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Chinese Women, Marriage and Gender: exploring the idea of women and marriage over
time in the context of China.

By

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A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2019

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Chinese Women, Marriage and Gender: exploring the idea of women and marriage
over time in the context of China.

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ABSTRACT

Chinese women who pursue professional careers must secure degrees in higher education and often require graduate degrees; however, in China, women are expected to be married and have begun a family by their mid-twenties. While, it is also a prime time for women to pursue their education and career advancement. Thus, Chinese women's familial expectations and academic goals often come into conflict. The phenomenon of young people being pushed to marry is more common among women. Some people believe that a woman who does not marry at this age has failed to conform to social expectations and may be undesirable. However, in recent years, more and more young women are refusing to marry because of age rather than love. The purpose of this article is to understand the views on marriage and career of contemporary Chinese women aged 22 to 27.

Keywords: gender, gender equity, Chinese traditional values, Chinese Feminism, educational expectation

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CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The views of modern eligible Chinese women with regard to marriage and career can be explained through the lens of feminist theory. The consensus of feminist theory is that it provides the basis for challenging multiple gender-based social oppression by questioning gender-based cultural and historical contexts to safeguard the common interests of women (Grant, 2013). In addition, feminism pursues equal treatment and opportunities for women in any field of work, as well as culture and respect equal to that of men, even if they have different roles (Grant, 2013). Feminist theory can be used to understand institutions and illuminate all issues that affect people.

Confucianism is the primary reason for the low social status of women in China (Mak, 2013). Confucianism requires women to be obedient to men, not to receive education, not to get paid work, to carry on the family line as a mission, and to honor this observance for the entirety of their respective lifetimes (Mak, 2013). Though China's feudal society no longer exists, traditional modes of thinking are difficult to eliminate.

Let us take a small anecdote from my own experiences to illustrate how gender relations function in China to sustain the patriarchy. In 2015, my friend Mandi Wang graduated with a master's degree in administration. One year later, in 2016, she became pregnant. Although her husband's education and salary were not as good as hers, they jointly decided that Mandi would give up her job and take care of the children at home. There was little discussion or debate about this decision. It was made in a matter fact kind of away. Mandi's experience is typical. In China, if there are no grandparents to take care of the children, most families where both parents have jobs the mother is required to quit

her job. This is what is typically expected in Chinese Confucian culture (M.D. Wang, personal communication, August 31, 2019).

The decision within the family about who works in the labor force and who stays home with the children is deeply gendered. For example, according to China's National Bureau of Statistics (2018), the number of female graduate students in higher education reached 1.27 million in 2017, accounting for 48.4% of all graduate students. There were 14.47 million female undergraduates, accounting for 52.5%; however, only 43.5% of China's workforce is female, which highlights the conflict between the professional goals of Chinese women and the cultural expectations they often struggle against.

Chinese women have recently breathed the air of Western feminist culture. After the founding of new China in 1949, the government made developing the global market economy the primary focus of its economic plan, creating an opportunity for Western ideologies to enter China (Yan, 2010). As such, Chinese women were gradually exposed to Western feminist culture (Yan, 2010). For example, my mother, born in 1965, has been playing both the role of family caregiver and professional woman for many years. Although she focuses more on family, she always emphasized the importance of women's financial independence when I was growing up. Around the same time, the Marxist ideology of gender equality was fading, and there was a revival of patriarchal gender roles; thus, it was and is still considered "natural" for women to tend to their families (Croll, 1995; Sun & Chen, 2014). Since then, contemporary Chinese women have played contradictory roles: independent and self-reliant women, and supporters of men and caretakers of families.

By connecting feminist theory with the current patriarchal society in China, it is not difficult to understand the reasons for the self-awakening of feminism among contemporary Chinese women. According to Tong (2004), all concepts of feminism theory stem from three central beliefs: (1) the patriarchal society is constructed by and prioritized for men, (2) traditional ways of thinking support subordinate women to the interests of men, and (3) the patriarchal order should be overthrown and replaced with a system that stresses equality for both sexes. On the basis of conforming to the former two, the consciousness of contemporary Chinese women has awakened (Shih,2005). More and more women call for equality between men and women and desire the realization of the third belief: a break from the patriarchal tradition in favour of true equality between men and women (Yang, 2012).

From my own experience, I know not all women long to be ‘liberated,’ and it has to be admitted that some women still hold traditional ideas and take pride in defending patriarchal norms. In addition, radical Chinese feminists¹ are rare, and many contemporary urban women are self-contradictory (Yang, 2012). While some women believe that men and women should be equal, those same women may voluntarily do more housework while expecting their partners to take more domestic chores without expressing their expectations. This echoes the sentiment of some Western women, such as Marilyn Quayle, who spoke at 1992 Republic National Convention and said that,

Not everyone concluded that American society was so bad that it had to be radically remade by social revolution... Not everyone believed that the family was so

¹ A radical feminist is someone who advocates radical feminism. Radical feminism is a branch of feminism. The basic idea is that the oppression of women is the most profound form of exploitation and the foundation of all other forms of oppression, and so radical feminism tries to find ways to free women from this oppression (Willis, 1984).

oppressive that women could only thrive apart from it... [and] Not everyone joined the counter-culture (as cited in Grant, 2013, p. 10)

This is one of the reasons that other feminists have pushed for the rapid development of feminism.

Any revolution is long and frustrating. Women must make the right choice in the face of a government bureaucracy that does not take into account the needs of the overwhelming majority of women, a constitution that allows discrimination against women, and a society that prescribes different standards for men and women. No new beginning will be able to claim the 'correct' feminism because there is no scientific precision or authoritative analysis of gender discrimination that can measure the success or efficiency of a feminist movement in exact units. As Nye (2013) suggests, no perfect logic can help women avoid the missteps on the way to progress because each misstep is part of the exploration that will eventually lead to the correct feminism; thus, such detours are symbols of progress.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

In this next section, I provide a brief background of China's political and social context beginning with a small discussion on Confucianism. Confucianism is one of the most influential philosophies in Chinese history and, together with Taoism and Buddhism, has become one of the three major religions in Chinese history (Yao & Yao, 2000). These religions have had a profound impact on the world view, values and philosophy of the Chinese people (Littlejohn, 2010). Confucianism was founded by Kong Qiu (551 - 479 BC), also known as Confucius, during the Spring and Autumn Period (770 – 476 BC). According to Yao and Yao (2010), the core content of Confucianism mainly revolves around filial piety, benevolence, etiquette, loyalty, knowledge, integrity, forgiveness, and other aspects. After the Spring and Autumn period, feudal society for thousands of years taught no more than Confucianism. According to Yang (2014), even today, the influence of Confucian culture can be seen everywhere in China.

A Brief Overview of Confucianism

Confucianism has been an official ideology of the Chinese state since the Han Dynasty (B.C. 207–A.D. 202). Some argue that the improvement of the status of Confucianism is the main reason for the decline of women's social status (Mak, 2013). Traditionally, under this regime, women were asked to obey “the three obediences and the four virtues.” The three obediences require a woman to obey her father before marriage, her husband during married life, and her sons in widowhood; the four virtues represent physical charm, fidelity, propriety in speech, and efficiency in needlework (Cheng, 2008). Pan Zhao, daughter of a famous scholar and a devoted disciple of Confucius, was a great advocate of the three obediences and the four virtues. In her book

Precepts for Women, she believes that a woman does not need to be beautiful, intelligent, or talkative, but to be like a shadow and an echo is to be admired (Gao, 2003). Quite clearly, the “three obediences and the four virtues” work together, operate in tandem, to provide men with social political and economic benefits, that are clearly not available to women.

During the time of the Han Dynasty, women could not get paid work in society (Gao, 2003). Reflecting how patriarchal relations shaped the lives of women and girls, it was believed that if women worked outside the home, it was an ominous sign that would bring shame and disaster to the dynasty. In a book by Yang Chen, a famous Confucian scholar of the time, if women were given work outside the home, the Sun and the Moon (Emperor and Empress) would fade away (Gao, 2003). It is not hard to see how this type of mythology would have powerfully shaped the ideas of men and women during this time period. Of course, shaped in a way that benefited men compared to women.

As women never worked in the paid labor force, then they were supposed to devote their lives to their families (Tang, 1995). Unpaid labor was gendered, and women did the bulk of it. Childcare and taking care of the home was all that women were supposed to do during the day. Along with doing most of the unpaid labour in the domestic sphere, loyalty to her husband was an important aspect of a woman's worth (Goldin, 2011). Women who were disloyal were shunned and shamed. And without any resources, they would be left marginalized in a deeply patriarchal society (Gao, 2003). Reflecting a similar kind of understanding when it came to sexuality and women and how both were deeply regulated both at the institutional and the private level, the government would offer a woman who died for her chastity an honourific arch or a title from the court (Tang,

1995). The honoring of a chaste women in the public sphere would have been a powerful symbol for women and for men. The ideal would have been set up, and to not meet this ideal, would cast one as a ‘failure,’ at least when it came to their gender identity (Li, 2000b). Although women in this dynasty were allowed to remarry after their husbands died, they preferred to choose suicide to show their integrity to their husbands and families (Gao, 2003). Besides, the widow's death for honour was highly praised, bringing honour not only to her husband's family, but also to her family and the whole village. As a result, it was common practice for women to commit suicide after the death of their husbands.

Staying true to its promotion of patriarchy, Confucianism holds that the greatest function of women is to carry on the family line (Zheng, 2016). After marriage, a woman did not have status within the family until she had a son. In other words, wives who did not have sons had little respect in the family, not to mention property rights and human rights. If an infant girl came when a family had no son, it would be a great disappointment to the family, and the infant girl was unwelcome (Zheng, 2016). If the second baby of the family was still a girl, it would be a disaster to this family. Furthermore, according to Tang (1995), many poor families faced with desperate financial difficulties were highly likely to sell their only daughters to brothels as prostitutes or rich families as maids at that time.

Women's social status can also be reflected in some Chinese proverbs, ‘Wei nv zi yu xiao ren nan yang ye,’ meaning ‘Only women and despicable people are hard to get along with’; and ‘Hong yan huo shui,’ meaning ‘Beautiful woman is the origin of disaster.’ Additionally, although Confucius was the first person in Chinese history to advocate

universal education, before that only aristocrats were eligible for education, he still did not advocate equal education for women (Gao, 2003). He believed ‘Nv zi wu cai bian shi de,’ meaning ‘The virtue of a woman is her lack of knowledge and talent,’ so women were not supposed to receive education of any kind. Until the 1920s, few women had gone to school (Mow, Tao & Zheng, 2004). Even after women had access to education, the content of their education was Confucian Education. It was useless for some women to develop their talents because after they had received education, good breeding only ensured a better chance of success as wife and mother.

Family Structure

In my experience, patriarchal control plays a significant role in Chinese traditional culture. As a major institution, the family does not consider any individual, but focuses entirely on identifying individual members with established roles based on the principles of consanguinity or marriage (Zheng, 2016). According to Tang (1995), as the patriarch of the family, the father's chief responsibility, apart from representing the family in the economy and in the community, is to ensure that no role in the family breaks the rules. According to Qiao and Chan (2005), ‘Spare the rod, spoil the child,’ illustrates that the father has to exercise his authority to punish a misbehaving member in order not only to correct them but to maintain harmony and order in the household.

Wives and Mothers. In ancient China, it was not uncommon to see two children married before they were born (Liu, 2018). Confucianism requires segregation of underage men and women. According to Li (2000a), marriage was entirely up to parents. Once a girl became a wife, her responsibilities increased. The main one was to please her husband to have a son for his family. In addition to this, she also needed to please his family, especially her mother-in-law. To quote from Mengcius (372–289 BC): “Three things are considered to be unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them.” No matter how well a woman did in everything else, as long as she did not bear a son, she would lose favour and be humiliated, and she would be blamed for failing to carry on the family name (Tang, 1995). As a way of humiliation, she could simply be discarded or sold to brothels as prostitutes or to rich families as maids. Sometimes the wife would spontaneously find a concubine for her husband, which is regarded as a virtue. In old China, a concubine was a female spouse who was legally recognized but had a lower status than a principal wife in marriage (Li, 2000a). The common reason for husbands to take concubines was usually because of the fickleness of the husband and the infertility of the wife. When a wife had borne her husband several sons, her status was raised although she still had only an affiliate position in the family – even punishing her son was beyond her duty. The only thing she could do was to warn her son that she would complain to the father.

When a wife lost her husband's favour, she would spend the rest of her life in loneliness, misery, and fighting with her husband's other wives for his favour and that of her parents-in-law, or she would simply kill herself (Tang, 1995). If her husband died when her sons were still boys, according to Chinese tradition, the rule of three obediences

still required her to obey or rather to depend upon her sons. However, when a father died young and no other man was responsible for maintaining family discipline, many difficulties arose. Many prominent families were ruined by this (Tang, 1995). For a widow who was still young and had no child or son, no matter how loyal she was, she would be blamed for bringing misfortune to her husband. To remarry was to be stigmatized, and no bachelor would take the risk of marrying her.

Daughters and Sons. Under a patriarchal system, sons and daughters, or brothers and sisters, also played different roles. A daughter would experience considerable discrimination when she was very young – she would have to face the notorious practice of foot-binding, which stands for obedience and suppression (Li, 2000b). Foot-binding was performed between the ages of one and three to reduce the length of the foot to three inches from heel to toe, with the toes bent under the sole. In order to achieve permanent deformities, this behaviour would last for 10 to 15 years, and after that, the feet had to remain bound for the rest of the woman's life. All of these were about pleasing men. The custom is believed to have started between the end of the Tang Dynasty (906) and the beginning of the Song Dynasty (960), had been seen as a fashion by the aristocracy in the royal court (Gao, 2003). It was then imitated by the public and became a custom. Such a product of cruelty, of women's tears and suffering, was highly appraised and admired by men – poets called the feet “Golden Lily” (Gao, 2003). A woman with natural unbound feet would be denounced at that time.

It is obvious that sons were the bearers of everything of the family, the name, the property, and the reputation while daughters were seen as a part of families' property (Tang, 1995). Many distinguished families married their daughters to other noble families

to increase the status and prestige of the family. However, it was common to see the poor patriarch simply sell his daughter as a concubine or even a prostitute.

Legislation Context

In ancient Chinese philosophy, the universe originated from life and was derived from different parts of the body. This theory was first proposed in *Yi Jing*, or *Book of Changes*, which was thought to be written during the Zhou Dynasty (841-476 B.C.) by the Emperor Wen. The disciples of Confucius believed that all changes were based on qian and kun, which was defined as Yang (sun) and Yin (dark) and were also recognised as male and female. Gradually, in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-88 A.D.), everything in nature was considered to be either Yin or Yang, even in medicine and geography (Tang, 1995). Such thought developed into a dualistic theory, such as positive and negative, bound only by morality but not by law.

In ancient Chinese society, Confucianism was not a religion but played a religious role (Tang, 1995). Because of the importance of Yang (male) and Yin (female) in Confucianism, reproduction became a sacred part of classical Chinese philosophy. Correspondingly, ancestor worship was probably a primitive religion in China (Zhang, 2010). Before the emergence of communism in China, almost every family had an altar dedicated to their ancestors and held regular memorial ceremonies.

Ancestor worship was the cornerstone of Chinese patriarchal culture (Zhang, 2010). Contrary to the individual-centered western society, Feng Youlan (1934), a Chinese philosopher, believed that the family, as the most important unit in Chinese society, was the main factor affecting the relationship between individuals and groups (as cited in Tang, 1995, p. 276). This belief, supported by Confucianism, may be one of the main

reasons that Chinese culture is so distinct from other cultures. In essence, ancestor worship was also a kind of reverence for the reproductive process, because it expressed the sincere appreciation for the contribution of ancestors to the process of life.

Confucian culture emphasized the moral and ethical relationship between people and is mainly composed of five relationships: 1) emperor and minister, 2) father and son, 3) husband and wife, 4) elder and younger brother, 5) friend and friend (Li, 2000b). According to Ma (1987), father-son relationships dominated these relationships. In other words, children's obedience to their parents is the most basic and significant of all the moral ethics. Parents' views override any aspect of their children's lives - including the freedom to reproduce. This could explain the reason why filial piety affects Chinese attitudes regarding fertility. Based on this, according to Tang (1995), emperors accepted filial piety as the basis of official policy and law, and the tradition of fundamentalism was deeply rooted in the Chinese people.

Patriarchal culture did not dominate at the beginning of Chinese classical culture (Li, 1981). As Li (1981) stated in the *Tao Te Ching*, Yin and Yang were both considered to be the origin of the universe, and Yin played a more important role - at that time (As cited in Tang, 1995, p.272). Lao Zi, who was one of the most famous philosophers in Chinese history and the author of *Tao Te Ching*, believed women were regarded as the mother of everything. To a large extent, *I Ching* (Emperor Wen, Late 9th century BC), also known as *Classic of Changes* or *Book of Changes*, was influenced by the thought of *Tao Te Ching* (Laozi, 6th-century BC). He inherited the theory of Yin and Yang from *Tao Te Ching*, but it barely mentioned that Yin and Yang were equal. In fact, Laozi strongly

opposed the idea of equality between Yin and Yang; exaggerating the Yang and belittling the Yin (Li, 1981).

Dong Zongshu, a great Confucian scholar, applied the dualistic theory to Confucian ethics defining ruler, father and husband as Yang, and subject, son and wife as Yin (Xinli, 1989). Moreover, he advocated that society would achieve stability only when the public followed these gender, generation, and political orders (as cited in Tang, 1995, p.277). Dong Zongshu explained the inevitability of women's subordination in terms of ethics and cosmology, not economics and sociology. He advocated that the unequal status of men and women was a natural law, determined by god, not because women needed to be financially dependent on men. Due to his advice, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty banned the spread of other religions for the first time in Chinese history and promoted Confucian culture as the only official religion. Dong's ideas had a profound impact on Chinese society.

As increasing numbers of people followed the Confucian culture, women's experiences went from bad to worse (Tang, 1995). The inequality between men and women is most vivid reflected in Chinese people's views on fertility: giving birth to a son is the most important task for most wives (Tang, 1995).

Status Quo

Parental Pressure. Although China's feudal society no longer exists, it has been difficult to eliminate old ways of thinking (Zhao, 2008). Chinese parents still have considerable control over a woman's marriage today (Zhao, 2008). Given the traditional Chinese concept of marriage, the appropriate age for marriage should usually be no later than 30, and preferably between 22 to 27. Therefore, most parents expect their children to find "qualified" romantic partners at this age, and the so-called qualification of marriage partners is mainly determined by family status and economic potential.

There is an old Chinese saying: "Men Dang Hu Dui", which means "only two doors of the same size can match with each other". This sentence is often used to describe the material conditions of couples who are about to get married (Ji, 2015). Chinese people generally believe that only two people whose material conditions match each other may have a happy marriage. Therefore, for the sake of their children's happiness, many parents will ask about the moral character and financial potential of their children's boyfriend or girlfriend. While many parents are disappointed that they have a daughter, they hope she can at least find a rich man to support them for the rest of their lives (To, 2013). For example, in Ji's (2015) study of "*Leftover*" *Eomen in Shanghai*, Dongzi, a single professional woman living and working in Shanghai spoke about the considerable pressure her parents put on her to marry:

Dongzi was born in a remote village in a northern province. Her parents are both farmers, and her mother has never left her birthplace. Almost every time she called her mother, they would have a fight over Dongzi's single status. Dongzi's mother pressed her to return home, get married, and have children.

Dongzi's mother's ideal of small-town, traditional family life is at odds with Dongzi's single, modern, professional life in metropolitan Shanghai. Dongzi accepts the social expectation of marriage for women but said she is not willing to compromise with her parents regarding her search for Mr. Right. (Ji, 2015, p. 1065)

Most parents of this generation in China have experienced the cultural revolution (Deng & Treiman, 1997). The cultural revolution, in short, was a decade-long revolution against feudalism. According to Deng and Treiman (1997), not only did the movement deprive many people of access to education, it has also forced many middle-class mothers into early retirement from state-owned enterprises. After this movement, China ushered in the reform of market economy. These massive economic reforms intensified layoffs and forced millions of workers off the job (Liu, 2007). From my personal experience, it can be said that most people who have experienced this can hardly ignore the significance of getting an education and mastering a skill. Therefore, just like my parents, many parents will try their best to give their daughters the best education they can, even spending a lot of money to send them to study abroad. This especially makes them feel that only higher education can ensure their children's competitiveness (Liu, 2007). Ironically, what parents do not seem to realize is that the deeply rooted sexist beliefs about marriage make most men unwilling to marry a woman with a higher degree or a better job. When women have higher education and occupation status, men believe that their own status as the master of the family is threatened by their inability to control these superior women (Ji, 2015). This further exacerbates women's partner selection dilemma -

the high educational and professional achievements of Chinese women are often discriminated against by men's "male superiority norms" (Liu, 2007).

Social Pressure. It is normal for parents of children in their 20s and 30s to talk about their children's marital status while chatting with colleagues or friends. For example, in Ji's (2015) article, Ma Mei, a girl in her 20s from a single-parent family, had to leave her hometown to escape the pressure of being forced to marry - because her single status shamed her mother and affected her mother's social life. This phenomenon happens frequently during the Spring Festival in China (Lv, 2016). The Spring Festival is the most important traditional festival in China. On this day, most Chinese people get together with their families to celebrate the coming of the New Year. In this festival, every family will visit their relatives and friends so this time of year is also the time when young people are urged to marry by their elders, relatives, friends and even neighbors.

Xiao Mamei was another participant in Ji's (2015) study. In her case, an aunt publicly questioned her mother about why Xiao Mamei was nearly thirty and still not married. It is a powerful example of how social networking is used to consolidate and increase women's normative marital expectations in China:

I was in a very embarrassing situation last year [at Spring Festival]. We go to visit a grandaunt. She asks my age and I tell her 26. She then asks if I have married or have a boyfriend. I tell her that I have no boyfriend. She raises her voice suddenly in front of everybody and accuses my mum why her daughter has not yet married... (Ji, 2015, p. 1065)

The practice of being forced into marriage has caused great dissatisfaction among many single young men and women who vent and discuss such feudal thought on social

media. I was shocked by one of the comments: "When an older person asks why you're not married when you're old enough to be, you should ask him why he doesn't die when he's old enough to die" (Koi fish trying to get ashore, 2019) Indeed, this was a bit of a vicious comment; however, what can be seen is contemporary men and women's deep hatred of this kind of forced marriage.

Patriarchal Norms A joke was spread in China many years ago, which goes: "There are three kinds of people in the world, the first one is men, the second one is women, then, who is the third one? A woman with a PhD." The joke illustrates quite a bit about gender and gender relations within the context of China. Simply put, the joke tells us that women who achieve academic or economic success pose a threat to men's masculinity. Men's identity is grounded in the notion that they are superior in every which way to women (Ji, 2015). And so, women who gain power through education makes men feel threatened to men's authority. Because of this, according to Martin (2014), high achieving women often face discrimination in the marriage market.

In the marriage market, it is common that many Chinese professional women are ostracized by men as heterosexual partners (McLaren, 2016). It is not only because they have excellent career achievements, but also because many Chinese men believe that marrying a woman with a more successful career than themselves will threaten their masculine status in the family (To, 2013). Men want to have an edge over their female partners in everything - higher salaries, higher job titles, higher levels of education, higher levels of graduate school, even more holidays allowed each year, so that they can control their wives to have a say in their families. According to To (2013), some of the professional women interviewed were shy about letting potential suitors know they were

pursuing a doctorate, and when asked why they were still studying, they even kept secret that they already had a master's degree in case they were rejected by men because of their advanced education. In addition, some men will put pressure on women to quit working after marriage and will restrict women to follow traditional family roles by applying the traditional view of patriarchal society, that is, give up work, have children and live a family-centered life as they wish. In my case, some of my parents' friends or colleagues would tell my parents, half-jokingly and half-sincerely, “it is no use for your daughter to read so many books, she should get married as soon as possible” or “it is not easy for her to get married after she has read so many books” .

Women's views. Most of the women who are squeezed out of China's marriage market are over 25, well-educated but unmarried (McLaren, 2016). According to McLaren (2016), in Chinese traditional values, these women are generally believed to have too high expectations for marriage and too picky about their choice of partners, so "being left behind" is the price they should pay. However, this is not always the case. After taking the college entrance examination, my high school classmates and I were admitted to different universities. One of them went to an ordinary university in Chongqing. After graduation, she went back to my hometown while I stayed in Beijing. A few years later, I went back to my hometown for the holiday and had dinner with her. Most of the time she expressed her desire to get married because she thought she was old and too tall for men. I was 24 at the time, and she was a year older than me. She is 1.85 meters tall, much taller than most girls. In my hometown, most men prefer petite girls. What makes me feel regretful is that she has participated in many competitions and won awards as a model since the age of 14, then participated in the model show of China central television at the age of 16. She returned to the small city at the age of 18 only because her parents insisted that she take the college entrance examination and receive higher education. However, due to her lack of many years of academic education, she finally went to an undistinguished university. After graduation, her academic achievements did not enable her to find a satisfactory job. At the same time, her age was no longer competitive for the modeling industry, and she eventually returned to the small city after graduating from college and took a copywriting job.

My friend once said: "I am too high, few boys would like a girl as tall as me. And I am already 25 now, and if I met the right guy now, we'd go out for a year or two, right?"

And then we're going to get married, and then I'm going to have a baby, and I'm going to be 30. If I can't find a boyfriend right now, I won't be wanted." I can still vividly recall my friend's anxiety when she said that. My friend and I believed she had a hard time finding a boyfriend because her height did not conform to the general male aesthetic. At that time, I did not realize that it was time to get ready to marry someone so I was shocked that my high school classmate, who used to shine so brightly, had such desire to get married. Now I am 27 years old, which means she is 28 years old, and as far as I know she is still unmarried.

Another high school classmate was admitted to Shanghai academy of Art, one of the best art schools in China. After graduating, she also went back to my hometown. We have been in contact, she and her boyfriend have been together for more than three years. Everyone is curious about why they are not yet married. She says he refused to marry so early. However, her boyfriend is very frank, and told me that he could not afford a house decent enough to please her. According to Chinese tradition, the material prerequisite for a couple to get married is that the man's family needs to purchase the new house, and the woman's family needs to buy the new car. It is common to see many couples delay marriage or even break up because they cannot meet this rule (Qiao, 2014). Even if the couple themselves do not mind if the other person does not meet this rule, their families will still be dissatisfied. This often leads to conflict between the two families.

Many Chinese women who have received higher education and attach great importance to personal development do not accept the unfair social norms of men and women in their hearts, but they still subconsciously hope to have a family. According to Ji (2015), when faced with serious conflicts between family and career, most professional

women are willing to make sacrifices to varying degrees for the sake of family, but only a small number of professional women are willing to give up their career for the sake of family.

It is worth mentioning that even if many women are willing to make contributions to their families after marriage, they do not marry for love (Ji, 2015). For example, in a small city like my hometown, many highly educated women still hope to get married as soon as possible. Most of them get married not primarily because their hearts ache for marriage, but because they are worried about being criticized based on not following social norms. That is to say, in today's China, the reasons for getting married are complex and varied. Marriage in the eyes of many people no longer have the sacredness of love. It is more like a means of circumventing accusations of social delinquency or a social deviancy. However, there still many women expect to get married. Faced with the irreconcilable contradiction between their desires and social norms, some women do not compromise. By exploring their own values, they established the role of independent women and challenged traditional gender norms, hoping that the ideology of traditional gender norms would eventually be replaced.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the educational level of Chinese women has significantly improved (China's National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The proportion of the female population with a medium or high degree (college degree or above) increased from 1.4 percent in 1990 to 48.4 percent in 2018 (China Statistics Press [CSP], 1993; China's National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2018a). With the popularization of female education and the improvement of labor force participation rate, more and more women pay more attention to exploring their own value and pursuing career achievements (Mak, 2013). Many women, including those of a marriageable age between 22 and 27, are also moving away from marriage and family as life goals. Hence, modern Chinese women are gradually forming new views of marriage and career.

Social Background – The Revival of Patriarchy

The new attitude that women are increasingly spending more time and energy pursuing careers rather than families is starting to have an impact (Yan, 2010). This new attitude has produced contradictory effects in the private sphere of the family because the gender rules in traditional Chinese culture have not changed. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government has taken the transition to market economy as the focus of economic development. Market capitalism created a new form of female gender identity not based on family relations but on labour market values and entertainment consumption (Yan, 2010). However, the propaganda of Marxist ideology, including its ideology of gender equality, has gradually lost its momentum of development (Sun & Chen, 2014). In contrast to what seems to be a self-focused, self-

motivated mindset, the public cultural construction of adult women has shifted to a more family-focused nature (Croll, 1995). As a result, adult women in the 1990s faced self-contradictory and dual pressures: as individuals pursuing self-reliance, they had to act as male supporters and family caregivers when working as a family unit, but this was increasingly taken for granted as Confucian patriarchal norms were gradually revived (Sun & Chen, 2014).

Political Background – One-child Policy

In 1979, the average age of 65 percent of China's population was under 30, and the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s was entering childbearing age (Hesketh, Lu, & Xing, 2005). To speed up market reforms and improve people's living standards, the government introduced the one-child policy. According to Hesketh et al., (2005), the policy included a set of laws regulating the number of approved Chinese families, restrictions on family size, late marriage and childbearing, and the spacing of children (if a second child was allowed). With few exceptions, the policy was strictly enforced for city residents and government employees. Exceptions to this policy were families with a first child with a disability, or where both parents worked in high-risk jobs (such as mining), or came from families with only one child (in some areas).

The one-child policy has caused some negative problems, such as the increasing burden of caring for elderly parents for the only child, but it has also slowed down China's population growth. It is said by the National Population and Family Planning Commission of China (2008) that China's population has shrunk by 400 million compared with the population that was expected to be reached without the implementation of the policy (as cited in Lee, 2012). In addition, the policy has

inadvertently improved the share of resources that a girl who is the only child enjoys in a family. Having an only daughter also reduces the pressure on parents to be prejudiced against female children, eliminates the need to obey male siblings, improves women's family status, and promotes gender equality. Lee's (2012) findings suggest that the proportion of children in single-child families to children in families with many children has a significant opportunity to improve education, and the progress of girls is generally greater than that of boys. In families with multiple children, daughters generally have fewer years of education than boys, but Lee's study found no difference in the years of education for boys and girls in families with only one child. In other words, in the absence of competition for family resources, girls from one-child families will have more educational opportunities. As the policy was pushed forward, more one-child families invested all their resources in the only daughter so that true gender equality within the family can be achieved.

Traditional Family Economic Model

With the improvement of female education level, female labour participation has also increased significantly in recent years (Yeung, 2013). There is no doubt that the employment of married women has brought great economic contribution to their families. In contemporary Chinese cities, women's emerging trend as a secondary or even major breadwinner has attracted widespread attention (Zhang, 2015). It is not only because this new situation of raising a family has a considerable impact on traditional values, but also because of the sense of uneasiness brought about by the influence of the independent income of contemporary women on marital relations (Zhang, 2015). Historically, men have occupied a more favourable position in the labour market, so couples who rely on

men's income ability will maximize their economic benefits. However, based on this family economic model, couples who do not follow this gender-based family economic model will be disadvantaged in both the economy and the family, which may lead to a decline in the quality of marriage (Furdyna, Tucker, & James, 2008). In fact, most women indeed do more housework because of the economic dependence of women on men, which makes them lose the right to make family decisions (Brines, 1994). For example, in 2000, more than two-thirds of non-professional women between the ages of 30 and 34 gave up their jobs just to take care of their families, but only four percent of men of the same age made the same sacrifice (Burnett, 2010).

According to Article 40 of the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, at the time of a couple divorces, one can claim compensation for housework from the other. However, the compensation standard for domestic work is not specific. (Government of China, 2005). Hence, although this typical family economic model is in line with traditional Chinese values, it cannot provide enough life security for non-working married women. As a result, more and more women are taking charge of both household finance and housework. According to the data, the proportion of female household labour in 2016 increased from 61.82% in 1996 to 62.50%, of which the proportion increased from 63.31% to 64.43% on working days and from 59.71% to 60.78% on rest days (NBS, 2018b). It has been reported that childbearing is one of the main reasons for the increase in women's domestic work time, so more and more women appear to be choosing to remain single as to not be exhausted by housework. Also, women who have received higher education and are independent and have better economic conditions account for the majority among single women.

Double Pressure of Working Women

China has one of the highest rates of female employment in the world (United Nations, 2000). By the end of 2017, there were more than one billion Chinese women in the workforce, more than 50 percent of whom had full-time jobs and who accounted for 43.5 percent of the total employed population (NBS, 2018c). Furthermore, advances in technology, the one-child policy and the marketization of housework seem to have eased the burden on working women. Yet compared with the proportion of women in management in any industry and the pay gap between men and women, China's working women have achieved only a hollow victory (Lu & Zhao, 2002). According to Project Group of the 3rd Survey on the Status of Chinese Women (2011) there is a growing gender pay gap in the labor market. The average income of working women in urban areas dropped from 77.5 percent of the average income of men in 1990 to 67.3 percent in 2010, while the gender income gap in rural areas was even worse with working women accounting for 56 percent of the average income of men, which was down from 79 percent. Moreover, according to China's Labor Statistics Yearbook (2016), even for informal types of employment, there is still a big gap between men and women. Female informal workers are mainly engaged in business and services, while men are mainly engaged in management and technology. In other words, although the labor force participation rate of Chinese women is higher than that of most countries in the world, the quality of career choice is still a disadvantage.

Married professional women face higher unemployment risks in addition to daily work and housework. In 1992, the Chinese government passed the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women (LPRIW), which has been revised and is still effective. It not only specifies that women should get equal pay, but also provides a number of

other protective measures, including a ban on using marriage, pregnancy, maternity leave, or nursing as reasons to terminate a contract, and specifies men's and women's equal employment standards and requirements (Federation, 1992). Unfortunately, the passing of LPRIW did not promote equality between men and women in the labour market, but only reinforced traditional notions of "women's" capabilities in China. As Bulger states, the laws that seem to protect women are based on traditional patriarchy, which ties a woman's primary obligation to her family, in other words, to having a man rather than a paid job (as cited in Burnett, 2010, p. 305). Additionally, LPRIW stipulates that both men and women should be held to the same employment standards, except for special jobs that are not suitable for women. However, LPRIW does not specify which kind of jobs are unsuitable for women, which justifies employers' refusal to hire women. Therefore, even though LPRIW ostensibly protects women's rights and interests, it actually strengthens the bond between women and their traditional role in the family, and virtually increases the cost for employers to hire women, making it more difficult for Chinese women to find jobs in the already pessimistic labour market. Moreover, due to the legal maternity leave, many women who are married but not pregnant are more likely to be rejected by interviewers (Burnett, 2010). When I was about to graduate from my undergraduate course, I really felt the discrimination based on gender. On campus job fairs, men who graduated with the same major had an obviously much easier time finding jobs than women. Many interviewers even asked the girl if she has a boyfriend, if she is married, if she plans to have children in the next years, and so on. However, no matter what the answer is, there are more than a few girls who are eliminated just because of personal questions. Additionally, even if pregnant working women are allowed to take

maternity leave as required, they often worry about losing competitiveness in the workplace and eventually losing their jobs due to long maternity leave.

Double Standards of Aging

Aging plays an important role in traditional Chinese marriage values. In Chinese slang, the first half of a sentence is "Nan Ren Si Shi Yi Zhi Hua", which means that when a man reaches the age of 40, he is as mature and charming as a blooming flower. The last half of the sentence is "Nv Ren Si Shi Dou Fu Zha", which means that when a woman reaches her forties, she will be as neglected as a piece of tofu foam.

Although Chinese women have made considerable progress in social status and economic ability, they still cannot overcome the disadvantage of age. According to Ji (2015), the ideal Chinese marriage is traditionally depicted as a knowledgeable husband and a beautiful wife. Becoming a knowledgeable husband takes years of effort, while becoming a beautiful wife takes "only" young, beautiful appearance. Furthermore, although older unmarried men are also under pressure - a lot of people will classify them as a "playboy"; however, compared with older unmarried women, when men marry later in life they are not subjected to the same social prejudice. For example, they are not referred to as 'leftover men'. On the contrary, a lot of older men can increase their own value by accumulating wealth are generally considered a "Golden Bachelor" by the public, as well as more attractive to potential mates (Liu, 2007).

Shanghai's people's park is famous for its matchmaking corner, where parents who are anxious about their children's marriages hold up homemade matchmaking ads with personal information about their children, and search through other ads to find a match for their children (Yang, Li & Wang, 2019). Yingguang Guo is a female photographer.

She created a performance art exhibition on this phenomenon -- she stood in the crowd and held an advertisement for herself, which said that her real information was "female, born in Liaoning province, graduated from the university of the arts in London with a master of arts degree, funny personality, independent, and her parents were intellectuals". Guo deliberately did not indicate her age in the ad. Then, many male and female elders came to ask her age. When hearing that she was already thirty years old, without exception, everyone expressed regret and even thought that her "personal situation" was very serious and worried about her. In the matchmaking corner, Guo "learned" a formula - one room, one price. In the eyes of parents who set up blind dates for their children, men are like bank cards, and women like houses. The more money men have in their bank account, the better the house they can buy. So what is the standard of a "good house"? For example, young, beautiful, and docile women are like downtown houses. "Look at you. You are fine, after all, you have never been married. You are not ugly either, but you are too old. Well, you're a suburban house at best" (Guo & Yang, 2018). Matchmaking events like this are not uncommon in China. Behind these matchmaking events, women are objectified as young and beautiful commodities, under a male-dominated power hierarchy to achieve a distorted, unequal material-based marriage.

Female Self-Contradiction

Many modern women born after 1980 say they are "more independent" by comparing themselves to their mothers (Martin, 2014). As mentioned above, the 1960s and 1970s were a period of economic reform in China, a period of cultural change, a period of both advocacy for women's independence and focus on the so-called "natural" gender differences between women and men. As a result, many women born in that era,

the mothers of contemporary women, have acquired a new gender identity, but are also plagued by double contradictory identities.

Different than their mothers, contemporary women are educated at an earlier age and generally enjoy more abundant resources (Zhang, 2001). As a result, most contemporary women generally believe that their mothers lack self-knowledge and that more women see self-reliance and self-hood as their life goals than having a family of their own. It is interesting that although more and more women have joined the ranks of those who desire equality between men and women, it does not mean that these women have completely abandoned the traditional Chinese view of marriage. According to Zhang (2001), nearly two-thirds of students believed that men should focus on their careers and women on their families. At the same time, only 10% of students thought women had to work, while 70% of students believed that caring for husbands and children was the center of women's lives. In addition, more than half of the students (accounted for 52% of the total number of students) strongly agreed that marriages in which the wife earns more than the husband do not last long. In contrast, only 20% of the students agreed that a husband should make some sacrifices for his wife's career. And an overwhelming majority of students (accounted for 83% of the total number of students) still think women are not suitable for management positions. Surprisingly, female students made up a higher proportion of the sample than male students in this survey. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that the results of this survey reflect women's cognition of their social roles. In other words, a significant percentage of highly educated women are still being socialized in traditional social roles, such as caring for a family rather than focusing on a career, even though they are not yet playing the role of wives.

As Martin (2014) stated in his research, although most Chinese women still want to get married, they are also worried that the constraints based on gender will become more obvious after marriage. Married women, for example, are often defined by social norms as "family caregivers". In this regard, there is a greater negative impact on women who still want to achieve in their careers. Even today's women, as Qin (2012) stated, who call for equality between men and women, still believe that, unlike men, there is a limit to how much time women can devote to their careers, because they still see getting married then having children as something they have to do in their lives within a certain period of time (most people say 30 at the latest). And, as long as they get married, family responsibilities get in the way of their efforts, so they have to achieve their career goals within a set time limit. It can be seen that modern women, on the one hand, expect to further develop their career, and be financially independent and confident; on the other hand, they hope to follow the traditional path of marriage and family, and aspire to establish an equal and healthy marriage pattern with their partners (Gaetano, 2014). However, in the traditional patriarchal society, strong gender norms make it difficult for modern women to achieve both goals in career and marriage. When women who fail to meet their goals delay marriage, they are socially penalized - stigmatized as "Leftover Women" and accused of being "picky" and "too idealistic".

The Level of Female Education

Economic independence theory holds that educated women can obtain independent economic resources and refuse to play the role of caregiver in marriage (Becker, 1981). There is also evidence to indicate that education is negatively correlated with a woman's marriage (Becker, Hubbard & Murphy, 2010; Cohn et al, 2011; Blossfeld & Kiernan,

2019). Take the University of Tokyo as an example, which is one of the best institutions of higher learning in Japan. According to Rich (2019), over the past two decades, women have accounted for only about one-fifth of all students at the University of Tokyo. Some male students say they prefer to date women from other schools, because they think girls at Tokyo university are too masculine. Also, as Ms. Ueno's stated, officials at Tokyo Medical University, which is another excellent institution of higher learning in Japan, admitted to suppressing female applicants' entrance exam scores for years (Rich, 2019). According to Wang and Wu (2013), the higher education people pursue means the longer they need to stay in school. In China, women who want to get married after completing a master's degree are generally over the age of 25. In other word, the pursuit of higher academic achievement at the age that women eligible to marry is also a factor in delaying their marriage.

According to Giddens (1992), and Beck and Gernsheim (2002), the combination of the behavior of late marriage of highly educated women with the concept of “individuation” by Western society could be used to clarify the positive proposition of professional women on their intimate life. This combination not only change the intimate pattern in modern society, but also means that women have more freedom and power to choose or not to choose marriage (as cited in To, 2013, p. 2). However, according to the gender role specialization model (Kalmijn, 1998), men are the breadwinners of the family economy, while women mainly undertake the labor within the family. Therefore, in the traditional Chinese view of marriage, women tend to seek partners with higher education and socioeconomic status, while men incline to find the opposite. As a result, highly educated women have a narrower range of choices than those without higher education.

This also objectively results educated women to marry later than those without higher education.

Although the age of first marriage has generally increased - the age of first marriage for urban men and women increased from 25 to 27 for men and from 23 to 25 for women during 20 years from 1980 to 2000, it has not affected the prevalence of marriage in China (CSP, 2013). Influenced by traditional Chinese values, urban men care more about women's appearance and whether or not they will be good at the role of “family caregiver” after marriage than their education level (To, 2013). This viewpoint once again draws our attention to how traditional understanding of gender powerfully shape men’s views in the past and today. But let me give you an example for my own experiences that will help us understand and illustrate how gender relations work in today’s China.

One of my male relatives, who is 30 years old, has never been married. His parents were anxious to set him up on a blind date. After meeting several girls, he was not satisfied because they were "too ugly". When I talked with him, I expressed my opinion that the girls were not ugly, and as far as I know, one or two of them were still top students of famous universities. Reflecting the idea that women’s real worth is based on their physical appearance and not on other capabilities including intellectual wherewithal, my male relative thinks it does not matter if a woman has a good university education or not. What matters is their physical appearance. Of course, it is important to point out that having a physically ‘beautiful’ wife needs to be understood as a key part to some men’s identity as men. To put it a little bit differently, women become objects, symbols, to signify a man’s worth to other men. Women become props, so to speak, to bolster a man’s masculinity.

Compared with urban men, urban women are more likely to value a mate's education, but more important is their financial ability. As mentioned above, my high school classmate did not get married because her boyfriend was not able to buy a house. Also, according to Zavoretti and Roberta (2017), the interviewee's fiancé did have a car, but he didn't have a house, so her parents couldn't accept him because her fiancé would shame them. This rule is also practical in China. It is natural for a man to buy a house and a woman to buy a car before wedding. If one fails to meet this rule, the other and his or her family will believe it too humiliating to marry in front of relatives and friends. So delaying marriage without a house or car is a common phenomenon. In general, education standards for urban men and women looking for a mate are not high - a bachelor's degree or an associate degree is enough. For men, having a master's or even a doctorate is just an added bonus. What really determines whether they qualify for marriage is their financial strength.

In addition, it is more important to be a good caregiver than to have a degree or a job. According to Tian (2013), although education offers women the potential to increase their earnings, it is difficult to translate the benefits of education directly into family bargaining power due to the relative deterioration of labor market conditions, and they are still expected to play the role of family caregivers after marriage. Even though women earn more, many men still want their wives to give up work and focus on the family (Zavoretti, 2017). "His family is very feudal and believes that women who go out to work after marriage are likely to have extramarital affairs." My college classmate said to me at a reunion after graduation: "even though my degree and salary are higher than his, he still hopes that I can quit my job. When I relented, he gradually became less

willing to support our family, complaining that I didn't understand the pressures of his job."

As a result, some highly educated women, despite their greater desire for gender equality at heart, find it difficult to refuse marriage because of social norms and parental pressure. Furthermore, many well-educated women, unable to tolerate the patriarchal control because of their male views on work and life, prefer to spend more time choosing their ideal marriage partner rather than rush through it. As Ji and Yeung (2014) stated in their research, highly educated women, under pressure from social norms and unequal age standards, have a tougher time finding a male partner, but evidence suggests that most still marry before the age of 35.

Love and Marriage

The accepted value in Chinese society is that people should get married when they reach a certain age and meet certain conditions (Qiao, 2014). While, few people have given much thought to why they need to get married. Modern people can simply boil down the motive of marriage to the need of youth, the need of love, the need of sex, the need of daily life and other personal needs. In his early research on the concept of marriage, German sociologist Muller Lille divided the motives for marriage into three types (as cited in An, 2004). The first is economy, the second is reproduction, the third is love. The importance of the three motives is different in different periods (An, 2004). Therefore, it can be seen that the motives for marriage are very complex, which changes with the changes of society and times. Ironically, it seems like love is insignificant in marriage in today. According to Xu (2004), only 13.8 percent of Shanghai women agree that "marriage is a personal choice, not important to others". Also, most of the Chinese

women I've spoken to believe that love is important in marriage, but financial ability is the core of whether a marriage will last or not. Traditional social norms stigmatize men and women who are old enough to marry but not married, making people increasingly indifferent to what should be the most important factor in marriage.

In the Mao era, as stated by Pan (2006), class and family background were the key to choosing a spouse: love was "bourgeois" and counter-revolutionary. However, this is a relatively new concept for anyone facing the ideal of love and romance in China today. Unlike the androgyny of the Mao era, the reform-era communist national agenda promoted the essentialist concepts of women and men. According to Hershatter (2007), this essentialist rhetoric conceals physiological differences, describing the "natural role" of women as "fragile, dependent and inferior" (As cited in Zurndorfer, 2018, p.491), while describing men as active and even aggressive (Song & Hird, 2014). It also oriented the male role as "support provider", while the female role naturally oriented as "naturally sensitive, delicate and suitable to take care of the family".

Under the influence of patriarchy in these two different periods, single women in China have different romantic pursuits for love. Despite family-centered values and the natural tendency of women to care for their families has been emphasized in the mass media with little or no attention paid to women's academic or professional achievements. The rising divorce rate and the declining marriage rate in recent years still reflect the low expectations of married life. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics (2011), China's divorce rate rose from 0.9 in 2002 to 2.0 in 2010. In 2017, the divorce rate in China reached 3.2. Meanwhile, the marriage rate fell from 9.9% in 2013 to 7.7 percent in 2017. That's a 2.2 percent drop in just four years (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2017). Liu

(2015) found that there are two main causes of marital breakdown: infidelity and/or domestic violence, caused by the husband's inability to cope with unemployment, alcoholism, gambling and debt. However, due to gender inequality and discrimination against leftover women and divorced women, in a society that values family harmony so much, women still suffer social punishment even if they are not at fault (Ji, 2015).

Despite not being divorced, the data also show that among married couples in China, women generally report lower levels of marital satisfaction than men (Wang & Yu, 2013). The reasons can be roughly summed up in two ways. On the one hand, women have higher expectations for marriage. However, after marriage, the life of a couple is in great contrast to its expectation. On the other hand, although equality between men and women has always been advocated, women after marriage still tend to undertake more housework in social and cultural construction (Wang & Yu, 2013). As a result, many women would rather be under pressure from social norms than go against their inner expectations of a casual family.

One of my friends once said, it is normal for a society that most people do not want to get married. However, when most people have to get married, the social culture is problematic. As long as China's patriarchal culture persists, the urge to marry will never go away.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through the understanding and exploration of various literatures, this study expounds the views of contemporary Chinese women on marriage from different aspects. As the focus of background research, Confucianism has made a significant contribution to the subordination of Chinese women. A woman should be loyal to her family all her life. She belongs to her family before her marriage, while she belongs to her husband after her marriage. Within the fading of gender equality advocated by Marxism in propaganda and the revival of patriarchal Confucianism, after the reform and opening up of China, the role of women in cultural propaganda gradually changed from "holding up half the sky" to "caring for the family by nature". At that time, women were encouraged to be both "independent" - not just dependent on men to live, but "caring" - because of their nature.

High standards for women are evident in both the marriage market and the labor market. The marriage market has three unwritten rules for women: first, you'd better not read too many books, second, you'd better not make too much money, and most importantly, you better be young. China's one-child policy guarantees women born in the 1980s the right to education, and as China's economy has grown rapidly in recent decades and the market has opened up, more and more women are pursuing higher degrees. Surprisingly, many men think women are no longer easy to control. Therefore, highly educated women are severely excluded from the marriage market. Similarly, successful unmarried women are viewed by men as difficult to control and ostracized. Also, once a woman is over 30 and unmarried, many men, apart from their personal preference, generally believe that marrying her is not good for reproduction.

Moreover, women are not only excluded in the marriage market, but are also unfairly treated in the labor market. In addition to the income gap, the gender gap has also led to an inequality in occupations - men in management and technical jobs while women in business and services. Especially for single women over the age of 25, their private lives are closely tied to whether they can hold their job steadily, whether or not they are in a hurry to get married, and when they plan to have children - the answers to these questions all determine whether or not employers have to bear higher costs such as statutory and paid holidays for women. As a result, the labor market tends to favor women who are married and have children. In other words, women who are excluded from the marriage market are also more likely to be excluded from the labor market. However, just because professional women are married and have children doesn't mean they don't have to follow their "natural instinct" of caring for their family. According to the above statistics, most married working women still have to bear the burden of housework in their spare time. If their husbands share some housework, many women show their appreciations for their husbands' help as this is considered women's work: although they have jobs, they see housework as women's duty. Therefore, pressure from both work and family has made many women increasingly aware of the problem -- that in a patriarchal society they are unable to achieve equal treatment with men in the marriage market, the labor market, and even within their own families.

The experiences and perspectives of unmarried working women in urban China are diverse and complex. With discrimination against women in the job market, the popularization of female education in China has gradually expanded. More and more women with higher education are willing to spend more time seeking career development

and finding a more suitable partner, thus delaying marriage. Most women hold firm expectations of equal partnership in a marriage and do not succumb to pressure from social norms regarding women's roles.

Conclusion

The generation born after 1980 with higher education, the infiltration of Marxist ideology of gender equality, and the revival of traditional patriarchal values due to the transformation of the market economy have made women's life run through the collision of Chinese traditional and modern values. Under such collision, gender relations reveal a convergence and contradiction between old and new ideas - traditional social values and women's personal fulfillment - men are more inclined to return to tradition, while women strive for true gender equality. Unmarried contemporary professional women in urban China have diverse and complex views and even in the face of pressure from traditional marriage values, they adhere to their ideal of love, and in the face of the marriage market against them, they affirm their success. Their stories illustrate the lack of social recognition and support for single women in contemporary China. Although they compromise when necessary, these women are still support gender equality and criticize traditional gender role ideology.

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