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## 2a. Gender and Women's Issues in China: OYCF Sixth Annual Meeting Summary

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[Editors' Note: The Overseas Young Chinese Forum (OYCF), the publisher of *Perspectives*, held its sixth annual meeting during May 28 to 31, 2004 in the beautiful town of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. About 55 scholars, students and professionals attended this meeting. The theme of the meeting was "Gender and Women's Issues in China." The following is a brief summary of the presentations and discussions in the six panels at the meeting. The moderators summarized their respective panels, and most of the panel summaries were reviewed and revised by the speakers.]

### **Panel 1: What It Means to Grow Up Female in China: History and Culture**

(Speakers: Shirley MOW, Weikun CHENG; Moderator: Hao JIANG)

Dr. Shirley L. Mow received her Ph.D. in 1988 from Columbia University. She is currently a senior researcher at the Center on Chinese Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Previously, she held administrative positions at various institutions. Professor Weikun Cheng received his Ph.D. in 1996 from Johns Hopkins University. He is currently a professor of history at California State University, Chico. His research interests focus on women of Beijing. He studied and taught at Qing History Institute at People's University of China before coming to the United States.

The first speaker was Dr. Mow. She discussed the purpose of publishing and editing the book *Holding UP Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future* (Feminist Press of CUNY, 2004). Through collaboration with distinguished Chinese women's studies scholars, she was able to gather 19 essays and have them translated from Chinese into English. At the panel, Dr. Mow went through the major topics in the book, which include early Chinese history and culture from a historical perspective, women and changing China in recent past, women and education at present, marriage and the family, women and work, and women and future. She stressed the importance of making Chinese feminist scholarship available to English-speaking readers. At the end of her presentation, Dr. Mow encouraged cross-fertilization of feminist theories between U.S. and Chinese scholars.

The second speaker was Professor Cheng. He first explained the scope of urban public space to women in early twentieth-century Beijing. In particular, an urban neighborhood served as special social network of laboring women. They gossiped, comforted the sick and the frustrated, inquired about children, scolded lazy or abusive husbands, and borrowed and lent various household items. In doing so, Prof. Cheng argued, laboring women colonized their living areas and turned the public realm into a parochial realm. Neighborhood streets were also places of social conflicts. Prof. Cheng suggested that the street hostility actually became a strategy for lower-class women to end the domestic abuses and to earn the support of public opinion.

Discussion followed. Dr. Mow and some audience exchanged ideas on how to promote women leadership programs as well as the necessity of redefining the characteristics of a leader or leadership. Prof. Cheng gave more descriptive explanation on the living condition and social status of women in early twentieth-century Beijing to interested audience.

### **Panel 2: Toward Gender Equality: Women's Liberation**

(Speakers: Zhengxu WANG, Julia Chi ZHANG; Moderator: Zili ZHUANG)

There were two speakers in this panel. Zhengxu Wang is a Ph.D. candidate in the joint program of Political Science and Higher Education at the University of Michigan. He studies value changes and citizen politics in China and around the world, focusing on the implications of individual values and behaviors on democratization. Julia Chi Zhang is a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology at Yale University. Her research interests are, among other things, cultural sociology and gender issues.

The first speaker was Zhengxu Wang. Wang discussed the public attitudes toward gender equality and the factors affecting such attitudes in contemporary China. The data he used are from the World Value Surveys, collected in China and about 80 other societies around the world every five years. He focused on several survey questions that ask people's opinions on: whether men have more right to jobs, whether men make better leaders, and whether women need to have children to be fulfilled. Theory tells us that economic growth and human development, changes in the role of the state, and culture and value systems can shape gender (in)equality in societies and the opinion toward it. By examining cross-sectional variations and changes over time in the attitudes toward gender equality, Wang showed that continued economic modernization tends to result in public values more supportive of gender equality and, in modernizing societies, younger generations are more supportive of gender equality than older generations. He concluded that as socioeconomic modernization continues in China, future generations of Chinese will be more pro gender equality, and, as a whole, the Chinese society will be more supportive of gender equality.

Julia Chi Zhang spoke next. Zhang started by pointing out flaws in previous studies of women's movement in China. She argued that those earlier studies are from a Marxist, deterministic/materialistic perspective and that they lack a critique of the wider social context of the movement. She then applied Alexander's theoretical framework of civil society and the three modes of civil incorporation to the case of Chinese women's status in the Mao era. Her main argument was that the emancipation of women in the Mao era was conducted in a form of assimilation, i.e., through the erasure of feminine qualities, and that the symbolic negativity attached to being female was not (and has not been) purified culturally. That explains why women's participation in the public sphere largely failed, and the political participation and cultural representation of women still followed a patriarchal code in both Mao and post-Mao eras even after women have been massively incorporated into the work force. Her study can also be generalized in that it uses the women's movement case to theoretically account for a civil sphere in China.

Heated discussion followed during the Q&A session. Some audience made the comment that market economy is a doubled-sided sword and it could be both good and bad for women's liberation. Some audience raised the question of where exactly the sphere for women's development lies. Julia Zhang responded by saying that neither the economic/market sphere nor the religion sphere can be solely entrusted to construct the civil sphere, that civil society is the result of continuous, rational and reflexive debates between these different spheres of life and members of the wider society. The fundamental questions concerning what equality really means were also raised and discussed.

### **Panel 3: Reform and Women – The Public Sphere**

(Speakers: Yuzhen LIU, Yaping YU, Huawei LING; Moderator: Xiaojiang HU)

In this panel on women in the public sector, three panelists investigated Chinese women's situation in three public domains: formal governmental positions, new IT industry, and the fledging media industry.

Professor Yu Yaping from Shanghai Jiaotong University presented a research on women's political participation in Shanghai. The project examined political participation in the form of formal governmental positions, as fulltime careers, rather than informal, voluntary-based participation. The project surveyed female cadres on various leadership positions, including governmental agencies, state-sponsored institutions and state-owned enterprises. These sectors reflect the mainstream situation of the Chinese society. Prof. Yu found that women's political participation in Shanghai has been on the rise in the past ten years, from 12% to 23%. It is higher than other regions in China. But looking closely at the composition of female leaders at concrete positions, Prof. Yu found it revealed a strong "quota-making" tendency. The Chinese government, in order to guarantee fair representation, has long required state controlled sectors to grant certain quota of leadership representation to four groups of people -- non-Communist party members, intellectuals, ethnic minorities, and women. Many women leaders in Shanghai therefore fall into the four categories. They are more likely to be non-party members, intellectuals and ethnic minorities. Such "quota-making" style of promotion, rather than solely through merit-based competition, has led women leaders into a situation researchers phrased as "three many, three few"—i.e., among women leaders, "many are deputies, few are heads; many are in lower positions, few in higher positions; many are in supplementary positions, few in key positions." This tendency shows that women's political representation to a certain extent is still state sponsored, "token" representations. The research implies that state policies of gender equality are important in promoting women leaders, but it helps more in increasing the number and percentage of female leaders, rather than in promoting these women into key positions with real power.

Liu Yuzhen, PhD candidate of sociology from York University in Canada, examined the career situation of women in China's Information Technology (IT) industries. IT industries are the backbone of the knowledge economy. Will IT industries provide women more opportunities because IT does not rely on physical strength? Or will women be even more marginalized because IT further increases their burden? Based on statistical data and interviews to female employees in large IT companies in Beijing, her study shows that IT industries are indeed not gender-neutral. Women are underrepresented in IT industry, especially in technological departments. Women are concentrated in low-level positions in IT companies, they more often hold training and service positions than in technology development positions, and their career advancement is much slower than their male counterparts. To understand these inequities, Liu examined the interplay between social structural factors and individual agency factors. Liu found that Chinese IT companies have developed a male-dominant cooperate culture in which working overtime and excel in technology are the norm. Liu also found that women's career identity, goals, and aspirations in IT companies are also different from male employees.

Ms. Ling Huawei is a senior reporter of the Beijing-based *Caijing* magazine. Using her personal experience as an example, Ling shows that in China's fledging media industry, highly educated women do not suffer from gender discrimination. In fact, female journalists have demonstrated certain advantage over their male colleagues in this sector. Women's dedication, better personal communication and language skills have helped them excel in this enviable industry. Ling introduced several influential reportages that were first reported by *Caijing* Magazine's female reporters. Currently, among *Caijing*'s twenty some journalists, only four or five are male. The gender composition of media industry poses an interesting contrast with the IT industry. Both sectors are sunrise industry, and are considered highly desirable, both in terms of income and social status. What makes the gender differences in them? The panelists left this question to the audience for further discussion.

#### **Panel 4: Reform and Women – The Private Sphere**

(Speakers: Zhenlin WANG, Jing LIN and Ying QIAN; Moderator: Su SUN)

Dr. Zhenlin Wang received her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology in 2000 from the Institute of Psychology at Chinese Academy of Sciences. She is currently in the doctoral program of Interdisciplinary Study of Human Development in the Graduate School of Education at University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests focus on children's cognitive development and human development in cultural context. Prof. Jing Lin received her Ed.D. from the University of Michigan and is an associate professor at the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at University of Maryland, College Park. She specializes in International Comparative Education (with a focus on East Asia) and social/cultural foundation of education. She has published four books on educational issues. Ms. Ying Qian is a Ph.D. candidate in economics at Harvard University. Her research in economics uses census data and household surveys from China to understand changes in patterns of marriage and fertility, and the consequences for women's education and employment. She is also a fellow at Harvard's Film Study Center and has made several films.

The first speaker was Dr. Wang. She discussed the ethnic identity development of children born in China and adopted by American families, most of whom were girls. Through a Sunday Chinese school, Wang did an ethnographic study on the identity development of such adopted children. Artifacts including children's drawings and a picture book about adoption were distributed and the audience appreciated the messages these artifacts sent. Dr. Wang showed that parents generally are keen in teaching Chinese culture to their adopted Chinese children and make a lot of efforts to prepare their children for all kinds of potential problems. She also discussed the societal implications of international (trans-racial) adoption and the theoretical construction of the concept of adopted children's ethnic identity.

Professor Lin spoke next. She first pointed out the existence of gender discrimination in co-ed schools, and then gave a brief overview of the development of all-girls schools in China, with a focus on five all-girls schools in Beijing, Shanghai, Dalian, Guangzhou and Kunming. Some of these five schools are private schools and others are public schools. They have their own beliefs and practices in educating the girls. For example, some included courses in wrestling, boxing and driving to stress the importance of competence in the modern time, while others designed courses in facials, beautification and modeling to focus on a more feminine approach. Prof. Lin suggested that all-girls school might be an effective alternative to enhance girls' learning and their self-esteem.

The last speaker in this panel was Ms. Qian. Based on the new China Health and Family Life Survey, Qian studied demand for commercial sex in China by linking self-reported consumption of commercial sex to personal characteristics. She first discussed how media, sociologists and economists view commercial sex differently. She then showed the preliminary results of her study. Not surprisingly, age, level of educational attainment, marital status and income level all correlate with a man's likelihood to use commercial sex. Somewhat surprising, however, is the finding that a migrant would be less likely to use commercial sex than an urban resident for the age cohorts of late 20s and 30s. This finding challenges the stigma commonly associated with young male migrants as reckless sex consumers.

Heated discussions followed. Some audience raised questions on the empirical methodologies used in the speakers' research, including sample selection, statistical inference, data source, etc. One audience offered a different view toward all-girls schools based on his wife's own

experience. Some mentioned the difficulty for Americans to adopt Chinese babies. Some others debated whether prostitution is a rational choice and how it should be regulated.

### **Panel 5: Special Challenges – Household and Sexuality**

(Speakers: Juhua YANG, Yingying HUANG; Moderator: Feng LIANG)

The speakers on this panel are Juhua Yang, PhD candidate in Sociology at Brown University, and Yingying Huang, PhD candidate in Sociology at Renmin University of China. The panel deals with some of the special challenges to gender equality in current China, including practical arenas such as household division of labor and theoretical construction of popular discourses on sexuality.

Ms. Yang presented her research on the equality of men and women within the household measured by the division of housework between husband and wife. The study uses data from the 2000 China Health and Nutrition Survey to investigate how husbands and wives differ in the amount and the kind of household tasks they report doing. The study suggests that family structure, time availability, relative resources of the spouses, and gender role ideology all predict the division of housework. Yang finds that Chinese men and women are far from equal in their participation in housework. No matter how the household division of labor is specified, women undertake at least five times more housework than men. Also, economic resources have a much stronger effect on husbands than on wives – whereas husbands are always able to translate their advantages in education and occupation into fewer housework hours, wives are unable to diminish household burdens. Last, gender-role ideology works on husbands and wives divergently: whereas a higher education increases husbands' housework hours, it decreases that of the wives. Yang suggests that highly segregated housework patterns have important implications for the power dynamics within households and the construction and maintenance of gender identities in China.

Ms. Huang presented her study on the perception of sexiness based on the interviews with female professionals born in the 1970s in Beijing, China. The study explores how female's definition and perception of sexy differ from that of the male. The study finds that female interviewees tend to feel flattered when being commented as "sexy", but their concept of sexy is more related to aesthetics than to sexual attraction, and most of the interviewees think men hold the opposite view. The study also finds that the perception of sexiness can be swayed by the context of the conversation provoking the word "sexy", by the people who mention the word, by the popular culture and the discourse related to the concept of "sexy". Huang suggests that the findings are driven by different perceptions and attitudes between male and female with regard to sex, and that understanding such gender distinction is important in related studies.

Both talks generated heated discussions. The audience raised questions related to different academic fields. For example, how to use instruments to sort out the causality between housework division and education and economic factors, how might the urban/rural gap in China influence the empirical test results, how generalizable is the study to other culture setups, how to measure the perception and concept of "sexiness" using survey method, how might interviewees respond differently to female and male interviewers when asked about sexuality, etc. Both speakers offered their views on these issues and on future research directions.

### **Panel 6: Cross-cultural and Transnational Perspectives**

(Speakers: Bei WU, Suowei XIAO, Yan LI; Moderator: Yingquan SONG)

There were three speakers in this panel. Professor Bei WU is an assistant professor from the Center on Aging, School of Medicine, West Virginia University. Professor Wu's research interest is social gerontology, especially health care and health services utilization. She received her master's and Ph.D. degree from University of Massachusetts Boston. Suowei XIAO is a PhD student of Sociology at UC Berkeley. Her research interest lies in gender ideology, marriage and family, and gender inequality in terms of the interlocking of various institutions. Yan LI is a PhD Candidate in Sociology at Stanford University. Her research interest focuses on the social psychological processes of inter-group relations such as among racial/ethnic groups and between men and women.

Can elderly woman contribute to the society in which they live? Are there any cultural differences in terms of their contribution acts? Those are the questions the first panelist tried to answer. Professor Wu portrayed the different patterns of contributory behaviors of a specific group of elderly women in China (age 80 and above) and U.S. (age 85 and above), based on surveys she and her colleagues conducted in suburban Boston and Shanghai. Her findings revealed that overall, the U.S. elderly women performed slightly more contributory acts than their Chinese counterparts, but the difference was not significant. However, when separating the kin and non-kin context in which the contributions are provided, she found that the Chinese elderly women provided a wider range of contributions to family while the U.S. respondents provided significantly more contributory acts to friends and neighbors. In terms of differences in types of contributions, acts of a "socio-emotional" nature were among the most frequently provided in the U.S. sample, while the more frequently provided contributions in the Chinese sample related to practical or "instrumental" assistance. She argued that the Sociodemographic differences between the samples may account for some differences in patterns of contributory behaviors between the two study samples, and opportunities for them to contribute to others.

Why are women more likely to immigrate to the U.S. than men? According to an empirical study she conducted in the Bay Area, Northern California, Ms. Xiao described the gender-oriented settlement patterns in Chinese engineering students and professionals in the United States and offered her interpretation. Different from traditional migration studies on low income, low education population, her study documented the experiences of recent migrants with a high education level and middle-class lifestyle orientation in the American society. It was found that similar to those prior generations of migrants, the women among the more recent, highly educated, middle class migrants prefer to stay in the U.S. more than their male counterparts. She argued that the factors that influence these students and professionals on their settlement preference are different to a large extent from those of lower-class migrants. Male and female students and engineers have different orientations towards work, family and social networks, which lead to their divergence in settlement preferences. Putting in another way, Xiao believes that the difference that women tend to pursue "a sense of freedom" whereas men tend to pursue "a sense of control" could explain the gender-oriented settlement.

Why does gender inequality persists in almost all modern societies? Ms. Li provided an explanation from a social psychological perspective; particularly, her explanation focused on the roles of interaction and gender stereotypes and how they contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Li started by asking the audience to help come up with a list of cultural stereotypes about men and women. She then points out that these stereotypes imply inequality because stereotypes about men (such as ambitious, aggressive, competent, rational, etc.) are tightly linked to status and material rewards such as better-paid jobs and promotions where as stereotypes about women (such as emotional, social, caring) are not. She then introduced social psychological theories that explain how, during social interactions, stereotypes about men and women can affect

their corresponding behavior which in turn reinforces status inequality between men and women in that situation and in society at large. She cited a few social psychological experiments to illustrate this. Finally, she expanded on the implication of these social psychological processes on policymaking and challenged audience to “step out” of the stereotypes deeply rooted in the ways of looking at the world.

Heated discussion followed in the Q&A session. Some challenged Li on how we could “step out” and followed up on the effects of policies such as Affirmative Action. Some offered experiments and examples to help further explain her arguments. Some raised the question if the different patterns found in Wu’s study can be attributed to cultural differences given that the only similarity between the U.S. and Chinese samples are the age of the oldest old women. Audience and speakers also discussed some methodological issues such as the representitiveness of the interview sample in Xiao’s study of the new immigrants.