

Incomplete Liberation—Modern Chinese Women's Identity Construction

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Susan Moller Okin in her book *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women* ⁽¹⁾ proposed a sharp question. She argues that supporters of multiculturalism emphasize the importance of protecting cultural diversity, but they ignore one point: “most cultures are suffused with practices and ideologies concerning gender. Suppose, then, that a culture endorses and facilitates the control of men over women in various ways (even if informally, in the private sphere of domestic life). Suppose, too, that there are fairly clear disparities of power between the sexes, such that the more powerful, male members are those who are generally in a position to determine and articulate the group's beliefs, practices, and interests. Under such conditions, group rights are potentially, and in many cases actually, antifeminist.” ⁽²⁾ Just as she said, we are often too quick to assume that feminism and multiculturalism are both good things which are easily reconciled but ignore their internal tension. Most cultures, here she especially means those illiberal ones, have as one of their principal aims the control of women by men. Therefore, she argues when liberal arguments are made for the rights of groups, then, special care must be taken to look at intra-group inequalities. “The rights of minority cultural groups, if it is to be consistent with the fundamentals of liberalism, must be ultimately aimed at furthering the well-being of the members of these groups...” ⁽³⁾

This question is inevitable if we want to discuss the liberation of

women in any non-western context. However, we should be careful about the standpoint of such a western-centered question because it obviously takes western liberalism as a legitimate value system to challenge non-liberal social practices and imagines the non-western women's liberation full of risks to miss the great goals of western feminist movement, such as individual independence and freedom. My argument is those values may have different ranks or different embodiments in non-western practices. And even if there are many group injustices within the non-western social practices, we need not necessarily go for help from western individualism to correct them. We can and must find our own ways out. And they are the true and complicated performances of multiculturalism. I will prove my point by the case of modern Chinese women in their pursuit of their identities.

After China's reform and open since 1978, more and more women left their families and hometowns to seek for their own development through the fluidity driven by education and working opportunities. The economic and social development of China provides women a historical chance to seek for their equality and identities. However, according to the sociological report from 1995 to 2005⁽⁴⁾, women's development in six areas – health, education, economy, politics and decision-making, family and the social environment suitable for gender equality and women's development – has been improved but still fall behind men's. It concludes that economic and social development will not necessarily bring forth the improvement of gender equality and women development.

If the general development of Chinese society would not necessarily bring out gender equality and women's development, then what should we do? I suggest we should actively construct women's gender identities

in that process and we should also urge the Chinese government to accommodate women's identities into its law-legislation and policy-making. If this is the right direction of our efforts, then the most important question is: what are Chinese women's identities that are under construction or should be constructed? It is this complicated question takes me away from the orthodox western mode. In this essay, I will first talk about the importance of gender identity, then go on to picture a value map of the sources necessary for identity-construction, then discuss the complexity of Chinese situation, and finally put forth my suggestions.

1. Why does gender identity matter?

"One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one."⁽⁵⁾ This word has become like a biblical saying for many feminists since it was proposed at 1973. What Simone de Beauvoir embodies is a break with the hard "reality" which is built up by western male-dominant culture. Rather, feminists insist that as a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender is not a substantive thing but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations. Gender includes several dimensions, biological, linguistic and cultural. Suppose biological differences between women and men can not be changed easily in the near future, for example, men can not substitute women to give birth to baby; there are still a lot of social practices which do not rely on biological differences. And even these biological differences are not brutal facts but interweaved with meanings that come from people's interpretations. These interpretations have been institutionalized in reality as a power system which in turn legitimize them and neutralize them as 'facts'.⁽⁶⁾

The term "identity" is thought to have a longer academic history than "gender". According to Charles Taylor, identity has at least two axes: one

is the time axis, namely, the narrative identity of the self, which is like how to make my life as a whole through the river of time and changes; the other is constituted by our strong evaluations ⁽⁷⁾ based on the value background with qualitative distinctions, which is like what we “identify with”. The first axis seems like the traditional concept of identity which means self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent. But the big difference is the narrative identity is a hermeneutic concept linked with the interpretative nature of human being. So it is not just identical with socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility but also entails a possibility of identity reconstruction for interpretation is an ongoing event. The second axis distinguishes Taylor from the classical epistemological tradition from John Locke to Derek Parfit ⁽⁸⁾ who defines self-identity in the sense of self-consciousness which abstracts from any constitutive concern and normative framework. Such an abstraction and neutralization take the established social understandings and institutions as invisible and pretends to be fair by its formalistic outlook.

Taylor’s critique of traditional identity theory can be appropriated by feminists. They both realize how important identity is for people’s self-understanding and for social construction; both try to dig out the substantial dimension of identity underlying the ‘neutral’ framework dominated by ‘rational’ wills of men ⁽⁹⁾. In this sense, I think Judith Butler is right, “it would be wrong to think that the discussion of ‘identity’ ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that ‘persons’ only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.” ⁽¹⁰⁾ Inasmuch as identity is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into

question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. This is called “gender trouble” by Butler. We can imagine that gender troubles happen a lot in the era of women’s awakening. Whenever there is oppression, there is opposition. It is also true conversely. To resist women’s identity rewriting, not just some conservative men but also some women mark those revolutionaries as their enemies to get their due reward by masculine societies. A society with the powerful tradition is especially like that. So there are two tasks here: first, to shake the reality and norms built up by masculine cultures and ask for re-evaluation of them; second, considering the specialty and complexity in China’s situation, to analyze the possibilities and methods of women’ liberation under that condition.

Therefore, I think considering about the question of gender identity is the first step for all feminists because most of us agree that traditional gender images destroy women’s ability to live an authentic life as women, but as others ⁽¹¹⁾ or absence ⁽¹²⁾ . However, feminists in different cultural backgrounds have their own way to go because gender identities are radically dependent upon the contexts in which they develop. This contextual feature of identity may indicate that although women share similar oppressions around the world, their liberations will move along different roads. Let us go on to discuss the contexts of modern China which constitute the sources of Chinese women’s identity-construction.

2. Sources of the self: The Making of Modern Identities of Chinese Women

To consider the identities of modern Chinese women, we have to first

describe the value map of modern China. Chinese women according to their different backgrounds may have different standpoints on this map, but few can stand outside of it because for our identity-construction this value map is the inescapable framework.

Modern and Contemporary Chinese History is very complicated. Since it is produced between tensions of the old and the new, of gender and a persisting kinship system, of the family and the state, modern Chinese women in the road to their authentic identities are under the influences of diverse trends of thoughts. At least four kinds of powers can be identified: Traditional Chinese Thoughts (especially Confucianism), Socialism, Western Liberalism and Consumerism.

Historically speaking, these trends come to the stage in different phase of history. Some scholars proposed that “gender relations in China have gone through a series of historical stages, being integrated with the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist view of gender equality during one phase, and with Deng’s Economic Reform introducing new market forces during the most recent phase.”⁽¹³⁾ Compared to this two-stage distinction, another demarcation method is to divide it into three-stage: 1) In the first half of twenty century, women’s identities are mainly culturally constructed; 2) From the establishment of PRC (1949) to the end of the Culture Revolution (1976), women’s identities are exclusively politically constructed; and 3) Since the Reform and Open (1978) till now, women’s identities are more and more economically constructed.⁽¹⁴⁾

I will set aside this historical debate and talk about the big hodgepodge that we have now (no matter when and how they come into play). Namely, the four trends I have mentioned above: traditionalism

especially Confucianism, socialism, western liberalism and consumerism.

Traditionalism:

Traditional Chinese society is structured by many different thoughts, such as Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism and Buddhism. They played different roles in shaping the society and people's ordinary life. Since the dominant role was taken by Confucianism which proposed a systematic ideology of Chinese family organization and state arrangement, it has been viewed as the source of degrading feminine values and the chief criminal of women's oppression. As the color-bearer of New Culture Movement, Lu Xun (鲁迅) in his novel "Zhufu" ("The New Year's Sacrifice") (1926) described the miserable life of a widow called Xianglin Sao⁽¹⁵⁾ who has been viewed as the concentrating embodiment of women under the oppression of feudal ideology of Confucianism.

Feminists' critiques on Confucianism are mainly focused on: 1) the sexist philosophical articulation in Confucianism, such as the unequal relationship of Ying/Yang⁽¹⁶⁾, the patriarchal "Three Bonds"⁽¹⁷⁾, and the feudalistic doctrine "it is a small matter to starve to death, but a large matter to lose integrity"⁽¹⁸⁾, etc. Their critiques are also sharply directed toward 2) the oppressive practices towards women, such as the labor division of inner/outer, the "chaste widowhood" and "foot-binding" from Song Dynasty till the early twentieth century. Based on these judgments, Confucianism is viewed as a historical trash the tenets of which totally contradict the aim of the feminist movement - women's liberation.

However, this tradition, or rather the interpretation of this tradition by the anti-tradition⁽¹⁹⁾ in the latest one hundred years may not be entirely true. Even though it holds the truth of the past, it does not necessarily

mean Confucianism as a tradition can not be creatively transformed and used in the future.

Actually, Confucianism as well as Christianity has found its own way into the modern secular age. Just as sexist interpretations of democratic principles in ancient Athens denied women political rights, sexist interpretation of Christianity assigned women a secondary position, it was the sexist interpretation of ren (仁) and some other values of Confucianism responsible for excluding women in ancient China. As long as its core values can be extended ⁽²⁰⁾, Confucianism has the power to be revived in modern age and contribute to women's identity-construction.

Since 1990s, some neo-Confucian scholars in China launched a movement to revive Confucianism ⁽²¹⁾ which stepped well with China's economic rise. A gigantic "dragon" ⁽²²⁾ now is eager to looking for its own identity that can not be fulfilled by western thoughts. Besides, the sense of uncertainty and disorder caused by fast modernization urges some people retreat back to seek for help from traditionalism. These psychological and cultural needs have been captured by academic elites and then been used by the government. The Confucian ideas such as "virtue" and "harmony" have been integrated well into the official ideology. "Run the country by combining the rule of law with the rule of virtue" was put forward in 2001 by the State President Jiang Zeming. His successor President Hu Jintao in 2004 proposed to "build a harmonious socialist society" to deal with various social conflicts that emerge during the process of China's modernization. Such a revivalism put a sharp question to Chinese women: how should they situate themselves in this revival? Could they find useful factors in Confucianism which can be transformed kindly to accommodate women's modern liberation?

Socialism:

Socialism is a special term which is used in China to indicate a primitive phase of communism. The word “social” means a universal commitment to the interests of the whole society rather than any privileged group. So the most important meaning of socialism is egalitarianism which in China directs to no distinction between different classes and also different sexes. Obviously the establishment of PRC was the first time in history that women received their equal status equal to that of men. The publication of the Marriage Law in 1950 claimed the freedom of marriage and women’s equal relationship with men. Since then women have the freedom of marriage and divorce. It was very important for them to plan their own lives independently. One outcome was their marriage age has been postponed according to other life projects, such as education and career development. The subsequent family limitation program ⁽²³⁾ changed the old notion of women as the baby machine, although its practice in rural areas caused other severe problems ⁽²⁴⁾ . We can view the socialist revolution of Chinese women freed them from the bondage of the feudal traditional family mode, enlightened them as equally capable citizens, and shifted their centers of gravity to the national construction. They went to factories and did heavy jobs as well as men ⁽²⁵⁾ . However, such a kind of revolution was deemed imperfect by many feminists. They objected this socio-economic development as contributing to the de-feminization of women and took women; indeed, they judged this revolution as merely using women a bridge toward the masculine modernization (industrialization). They blamed that it was the social systems in China that establish a gender stratification of the workforce which brought many women into the mire of unemployment after China changed from the planned economy to the market economy. ⁽²⁶⁾

The problem did exist. Female employment once owned a solid guarantee in the traditional “DanWei system”⁽²⁷⁾. They used to possess almost the same employment opportunities with males. With the reform of “DaiWei system” the state-owned and collective units had experienced a transition from the administrative type to the profit-making one. During that transition, women as a group were discriminated against, since the family responsibilities imposed a double burden on them. Consequently they were denied access to certain jobs and were hindered in their career advancement.⁽²⁸⁾

Admittedly, socialist modernization takes priorities of economic development and capital accumulation over the development of women as independent members of society. China’s rise accelerates the modernizing process and economic growth, triggered by the opening up to foreign investment and the rapid transformation of major cities. It is evident that China has entered a post-socialist phase of development, along with a growing new middle class and rising female educational opportunities. Compared to men, women’s share of the cake may be smaller, but they still become stronger than before. Their advancing formation will help themselves become more and more attractive in the competition with men. Gender equality during its early phase under Deng’s reforms should be viewed within the context of localized Marxism that was mixed with traditional Chinese collectivistic culture. The prominent form of this traditional collectivism has been the establishment and maintenance of a “harmonious” family life. Under the reforms, there was a new form of collectivism; one not based on the family but upon the wider collective good of society. Women’s role became one of contributing to the collective good—primarily economically and through participation in the productive

process. But this role did not fully displace the traditional obligations to uphold domestic harmony within a patriarchal structure. It is like pushing yourself forward in public while dragging your legs in private.

However, socialism can be appropriated as a rectificatory power to correct the increasing gap between urban and rural; between men and women. Its commitments to social justice, to gender justice are not necessarily related with the distortion or masculinization of women. As well as Confucianism, socialism is also a value source which is undergoing change and far from resilience.

Western Liberalism:

China's liberalism emerged from the May Fourth Movement. May Fourth radicals inherited from late imperial Confucian reformers the conviction that the patriarchal family was both the symbol and the agent of China's weakness in the modern world. The belief that China had been handicapped by its failure to develop all its human resources encouraged efforts to free urban elite women from the worst constraints of Confucian patriarchy. For example, Nora (娜拉)⁽²⁹⁾, a new image of women created by elite male intellectual as a symbol to represent a sovereign nation which is liberated from its old bindings, was regarded as the liberation claim of the Chinese women and the nation. The oppression of women had been linked with the oppression of China; such a kind of feminine interpretation is worth considering.

According to my understanding, western liberalism as a foreign exotic came into China twice. The first time was May Fourth Movement. At that time liberalism came as a hero to save the ignorant Chinese from the shackles of Confucianism. And it combined naturally with nationalism, the

hope to become strong again by enlightening Chinese with science and democracy. Since liberalism was identified as the cause of western success, and Confucianism as the cause of our failure, it was viewed as the remedy for all ills of China. China's weakness was compared as women's weakness; China's oppression was compared as women's oppression. The failure in the political system was due to the unreasonable patriarchal family structure. The same structural problem legitimized women's liberation from the family and the tradition. Nora was just one of them. Women now contributed themselves into the popular new cultural movement and enjoyed the happiness of participating in public affairs for the first time. Marriage was another issue to identify themselves as new women. They objected to arranged marriages and chose their own marriages freely. Liberalism means the hope of liberation, with the sense of both nation's liberation and women's liberation.

However, after the establishment of PRC, a series of left-leaning political movements judged it as a kind of bourgeois ideology and killed it by the radical collectivism. Its revival was after the reform and open, after the establishment of the market economy in China. This time liberalism came with a different outlook. No longer linked with nationalism, it came with the images of individualism and consumerism⁽³⁰⁾. It brought western modernity into China. Individualism and consumerism support each other in that expressive individualism realizes itself by making personal choice on what individuals consume. And making choice means freedom now. One difference between China and western countries is, in China, liberalism hasn't established a close relationship with democracy. Except for some elite intellectuals, ordinary people don't have intense motive to impel their liberty in market into the political sphere. There is no strong political demand from the people especially from the women to

change some unreasonable part of the present political institution. The political restructuring in China is elite-promoted, from the top down, and is dominated by national ideology – the mixture of socialism and cultural revivalism. Its authoritative feature excluded liberalism to play a big role (although it has the marginal role). So it sneaks into the non-political sphere, such as economy and personal life, to exact its influence. For modern Chinese women who are working in urban cities, liberalism is part of their life attitude to be their own: to choose a decent job, earn enough money to plan their life, to love and get married as they wish, and to dress up with their own fashion ideas.

Consumerism:

It leads us naturally into the discussion of consumerism. Liberalism and consumerism can be separated in theory. However, its combination in modern China could be seen as the embodiment of the economic globalization pushed by western-grown capitalism. I will set aside this complicated issue and return to China's situation. The mode of production in Confucian China was a patriarchal family economy in which the private family economy served as the basic social and economic unit. After the coming of socialism, the production mode had been replaced by collective production and management. Women as well as men's life are managed by their Danwei, a comprehensive social system supported by the planned economy. Consumerism comes with the 20th century market economy, the logic of which is built on consuming and production, in replace of planning and production in the age of planned economy. Since it is a kind of consumer-oriented economic mode, sale promotion and market opening become important links. And women become their focus because women's images ⁽³¹⁾ are constantly changing which fits well with the spirit of consumerism.

Compared to the “iron women” in 1980s, after 1990s the popular media depict women as housewives and associate them with a new image of fashion and beauty. Feminine attractiveness is regarded as being favorable to women in order to fulfill their sex role⁽³²⁾. Emerging from the uniformity of the Maoist era, during which women all dressed the same in blue and olive-green unisex clothing and all wore their hair short and straight, there is a growing concern to express status difference, self-image, individuality and gender identity. Today, women proudly announce that they can dress more fashionably and show more individuality than they did decade years ago. Makeup, fitness centers and beauty salons (not to mention karaoke “xiaojie” and sex workers) are flourishing in urban cities. However, regarding this change, some feminists objected that “the new consumerism has begun to trade on traditionalist representations of women, leading them to see their role as that of ‘the second sex’”⁽³³⁾. It is said women consume fashion ideas, while men consume female images. But there is also another voice which approves such kind of expression and regards it as a start for women to fully appreciate their values. In my view, to judge this debate, we have to find out who define the standard of “beauty”. If “beauty” is defined by males’ sexual or patriarchic preference, then consumerism just builds a new cage for modern Chinese women, a cage within which they voluntarily imprison themselves; only if the definitions of “beauty” come from women’s new understanding of their values, such as to be independent or peaceful, or both sexes’ agreement, it reflects the real improvement of women’s status. Unfortunately, I can not see the latter in the popular consumerism right now.

This reveals another paradox of women’s identity-construction in modern China. Women need find their ways to free themselves, but the

alternatives are few. As one of the possibilities, consumerism gives them a channel to dress as they wish. But this kind of freedom is realized by constant consuming which is an additive habit and is influenced by males' sexual imaginaries.

3. What is the specialty of Chinese Women's Identity Construction?

The specialty of China's situation is: the relationships among these different sources are delicate. They have different influence in different part of women's life, but their camps ⁽³⁴⁾ are not clearly cut.

Let's begin by Confucianism. Confucianism does play an important role in ordinary life of modern Chinese women. It shapes their conceptions and values about marriage, family and motherhood. Most Chinese women, even those successful career women working in large cities, still put a happy marriage and family as one of the most important indicators in their evaluation of happiness. I doubt it can be totally understood as remains of feudal thinking because family means a lot not just for Chinese women but also for Chinese men. The growing self-independence of modern Chinese women increases their ability to choose their own life. The happy life in their imaginations is partly constituted by a happy family life in which the relationship is more equal and reciprocal. It does not mean such a transition is easily attained, but we can see how struggling modern Chinese women are to achieve their new freedom without abandoning their old dream. For a Chinese woman, the standard of success should be multi-faceted: not only the success in career, but also the success in their family life. They still want to be a good wife and a good mother as well as a good daughter. Success is not individualistically defined, but relationally evaluated. The big difference between the past and the present is the harmonious relationship within family can not be achieved by involuntary

obedience but should be built on mutual respect and trust.

We can see it as women's requirement to reform marriage and family by their new consciousness of equality and liberty which may be from Socialism or Western Liberalism or some kinds of the mixture. They have learned from Socialism that they are free to pursue their career which is also the need of the national economic construction. They have learned from Liberalism that only independent women can protect themselves to live a decent life with their free will. However, they find it is hard sometimes to achieve the balance of all these ideals: to be a successful career woman, an independent woman with her special personality and a lovely wife or a kind mother or daughter. The so-called "double burden" influences them from two directions: on one hand, it is hard to find a good job or secure a good job or get promotion as men because they may need give birth to baby, do baby-sitting, or take more shares of housework; on the other hand, the "double burden" imposes some women to make a choice: to be a housewife or a career woman. Unreasonable social arrangement deprives the opportunities for women to fulfill all the ideals, therefore makes some of them as targets of feminist critiques. For instance, traditional values of being a good wife and mother and daughter as well as maintaining a harmonious family are not bad; what makes it bad was the patriarchal family structure which should be changed. Expressive individualism⁽³⁵⁾ is not necessarily bad, but it should be combined with deep value resources to make its expression really authentic rather than built on the rootless consuming reconstruction.

Compared to the western situation, we can not easily say that there is a clear-cut of public and private distinction in modern Chinese society in which Socialism shapes their attitude toward work, Traditionalism still

influence their family ideas, while Western Liberalism and Consumerism in a certain sense combined influences their self-images, their individualistic expression in private life. For sometimes we can see Socialism and Confucianism stand in one camp to object Western Liberalism and Consumerism in shaping women's identities, for instance, those female model workers during the Danwei period were defined by their hard working and harmonious family relationships; sometimes we see Socialism, Liberalism and Consumerism stand together to attack traditional images of women and family, which is obviously embodied in going to the countryside helping rural women to change their feudal conceptions by education; sometimes we see all these ideas work together to express a "perfect" image of a modern successful woman – such image usually spreads in advertisements – a capable white-color woman who achieves success in office and enjoys happy times with her families.

Women's liberation in modern China is a complicated narrative. *The evaluation Report on Gender Equality and Women Development in China (1995—2005)* reveals the improvement we have obtained during the past ten years. Women's right as a kind of human right has been partly realized in China. ⁽³⁶⁾ But the development of women's self-consciousness and their pursuit of authentic identities are left behind. This makes them more like a receiver than a subject in changing their status. Someone may challenge my judgment. At least we can see that some women realized this problem. Professor Yu Dan, who courageously interpreted *The Analects*, a classic in Confucianism which was never away from masculine words authority, caused a great sensation among the Chinese people. As a female professor on communication, Professor Yu chose a very vivid way to interpret *The Analects*, namely, explaining it by her own moral experiences, which was joked as "Chicken Soup for the Soul". Academically evaluated, her

interpretation is inaccurate, but at least she was the first woman who made public speaking by her own understanding on this authoritative text. Her success implied a way to make the classic into the people and to feminize⁽³⁷⁾ the traditional text. Put another word, she is not just following the rule; she is establishing a rule, or rather, showing an alternative. Let alone the conjecture about her personal motive, she shows a way that women can participate in the reconstruction of Chinese cultural identity, although the way itself is highly commercialized⁽³⁸⁾.

However, Yu Dan's success, as well as some other female elites' success, no matter in the academic world or in the political world, reveals Chinese women's differentiation in the process of liberation. Only a few of them rise up and share the social resources with men, most of Chinese women are still under the pressure of traditional gender imaginaries⁽³⁹⁾. Modern Chinese women have much more power than before, but many of them are not clear about how to redefining their gender identities. However, this does not mean the discussion of identity problem is a luxury. On the contrary, just because of it, we should promote its research and discussion.

4. Some Suggestions

China's situation, as I have tried to show, shares some similarities with the western context. Women's images and their gender identities are defined by the power system dominated by males. To overthrow its domination, to establish an equal relationship between two sexes, women need to change the power contrast; they need to know what they want to say about themselves. They need actively express their identities and their needs through various ways, politically, economically, socially and philosophically. They need to know that if they continuously conform to

the sexual role defined by males they could do that but may not be happy. Not only that, they have lost freedom and constrained their autonomy and limited their contributions to society. Indeed, if they resist such conformity and take up the task of contributing to their self-definition, the men's world could also be changed and bettered.

This does not mean that they need follow their western sisters step by step. Chinese women could be inspired by the western feminists, but they have own dreams to realize. For example, individualism may not be proper for most of them who want to hold a harmonious family; Consumerism may not be a good weapon for them to liberate their personalities; and socialism could be used to improve their status in political world. They need look at what they have as sources, and what they could use as opportunities to change the situation, rather than copy the western mode and take it as the only one successful standard (actually even in the western world, feminists have disagreement on how to define women's liberation).

This does not mean the present situation in China is perfect for women, far from it. This means we need do the elaborate works on picking out the valuable factors from our different sources, re-interpret their positive values for gender identity-reconstruction, and impel institutional changes based on them. We want the equal citizenship the same with our western sisters; we want the equal respect and the equal opportunities in society; we also hope we can plan our own life and realize our own dream. But we are different for we may seek for equal rights under the framework of the socialist politics; we may win our respect not by individualistically consuming or rebelling but by proving our values and capabilities in career as well as in family relationship; since we have

never been the same, our dreams are also different. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

If making a conclusion about the ongoing modern Chinese feminist movement is too early, at least from my analysis I hope I can show how different it may be from western experiences. In that sense, I use “incomplete liberation” as my title to contrast with western radical feminist movement. However, as a feminist, we should never forget Okin’s caution: don’t easily give any cultural particularity the political immunity. The liberation of modern Chinese women will be “complete” by their constant efforts to look for the authentic identities.

Notes

- (1) Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton University Press, 1999. This article is also available in an anthology titled IS MULTICULTURALISM BAD FOR WOMEN? edited by Joshua Cohen and Matthew Howard, from Princeton University Press, 1999.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) *Evaluation Report on Gender Equality and Women Development in China, 1995—2005*. Research Group on the Study and Application of Indicators Measuring Gender Equality and Women Development in China. *Collection of Women’s Studies*, March 2006, No.2, Series No.71. Among the six areas, the two greatest improvements are social environment suitable for gender equality and women’s development and education; the least improvement is politics and decision-making. Respectively, the comprehensive indicator of social environment has increased 5.45; the comprehensive indicator of education has increased 4.28; while the comprehensive indicator of politics and decision-making only increased 0.58.
- (5) Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. E. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1973), p.301.
- (6) “If a group is kept out of something for long enough, it is overwhelmingly likely that activities of that sort will develop in a way unsuited to the excluded group. We know for certain that women have been kept out of many kinds of work, and this means that the work is quite likely to be unsuited to them. The most obvious example of this is the incompatibility of most work with the bearing and raising

- of children; I am firmly convinced that if women had been fully involved in the running of society from the start they would have found a way of arranging work and children to fit each other. Men have had no such motivations, and we can see the results." See Janet Radcliffe-Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1980: 113-14.
- (7) Strong evaluation "means that we are not taking our de facto desires as the ultimate in justification, but are going beyond that to their worth. We are evaluating not just objects in the light of our desires, but also the desires themselves. Hence strong evaluation has also been called 'second-order' evaluation." Charles Taylor, *Self-Interpreting Animals*, in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I*, Cambridge University Press 1985, p.66.
 - (8) Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989, p.49.
 - (9) Men and women dichotomy works here: men mean rational, will, universal; while women are emotional, body, particular, etc.
 - (10) Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge: New York and London, 1990, p.22.
 - (11) See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. E. M. Parshley, New York: Vintage, 1973.
 - (12) See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. Originally published as *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977.
 - (13) Alicia S. M. Leung, Feminism in Transition: Chinese Culture, Ideology and the Development of the Women's Movement in China, *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20, pp.359-374, 2003.
 - (14) Dong Jinping, Discourse and Construction of female character: analysis on transition of Chinese female character since 20th century. See <http://www.sociology.cass.cn>.
 - (15) "Zhufu" is a short story that forms part of the collection Panghuang (Wandering) , written by Lu xun in 1926. It depicted the miserable life of a widow, Xianglin Sao, who was twice a widow and thus an ominous figure, no longer allowed to have anything to do with ancestral sacrifices. Psychotic, aging and losing her memory, Xianglin Sao finally was dismissed by her master and became a beggar.
 - (16) Yang and Yin are two principles that govern the universe. Yang is superior and Yin is inferior. It was proposed by the Han Confucian master, Dong Zhongshu (179-104, B.C.E.). "The husband is Yang even if he is from a humble family, and the wife is Yin even if she is from a noble family." – Chun qiu fan lu, BK.11, section 43.
 - (17) The idea "Three Bonds" comes from the Han dynasty Confucian Dong Zhongshu, which asserted the ruler's authority over the minister, the father over the son, and

the husband over the wife.

- (18) This doctrine was proposed by another neo-Confucian, Cheng Yi (1033-1107), which implied that widows who get remarried are immoral.
- (19) Here I mean the May Fourth – New Culture movement, the Communist revolution and the coming of western thoughts like liberalism and feminism.
- (20) Many scholars argue that Confucian ethics shares a lot of similarities with care-oriented feminist ethics. They both carry a strong caring orientation and focus on the tender aspect of human relatedness; they both emphasize situational and personal moral judgment as well as character-building. See Chenyang Li, Confucianism and Feminist Concerns: Overcoming the Confucian “Gender Complex”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27:2 (June 2000), 187-199.
- (21) Since 1990s, a cultural phenomenon called “contemporary neo-Confucianism in mainland” appeared. Scholars like Jiang Qing, Chen Ming, Chen Lai, Kang Xiaoguang highly evaluated the modern significance of Confucianism and proposed ideas such as “politics of kingly way” and “Confucian revivalism”.
- (22) China is compared to dragon in its tradition.
- (23) In 1972 and 1973 the Communist party mobilized its resources for a nationwide birth control campaign administered by a group in the State Council. Committees to oversee birth control activities were established at all administrative levels and in various collective enterprises.
- (24) The one-child policy enjoyed much greater success in urban than in rural areas. Even without state intervention, there were compelling reasons for urban couples to limit the family to a single child. Raising a child required a significant portion of family income, and in the cities a child did not become an economic asset until he or she entered the work force at age sixteen. In rural areas, the one-child policy didn't change women's situation a lot, rather, the situation has become even worse for they may experience abortion several times till they get a boy.
- (25) For example, in 1980, the participation rate of Chinese women reached 80%. They were encouraged to enter into the heavy jobs once dominated by men. Women were supposed to work, dress and look like men in clothing. They are called as “iron women”.
- (26) Alicia S. M. Leung, *Feminism in Transition: Chinese Culture, Ideology and the Development of the Women's Movement in China*, *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20, pp.359-374, 2003.
- (27) ‘Danwei’, which literally means ‘work unit’ in English, is a comprehensive organization in China that penetrates nearly all aspects of people's life. After 1980s, with the transition from the planned economy to the market economy, Danwei system gradually disappeared in China. See Sun Liping, *Cleavage: Chinese Society Since 1990s*, Social Science Documentation Publishing House, Beijing, China, 2003.

pp.111-123.

- (28) Xu Guoliang, Wu Zhongzhe, "Danwei system reform and female employment security", *Journal of Shandong Teachers' University*, No.5, 2001.
- (29) Nora, the female protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. It depicts the fight against the dehumanizing oppression of women, particularly in the middle-class family. Nora's final exit away from all her traditional social obligations is the most famous dramatic statement in fictional depictions of this struggle. This image, Nora's run-away, has been created by Chinese intellectuals as an idol of new women, new youth and new China. It embodies the awakening of women's self-consciousness as well as the national consciousness.
- (30) In my view, we can define the two types of liberalism in China respectively as national liberalism and individualistic liberalism. Nationalism is another important ideology in Modern China which I have not discussed. It combined with liberalism Since the May Fourth Movement to free China from the imperialist oppression. However, after the establishment of PRC, it was redressed as a revolutionary narrative to make China transcend those capitalistic countries, such as United States and Great Britain. Since 1978, with the so-called "liberation of thoughts", nationalism has become covert. It has been changed as an effort to look for China's own value sources and its authentic identity. The wings of nationalism today are Confucianism as its cultural power and Socialism (with Chinese characters) as its economic power.
- (31) Note that the word "images" here has a far different value than the "image" of Nora. Here the "images" are influenced by an individualistic liberalism, rather than the earlier one that was defined by the national liberalism.
- (32) See Elisabeth Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women*. London: Zed Books, 1995.
- (33) Alicia S. M. Leung, Feminism in Transition: Chinese Culture, Ideology and the Development of the Women's Movement in China, *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20, p.370, 2003.
- (34) I use the word "camp" here to indicate the struggle among different ideologies, which will be extended later in the article.
- (35) Here I mean the second type of liberalism which I mentioned above. It emphasizes the importance of individuality, which expresses itself partly by consuming.
- (36) The "Beijing Declaration," promulgated at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, put forth for the first time the new proposition that "Women's rights are human rights." This proposition is a concise definition for women human rights. On the 2001 modification of the "Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China," it is clearly stipulated that familial violence shall be prohibited was added to it for the first time. The 2001 modification of the "Marriage Law" also set up fault compensation system at the time of divorce and compensation system for the

divorced women who are without labor capabilities and without sources of living ailments. In 2005, the women's federation organizations all over China started hotline services in protecting women's rights and combating domestic violence in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government. The-only-one child family structure after 1973 did help a lot of girls get benefits they had not gotten before, especially education. (Of course, the by-product is the abortion caused by this policy, which is worsened by the feudal conception that only boy is valuable. However, more and more Chinese people accept that boys and girls are equally valuable now.) Based on the belief that education can change women's life, "The National 'Two Basics' Storming Fortification Program in Western Regions," "The Hope Project," "The Spring Buds Plan," etc. that have been carried out since 1990s give priority to helping the impoverished young girls to receive education and it has achieved remarkable success. At present, girl students in our primary school and junior secondary school account for 48% and 47% respectively of the total number of students. Among school age children at the primary school stage the entrance rates of boys and girls are 98.69% and 98.61% respectively. See Zhang Xiaoling, "Human Rights of Women and Harmonious World", China Society For Human Rights Studies. http://www.humanrights.cn/en/Messages/Opinions/t20070627_281629.htm.

- (37) The word "feminize" means: Yu Dan's interpretation of Confucianism is to combine the wisdom of Confucians with people's ordinary life, with spiritual happiness. The style is totally different from the academic interpretation of Confucians by many male scholars which are full of political senses. See Daniel A. Bell, "De-politicize the Analects: Yu Dan's learning from the Analects", *Read*, 2007, No.8.
- (38) Her lectures about the Analects have been published as the book *Yu Dan: Things I have learned from the Analects* by China Book Store in 2006. She became an academic star after these public lectures, busy engaging with various kinds of cultural activities.
- (39) Wang Xiaobo, "The Disintegration and Stratification of the Female Group in China", *Collection of Women's studies*, Sep., 2005, No.5, Ser. No. 67. One phenomenon that I want to mention here is, influenced by some traditional values, most Chinese women working in cities still want to marry the kind of men who are stronger and more capable than them, which becomes more and more difficult with the improvement of women themselves, no matter in sense of education or salary. Such kind of upward marriage mode caused a part of career women complain about the difficulty of getting married.
- (40) For example, the socialistic democracy could help enlarging women's proportion in political organizations. Equality is a value which is easier to be justified in socialistic democracy of China rather than in western democratic countries. The

similar practices as “affirmative action” in China have helped a lot of women and poor children to develop themselves. Besides, traditionalism especially Confucianism influences people’s life no more by its institution but by its core values, such as filial piety, family harmony, etc, which reveals a possibility to distinguish the institutional Confucianism and the spiritual Confucianism. The latter could be used by Chinese feminism and is also a value source that could be creatively transformed.