

GENDER, FEMINISM AND GLOBALIZATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

In any society, the construction of gender is a continuous process intimately connected to other historical developments in the society. Feminist researchers have convincingly insisted that gender is socially constructed because of the general image of women as docile, compliant and oppressed by the patriarchal family. This is the reason why many feminist writers project the female identities in order to give women a sense of belonging in their fictional works. This paper examines in a unique way the social, cultural and nature of gender construction in the society. It specifically looks at gender relations, globally and also explains that men and women had rigidly defined roles as well as a range of social and moral obligations attached to these gender roles.

Introduction

The **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary** defines "gender" "as the act of being male or female". Gender is perhaps the most salient issue and ubiquitous social category in human communities which is socially unavoidable. In an article by Marcel Harper and Wilhelm J. Schoeman (2003) termed "**Influences of Gender as a Basic Level Category in a Person's Perception on the Gender Belief System**". They quoted Maccoby (1988), "who pointed out that gender influence is observed within all known languages past and the present and it distinguishes role differences pan-culturally". Indeed, it can be seen as the primary basis of human differentiation which makes perceivers to likely structure and explain their social interactions in terms of gender.

The international Telecommunication Union Websites defines "gender" "as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, the relationship between women and men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through a socializing process. They are context/time specific and changeable. Feminism means therefore, a rejection of inferiority and striving for recognition. It seeks to give women a sense of self as worthy, effectual and contributing human being.

French Marilyn (1985:7) also states that "Feminism is the only serious, coherent and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures... feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes (at least are equal in all significant ways and that this equity must be publicly recognized".

Globalization

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th Edition defines globalization as "the fact that different cultures and economic systems around the world are becoming connected and similar to each other because of the influence of large multinational companies and of improved communication". Scholars from various disciplines such as sociology, political science and

history have perceived globalization differently and have tried to define it from various angles. Globalization increases cross border flow of goods, services, money people, information and culture. We also find common concepts like mutual interdependence, exchange and sharing of the communication around the world in all aspects such as social, economic, cultural and even linguistic aspects. Our concern here is in relation to culture. Culturally speaking, globalization is the emergence of different cultural beliefs that are common cross-culturally and across national boundaries. That is to say that concept of gender inequality is widely acknowledged in the world today. The global communication leads to some extent functional homogenization of culture and language. These two aspects namely, homogenization of culture and homogenization of language, are particularly relevant for translating globalization as a reality. We should also note that, the homogenization of culture due to globalization process results in the marginalization of indigenous cultures.

Gender Analysis and Perception in China

Kathy E. Ferguson States that “the feminine is always described in-terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value... In short, they (women) are deprived of the worth of their sex”.

The case of women and property ownership in Sung and Yuan China will provide a good example. According to the article, “**women, Property and the Confucian. Reaction in Sung and Yuan China: Gender, Mongols and Confucian Ideals**”. Patrilineal, principles were part of the Chinese society from earliest times as seen in Confucian the rituals texts, legal codes and popular practices such as agnatic ancestor worship. Formal Law and Confucian rhetoric tied the transmission of property rights to the male patriline..... Household property held communally under the name of the household head, was divided equally among the sons at the death of their parents..

“Marriage and property relations among the Mongols, a Nomadic steppe people, were in many respects conceptually opposite of the Chinese, resembling what Goody has described as the African mode of production and reproduction rather than the Eurasian system of China. The African model was characterized by lack of property transmitted through women and more complete incorporation of a woman into her husband’s lineage”. (290)

However, in the Chinese society, women are seen as objects of humility and not humiliation because of their culturally defined roles. Education was considered less important because of their biological roles as wives and mothers; so the society didn’t see it wise to educate women like the men. The migrant women in haidian did not identify sexism or gender discrimination as the reason why males were educated than females. Instead, they regarded the problem to “poverty” and lack of funds. Tamara Jacka in the article termed “**Rural Women in Urban China; Gender, Migration and Social Change**” states that “..., a few mentioned that, as children, their educations were limited because their families included several girls – the problem, as they saw it was the poverty that resulted from having too many mouths to feed. They did not identify discrimination against girls as a factor, even though their brothers commonly received more schooling than they did”. (219).

In ancient China woman’s participation in leadership is not encouraged, they are not allowed to participate in politics or leadership; because the society has pervasive fear that women could bring chaos by upsetting the cosmic harmony. This was a great obstacle for women who aspired to male political leadership. Those who succeeded were accused of breaking one of nature’s laws of becoming “like a hen crowing”. Some western scholars still argue that women are discriminated from participating effectively in the Chinese society. The Chinese people believe in the place of a woman in the society. Women are the weaker sex, and should be virtuous

supporting the husband; even the Confucian doctrine supported this view by stating that wives are sub-ordinate to their husbands. Girls were taught how to respect family ethics and respect for their future husbands. "Confucianism became the most pervasive doctrine to promote the belief in women's "natural place." Confucius himself did not inherently denigrate women, although he placed them at the lower end of the patriarchal family structure. Yet, through the ages the assumption that men's and women's social places and expected behaviors were quite distinct based on Confucian hierarchical precepts, and were reinforced by prescriptive advice manuals like *Lessons for Girls*. Written by the female historian Ban Zhao (Han dynasty, ca. 45-120 C.E.), *Lessons* became one of China's most durable sources of advice about female behavior. One nugget tells women to "yield to others; let her put others first, herself last." (Essay on Gender Differences in the History of Women in China and Japan: Women in World History Curriculum". In the ancient China, women were seen as objects of humility, obedience and loyalty. This explains the reason why "foot binding" was made mandatory for women in the olden days of china; which was meant to remind them of their humble nature and respect for their husbands. Again, widows were not allowed to remarry, but to keep themselves clean. Some western scholars saw this as humiliation to the female gender depicting women as voiceless and helpless in the Chinese society.

"In the Song dynasty (960-1279 C.E), a reinterpretation of Confucian teaching called NeoConfucianism stratified the position of women even more. NeoConfucian belief led to the egregious practices of foot binding, insistence on widow chastity. ...foot binding illustrates the perceived need to limit female mobility; the practice did not appear until the Song Dynasty.

Some western scholars argue that China is a country that idolizes sons and dreads the birth of a daughter because of the "issue of one-child policy" and the sustenance of the family name seeing women as farm hands and baby making machines especially during the pre-industrial rural Chinese society. Some scholars believed that women as teenagers were forced into marriages; sometimes bought or sold into prostitution. However, in the developing countries like china, Nigeria, India etc, girls are less cherished than boys because of the culture value and family function of the different sexes. In most developing countries, girls are constantly reminded of the things they are not allowed to do from the day they were born. But for the girls in the developed countries the message is different; they are encouraged to believe that girls can just be as smart, athletic and successful as boys too. They believe that when you are a girl, anything is possible. However, we should also note that the Chinese government adopted the "one child policy" in order to deal with the size of the population although the policy now has different interpretation for the citizens as they prefer one gender sex to the other.

In the Chinese society, the family plays an important role in encouraging sex and gender inequalities or discrimination because of their strong traditional belief system of keeping their family name and the issue of one-child policy system that limits the number of births in the society. In china, 70% of Chinese parents prefer boys to girls; even before and after the 1978 market oriented reforms, there had been a persistence of sons' preference over daughters. Generally, both the rural and urban Chinese people view sons and daughters differently. They see sons as members of their own lineage or family, while girls or females are not seen as members of the family. Chu, Junhong.(2001). in his article , "**Prenatal Sex Determination and Sex – Selective Abortion in Rural central China**" supports this fact by quoting a typical saying which people in the rural central of china where he conducted his research strongly believe in, he states "When you bring your daughters up and they are able to work and earn money, they will leave you .Sons are different. They can bring in labor".(p267)

Chu, Junhong believes that there is a persistence of sons' preference in the wake of declining family size. According to the research he conducted, he stipulates that sons' preference over

daughters is very strong in china; the differences in birth celebration, language and tone that are used when people talk about sons and daughters are quite different. “The felicitations and tones used when people talk about sons and daughters, and the privileges extended to boys all convey different appreciation of sons and daughters .Relatives and friends prepare “dates” (zao), peanuts (sheng) and sunflower or water melon seeds (zi)” for newlyweds in the hope that they will have sons earlier (those foods combined have the connotation of having sons earlier”.(p 267)

Chun also states in his article saying “that if a woman has a son at the first birth, her position in the family improves overnight .She is considered “very capable” by her in-laws and envied by all her neighborhood her voice becomes weightier in the family and in the neighbor.”(p267)

Recently, women in china are allowed to participate in leadership but not in all government positions. This is why Lee Ching-Kwan (1998) states in his article titled “**Gender and the South China Miracle Two Worlds of Factory Women** that “gender is socially constructed because of the general image of the Chinese women as docile, complaint and oppressed by the Chinese patriarchal family”.

Conclusion

Some Scholars and feminists still maintain that gender inequality persists in the world which has implications for women’s capacity to benefit from the global economy or certain policies. In the contemporary Chinese society, the standard of women and girls has improved a lot. It has always been in the agenda of the Chinese government to establish basic state policy in China to promote equality between men and women. Since the “New China was found in 1949, especially since the adoption of the reform and opening up policy in the late 1970’s the rights of women have improved a lot. And in the continuous growth of China’s economy and the over all progress of its society, women are now given equal rights and opportunities with men. The article, “Gender Equality and women’s Development in China” states that “the government has made the guarantee of equal employment opportunities between women and men and the sharing of economic resources and results of social development the top priority for the advancement of gender equality and the development of women, and has worked out and adopted a series of policies and measures to ensure that women can equally participate in the economic development, enjoy equal access to economic resources and effective services, enhance their self-development ability and improve their social and economic status”.

The revised Marriage Law, promulgated in 2001, reiterated the basic principle of equality between men and women, stressed the equal status of husband and wife and their equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and the family, and, in consideration of actual situation, forbids domestic violence and bigamy with the clear aim of protecting women's rights. Today, women have a lot more say in decision-making concerning their own marriage and play a bigger role in family decisions, and their personal and property rights are better protected.

This is why some feminist writers try to explore and bring to the fore “that women are equally human beings, owing to the fact that “what a man can do, a woman can do it perfectly”.

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