

# **WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN CHINA**

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# A Look at History: The Han Dynasty

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- The early Chinese had no real commitment to subordination of women, however over time Confucian teachings were interpreted to demonstrate this.
- Neoconfucian interpretations of male-dominance was founded in Confucian teachings
  - Confucian structure of society
    - women at every level were to occupy a position lower than men
    - subservience of women to men seen as natural and proper

# The Patriarchal Order

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## ● Traditional Guides

- Ruler guides Subject
- Father guides Son
- Husband guides Wife

## ● The Confucianism Order

- women must obey their father, husband and sons
- gives women no real authority

# Men v. Women in Ancient China

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## ● Men:

- Permitted to have premarital sex without scandal
- Have concubines if they could afford it
- Remarrying if one or more of their wives dies or just because they feel like it
- Laws created that favored male inheritance, divorce and familial interactions

## ● Women: Servant to her Husband

- Homemaker/mother, bearer of sons
- Confined to the house
- Never to remarry (received the death penalty if she did)
- Live up to husbands expectations
- Excluded from education that allows them to rise to civil services or political positions

# The Tang Dynasty: One Step Forward

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- The Tang Dynasty (618AD-907AD)
  - most progressive Dynasty for women
    - land distribution
    - mutual divorce
    - women could remarry
    - access to education
    - social restrictions were lifted
- Empress Wu Zetian 624-705
  - only female Empress in China's history from the Tang Dynasty
  - her influence went beyond her rule, extending to modern day women's rights in China

# Tang Dynasty Continued: Two Steps Back

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- In the late Tang Dynasty, emperors found beauty in the tiny feet of dancers
- Gradually spread through the upper class during the Song Dynasty (960-1297)
- During the Ming period (1368-1644) and the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911) the custom of foot binding spread through the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population .
- It was finally outlawed in 1911

# Foot binding



# Family

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- Ideal family:

- family under one roof
- multiple generations
- oldest living male as the head
- sons with wives
- grandsons with their wives and children

- this family structure has been the primary contributing factor to the subjugation of women throughout China's history



# Early Feminism

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- China's first experiences with feminism were not historical and cultural developments in which women consciously became aware inequality between men and women
  - it was the influence of a western concept onto an uneducated society

# Problems for feminism

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- Can western feminism find a place within a society where power structures have not been altered to the degree as they have been in the west?
- Traditionally, in China the family defined ones existence, leaving no room for individuality

# Education Act

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- 1907
- Tried to bring education to women
- women's issues were bundled under quests for national strengthening and nation building

# People's Republic of China

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- since the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China, in 1949, the conditions for women have improved in material, legal and social terms

# Women protected in Constitution

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- The Chinese constitution states: "Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, cultural, social, and family life."
  - not always practiced on the streets, homes and workplaces

# Marital Law- 1950

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- put an end to traditional practices such as:
  - arranged marriage, polygamy, the sale of daughters, childhood concubinage
- Allowed for expanded experience for women
  - encouraged to move into the labor force as equals to men.
  - educational opportunities and vocational training now open to women

1980s –

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- health care facilities, childcare centers, and other women related initiatives to provide for mothers and pregnant women in the work place
- crimes of rape, incitation of prostitution, and female abduction became offences that could lead to capital punishment

# Problems

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- laws not easily incorporated into the lives of people and community
- Marriage Law of 1950
- Cultural Revolution
- Cultural Context



# Modern Day Chinese Women: Laws and “Birth Control”

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- women have gained equality in education, marriage, rights and freedoms, but in many villages and rural areas, these laws are ignored
- In an effort to curb the ever growing population, the government devised a law in 1970 that restricted women to having one child

# Modern Day: Effects of Child Regulation

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- Due to Confucian tradition, boys have always been valued more than girls
- Female newborns are often killed or abandoned. Abortion is encouraged.
  - Since 1997, hundreds of "mobile abortion clinics" have roamed the countryside. Women are forced to submit to abortions or sterilization after a birth has occurred, by local authorities, anxious to adhere to the one-child family ideal.

# Modern Day: Working Chinese Women

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- ◉ In China today women workers predominate in the fields of agriculture, banking, textile work, and export manufacturing.
- ◉ Many farms are worked by women.
  - about 100 million women working in isolated conditions on large plots of land for about \$1 a day.
  - Suicide rates

## Working cont'd

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- South east China's urban centers contain many sweatshop operations
- government presently bars migrants from securing legal residency,
- child labor, long hours, low pay, no benefits, hazardous conditions

## Conclusion:

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- In regards to women's rights, China has made strides towards equality for men and women, however there is still more to be accomplished