), 112.

[50] Rankin, "Emergence of Women " 41; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Quarter: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 68-114.

[51] Rankin, "Emergence of Women " 44. Hsiung's study cited above shows that women's education literary skills had real and important uses in late imperial China, so they were more than "largely an adornment" even though women could not put their education to full use in all domains.

[52] An example is Terry's Woo's comparison of Mencius and Xunzi's views, in Woo, "Confucianism and Feminism," 118-20.

In retrospect, Confucianism might have fared better viz-a-viz gender justice had it been more actively critical of the traditional norms of gendered education, but its insight that education must correspond with the roles which would or must be assumed by the educated so that they could realize themselves within those roles is sound. Its views of gender roles were sexist and the sexism worsened over time. A rapprochement between Confucianism and feminism requires a reconstruction of Confucian views on gender roles, but this should not and cannot be a matter of replacing them with a borrowed set of given "feminist" gender roles, since there is no consensus on what constitute ideal gender roles among feminists. Reflective inquiry on the problems of gender relations in contemporary contexts and their possibilities in the future is needed for progress in both Confucianism and feminism, and is the most urgent and crucial task in constructing a Confucian feminism or a feminist Confucianism. In contemporary scholarship, reconstructions of Confucian concepts which provide the basis for its gender views, such as *nei-wai* and *yin-yang*, suggest various possibilities of more equitable modern Confucian views of gender roles.[53] Such undertakings do not point in the direction of uncritical acceptance of current gender roles – whether in East Asian societies still influenced by Confucianism or more westernized societies upholding gender equality as idealized by Anglo-European philosophical traditions. As a reflective normative philosophy, Confucianism today cannot simply adapt itself to current gender roles, any more than it should revive traditional roles, which are both far from ideal.

Gender relations in China today

Women's liberation was considered central to China's modernization in the nineteenth century intellectual elite's preoccupation with the "woman question" and the Chinese Communist Party's belief that the achievement of gender equality was necessary for national strength and social progress. Laws and regulations to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of women in the labor market, to promote gender equality, and to enable women to play more active roles in society have been introduced since the beginning of the twentieth century, with new laws on job promotion, contract labor, and rural land use aimed at promoting gender equality propagated as late as 2008. The Chinese state also adopted a Development Plan for Women for 1995-2000, followed by a second plan for 2001-10, and a third for 2011-20.[54] Yet, the modernizers' narrative of Chinese women progressing from a state of subjugation in the pre-modern period toward liberation and gender equality in modern times is far too simplistic: "some types of gender inequality have become less common, while others appear to have changed relatively little. Yet other types of gender inequality and some problems for women appear to have been exacerbated or created in the post-Mao period."[55]

Many patriarchal values and practices remained embedded in social, economic and political policies since 1949, with the aspiration of gender equality subordinated to more urgent agendas. State policies under the Communist Party often built upon traditional patriarchal social arrangements and norms to achieve their economic and political goals, and

[53] Kelly James Clark and Robun R. Wang, "A Confucian Defense of Gender Equity," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 2 (2004); Lisa Rosenlee, "Neiwai, Civility, and Gender Distinctions," *Asian Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2004); Robin R. Wang, "Dong Zhongshu's Transformation of Yin-Yang Theory and Contesting Gender Identity," *Philosohy East and West* 55, no. 2 (2005).

[54] Tania Aneloff and Marylène Lieber, "Equality, Did You Say? Chinese Feminism after 30 Years," *China Perspectives*, no. 4 (2012): 19.

[55] "The 'Woman Question' and Gender Inequalities," in Tamara Jacka, Andrew B. Kipnis, and Sally Sargeson, *Contemporary China: Society and Social Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 254.

economic reforms have exacerbated some forms and introduced new forms of gender inequality. Chinese women continue to suffer injustice in the revitalized preference for sons in most of China in the post-Mao period and exacerbated by "gender blind-spots" in some policies, in the gendered division of work resulting in women's "double burden" of full time (under)paid work and major responsibilities for child care and housework, under-representation in politics and other domains, especially in positions associated with power and prestige, in the disparity between their shares of economic contributions and benefits both at home and at work, in violence against women in the form of infanticide and wife battering, attitudes about the proper qualities of husbands and wives, and the pressure exerted on young women to get married, often against their economic interests and independence.[56] The era of market reforms and globalization unfortunately has witnessed the commoditization of women through stereotype advertising and other media, leveraging on a return of traditional ideologies of gender bias.

Education is one area where women have benefited significantly from China's modernization with drastic decrease in gender disparity in school enrollment and average years of education. The population census of 2005 reveals that women who completed senior high school had a significantly higher chance of entering college than men in similar circumstances, and women accounted for 51.1% of students enrolled in college and 49.7% of students enrolled in four-year universities in 2005, although women from economically disadvantaged regions remain a cause for concern.[57] While some studies show that industrialization and structural changes, including the growth of gender specific industries could explain some of the decrease in gender inequality in education, it has also been suggested that the traditional idea that educated women make better wives and mothers plays a part in the expansion of education access for women, as that expansion has not been matched with a corresponding improvement of labor market opportunities and performance, a discrepancy that "can be traced back to the persistent gender norms which, amongst other things, imply the centrality of marriage and non-market unpaid labour for women."[58]

Together with rural-urban residence, provincial residence, and occupation, gender is one of the four major determinants of income inequality (measured as percentage of the Gini

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[56] She Mingyang, "Changing Trends in Mate Selection among the Young (青年择偶观的变化趋势)," *Marriage and Family (婚姻与家庭)* 3 (1986); Yanjie Bian, "A Preliminary Analysis of the Basic Features of the Life Styles of China's Single-Child Families," *Social Science in China* 8 (1987); Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 273-307; Xiaoling Shu and Yanjie Bian, "Market Transtion and Gender Gap in Earnings in Urban China," *Social Forces* 81, no. 4 (2003); Xiaoling Shu, Yifei Zhu, and Zhanxin Zhang, "Global Economy and Gender Inequalities: The Case of Urban Chinese Market," *Social Science Quarterly* 88, no. 5 (2007); Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*; Gillian Pascall and Sirin Sung, "Gender and East Asian Welfare States: From Confucianism to Gender Equality?," in *East Asia, Fourth Anneal East Asian Social Policy Research Network (EASP) International Conference* (Tokyo2007); Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women*; Fenglian Du and Xiaoyuan Dong, "Why Do Women Have Longer Durations of Unemployment Than Men in Post-Restructuring Urban China?," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 33, no. 2 (2009); Huiying Li, "Son Preference and the Tradition of Patriarchy in Rural China," in *Revisiting Gender Inequality: Perspectives from the People's Republic of China*, ed. Qi Wang, Min Dongchao, and Bo Aerenlund Sorensen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[57] Xiaogang Wu and Zhuoni Zhang, "Educational Inequality in China, 1990-2005: Evidence from the Population Census Data," in *Globalization, Changing Demographics, and Educational Challenges in East Asia*, ed. Emily Hannum, Hyunjoon Park, and Yuko Goto Butler (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2010), 143-44; Jun Yang, Xiao Huang, and Xin Liu, "An Analysis of Educaiton Inequality in China," *International Journal of Educaitnal Development* 37 (2014); Junxia Zeng et al., "Gender Inequality in Education in China: A Meta-Regression Analysis," *Contemporary Economic Policy* 32, no. 2 (2014).

[58] Ming-Hsuan Lee, "Schooling and Industrialization in China: Gender Differences in School Enrollment," *Comparative Education Review* 58, no. 2 (2014). Cf. Mukherjee, "More Educated and More Equal?," 846.

coefficient), and its contribution to that inequality more than doubled between 1995 and 2007.[59] While economic development has reduced gender income inequality, market forces have exacerbated it.[60] Several studies have shown that the gender wage gap has widened significantly since the mid-1990s, especially between 2002 and 2007, and according to one study, "this increase was largely due to unexplained components, thereby implying that discrimination against female workers in the urban labor market was rising."[61] Besides discrimination, other studies also attribute the "gender penalty" in income to "a cumulative process of gender-specific 'routing' in the Chinese society: gender-specific childhood process of education, different length of employment in part due to an earlier stipulated retirement age for women, different levels and specializations in educational attainment, different occupations, and different industries."[62] While women's participation in the workforce has increased, they tend to be employed in low paying industries and positions, and their work performance is often adversely affected by unequal distribution of responsibilities for housework and care for the young and the elderly in the family. Despite self-employment providing more room for work-family balance and the absence of employer discrimination, preliminary findings indicated that the few much publicized Chinese women entrepreneurs and millionaires are also exceptions that prove the rule of women being relegated to the least rewarding (both in terms of earnings and prestige) self-employment.[63] Beyond income inequality, the market economy has introduced new forms of gender inequality endangering the futures of Chinese young women: besides "segregating them into work that is low wage,

[59] Shi Li, Guanghua Wan, and Juzhong Zhuang, "Income Inequality and Redistributive Policy in the People's Republic of China," in *Inequality in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Ravi Kanbur, Changyong Rhee, and Juzhong Zhuang (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 336-37. This is not to say that the China is worse than other countries. Indeed, the picture for gender equality is gloomy and worsening worldwide, and according to one study, China's urban gender wage gap is still one of the smallest among developing countries. Jane Nolan, "Gender and Equality of Opportunity in China's Labor Market," in *Managing Gender Diversity in Asia: A Research Companion*, ed. Mustafa F. Özbilgin and Jawad Syed (Elgar, 2010), 160; Martin King Whyte, "Sexual Inequality under Socialism: The Chinese Case in Perspective," in *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolutionary China*, ed. James L. Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Despite widespread global injustices, feminists and other philosophers remain positive in offering possible solutions in a special issue of *Philosophical Topics* (2009, 37.2) on Global Gender Justice.

[60] Gloria Guangye He and Xiaogang Wu, "Gender Earnings Inequality in Reform-Era Urban China," (Michigan: Population Studies Center, University of Michigan Insitute for Social Research, 2014); Philip N. Cohen and Wang Feng, "Market and Gender Pay Equity: Have Chinese Reforms Narrowed the Gap?," in *Creating Wealth and Poverty in Postsocialist China*, ed. Deborah S. Davis and Wang Feng (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[61] Shi Li and Jin Song, "Changes in the Gender-Wage Gap in Urban China, 1995-2007," in *Rising Inequality in China: Challenges to a Harmonious Society*, ed. Li Shi, Hiroshi Sato, and Terry Sicular (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 402. See also Liqin Zhang and Xiao-Yuan Dong, "Male-Female Wage Discrimination in Chinese Industry: Investigation Using Firm-Level Data," *Economics of Transition* 16, no. 1 (2008); Min Qin et al., "Gender Inequalities in Employment and Wage-Earning among Internal Labor Migrants in Chinese Cities," *Demographic Research* 34 (2016).

[62] Feng Wang, *Boundaries and Categories: Rising Inequality in Post-Socialist China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 119. See also Eileen Otis, *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 6; Bohong Lui, Ling Li, and Chunyu Yang, "Gender (in)Equality and China's Economic Transition," in *Revisiting Gender Inequality: Perspectives from the People's Republic of China*, ed. Qi Wang, Min Dongchao, and Bo Aerenlund Sorensen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 26-42.

[63] Qian Forrest Zhang, "Gender Disparities in Self-Employment in Urban China's Market Transition: Income Inequality, Occupational Segregation and Mobility Processes," *The China Quarterly* 215 (2013).Cf. more complicated picture in Jing Song, "Women and Self-Employment in Post-Socialist Rural China: Side Job, Individual Career or Family Venture," ibid.221 (2015).

low prestige, and temporary," the new service industry "requires performances of femininity and deference" that perpetuates traditional gender bias in new hierarchical processes.[64]

Despite equal access to gender-neutral education, the traditional "inner-outer" gender division continues to influence students' entries into different disciplines and subsequent entry into different industries, with women concentrated in the social sciences, education, and social work. While the gender difference is small in these fields (55.3 percent men vs. 44.7 percent women in the 2005 graduating cohort), science and engineering graduates are predominantly male (57.5 percent in science/technology and 77.3 percent in engineering).[65] This is not always due to individual choice, as women face greater difficulty getting jobs in these fields, were given lower starting salaries compared to men despite better academic performance, and some universities require higher University Entrance Examination (UEE) scores for women than for men in recruiting students for majors deemed to relate to "men's work.[66] The attitudes of the state, educators, potential employers, besides their parents, influence student choice, casting doubt on the extent to which students can choose what interest them most and would optimize their self-realization.

Persistence of the "inner-outer" gender norms is also at the root of the disproportionate burden of housework and family care responsibilities shouldered by women even when they hold full time paid jobs that are no less demanding than their husbands'. A survey by the National Bureau of Statistics shows that the time spent on unpaid work every week by women is three times as much that of men. Unpaid work takes up 20.2 percent of men's time, but 47.1 percent of women's time.[67] Another study reported that wives accounted for 64 percent of the total time couples spend on ten major household chores.[68] In rural China, "domestic work" is considered "women's work" and undertaken almost entirely by women. Tamara Jacka points out,

> This is an important element in women's subordination; not so much because of the work itself but because, firstly, it is, in a number of ways devalued in relation to other work; secondly, women are expected to undertake such work in addition to other work and hence suffer a double burden; and finally, due to the above two factors, it has certain negative consequences for women's involvement in other types of work.[69]

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[64] Otis, *Markets and Bodies*, 6. See also Xin Tong, "Gender, Division of Labor, and Social Mobility in Small-Scale Restaurants in China," in *Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities*, ed. Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, Marcia Texler Segal, and Lin Tan (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2011).

[65] Congbin Guo, Mun C. Tsang, and Xiaohao Ding, "Gender Disparities in Science and Engineering in Chinese Universities," *Economics of Educaiton Review* 29 (2010). See also Xiaoling Shu, "Market Transition and Gender Seggregation in Urban China," *Social Science Quarterly* 86, no. 5 (2005).

[66] Guo, Tsang, and Ding, "Gender Disparities in Science and Engineering in Chinese Universities."; Didi Kirsten Tatlow, "Women in China Face Rising University Entrance Barriers," *New York Times*, 7 Oct 2012.

[67] Lui, Li, and Yang, "Gender (in)Equality and China's Economic Transition," 40.

[68] Joyce Lai Ting Leong, Sylvia Xiaohua Chen, and Michael Harris Bond, "Housework Allocation and Gender (in)Equality," in *Psychology of Gender through the Lens of Culture*, ed. Saba Safdar and Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2015), 85.

[69] Tamara Jacka, *Women's Work in Rural China* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1997), 119. Again, it is noted that women in advanced Western societies continue to have difficulties combining work and family as a result of inequitable distribution of housework and care responsibilities and persistence of traditional gender ideology. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift* (New York: Quill, 1989); Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued* (New York: Picador, 2001); Emily Monosson, ed. *Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Man Yee Kan and Jonathan Gershuny, "Gender Segregation and Bargaining in Domestic Labour: Evidence from the Longitudinal Time-Use Data," in *Gender Inequalities in the 21st Century:*

Some believe that the solution to women's "double burden" is for them to "return home." In 2011, Zhang Xiaomei, a female member of the CPPCC National Committee submitted a law proposal "Encouraging Some Women to Return Home" that triggered a heated debate in the media. According to Shaopeng Song, this is the sixth debate in China over this issue, the first occurring in the 1930s. Earlier advocates of women's return to the home tend to be male, for example in the mid-1990s, a leading sociologist, Zheng Yefu, basically "argued from a market point of view, urging women to accept injustice, or at least to recognize and accept gender injustice, at the current stage of China's development."[70] The 2011 debate saw a woman defending "women returning home" as a voluntary choice that women should be able to make in their own interests, while maintaining that "there are some congenital differences between men and women which cannot be changed," and "women are physiologically more suited to take care of household affairs, housework, caring for the elderly, nursing, educating children, and creating a happy and harmonious family life."[71] Song questions the "voluntariness" of such choices in a gender system still characterized by widespread discrimination against women, and other unjust practices that diminish women's motivation and confidence at work, and make it difficult for women to balance family life and career.[72]

Wither feminist encounter with Confucianism?

Rather than adapting to an already modernized ideal gender role of the "liberated woman," Confucian education for women today must answer the question of what "self-cultivation" for women should mean in the current circumstances. Is Zhang Xiaomei's proposal evidence that the ancient wisdom about "distinction between men and women" is correct, and women (or at least some, if not most women) are better off in the "inner quarters"? Afterall, outstanding Chinese women such as Ban Zhao and the Song sisters believed that the majority of (elite) women should be educated for just such a destiny. The tension between such a belief and their own unusual biographies – all three held official appointments at court and the Song sisters never married – rather than a sign of inauthenticity that undermines the persuasive force of their advice, perhaps testifies to the practical purpose of their works, aimed at fulfilling what they perceived to be the educational needs of the majority of their female contemporaries, and a realistic acknowledgement that their lives were exceptions to the rule. Nor is the Song sister's choice of title, *Women's Analects*, necessarily a misguided self-aggrandizing, for Confucius' teachings begin with filial respect towards parents and

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New Barriers and Continuing Constraints (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2010); Sheryl Sandberg and Arlie Russell, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

[70] Shaopeng Song, ""Returning Home" or "Being Returned Home"?: The Debate over Women Returning to the Home and Changing Values," in *Revisiting Gender Inequality: Perspectives from the People's Republic of China*, ed. Qi Wang, Min Dongchao, and Bo Aerenlund Sorensen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 72; Yefu Zheng, "Sociological Reflections on Gender Equality (男女平等的社会学思考)," *Sociological Studies (社会学研究)* 2, no. 108-113 (1994).

[71] Song, ""Returning Home" or "Being Returned Home"?," 61.

[72] Ibid., 62. For more evidence that, rather than a voluntary choice of family over work, Chinese women since the 1990s have been pushed into leaving work by market forces and inadequate state policies to protect their rights, see Jieyu Liu, *Gender and Work in Urban China: Women Workers of the Unlucky Genderation* (New York: Routledge, 2007), chapter 6; Tamara Jacka, "Back to the Wok: Women and Employment in Chinese Industry in the 1980s," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 24 (1990); *Women's Work in Rural China*, 106-08; Shirin M. Rai, "Gender in China," in *China in the 1990s*, ed. Robert Benewick and Paul Wingrove (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 190. For a general philosophical discussion of when and why feminists worry about gendered preferences, not just because they are adaptive, even to the extent of arguing for overriding voluntary preferences of many actual women and men, see Ann Levey, "Liberalism, Adaptive Preferences, and Gender Equality," *Hypatia* 20, no. 4 (2005).

deference to elders (*Analects* 1.6). It implies that the activities that define the women's role do not preclude Confucian self-cultivation; on the contrary, excellence in their performance requires and sustains self-cultivation. However, the question we must ask is whether the paths that do not lead back to the "inner quarters" are truly open to women today, if they have the abilities and the inclinations to follow such paths, or do such options remain exceptions for external reasons having nothing to do with women's own personal qualities, desires, or values. If so, simply declaring that the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation, in which public life and contributions to society beyond the family are critical, applies to women as much as men will not make much difference without recognizing the need for social changes to remove the structured barriers to women's self-cultivation in diverse forms (and not just confined to the family), explicitly rejecting unexamined traditional gender norms that are unjust even if, perhaps especially if, they are attributed to Confucianism, paying serious attention to women's experience and women's voice, and answering the empirical questions of how to go about doing so in practically efficacious ways. Rather than assuming that women's sense of accomplishment and meaning in life lies in being good (traditionally Confucian) daughters, wives, and mothers, feminist Confucians would want to see all opportunities of self-realization in modern societies open to all human beings, male, female, or transsexual, and listen seriously to women's own articulation of what kind of accomplishments give them satisfaction and meaning in life.

Lisa Rosenlee argues that, instead of rigid boundaries between static spatial-social domains, the Confucian concept of *nei-wai* implies boundaries that shift with contexts, and permit crossings in practice, so that the relation between inner and outer is one of complementarity, reciprocity, and interdependence.[73] How should such complementary, reciprocal, and interdependent inner-outer roles be distributed among men and women, and what would these demand of them are questions that need answering if Confucians are to educate the next generation appropriately. It may be that no definite prescription is warranted and the answers to these questions will vary from society to society and person to person. It is by no means certain that gender is never a legitimate axis of role differentiations. What is certain is that greater diversity and flexibility in roles that a person, whether male or female, could assume would benefit all; such diversity and flexibility, genuine choice in the roles that one assumes, and authentic evaluation of which roles suit one best in the context of one's network of ethical relationships are not possible without first dismantling the structural inequities posing as tradition.

[73] Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 70.

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