

# The Development of Feminism in China

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to review the development of feminism in Chinese history at different times. This literature review shows the changes in China's feminism, summarizes the essential reasons for these changes and put forwards better solutions for the future direction. It is interesting to find that the development of feminism in China is advancing with the progress of social civilization. Through the study of history, many problems encountered in the development of feminism are the legacy of problems that have been encountered. To solve today's problems, it is not enough to only rely on the analysis of today's situation, but also need to trace the history by exploring the deeper essence, to solve this problem more effectively, which will not lead to its continuation to the next level of social civilization.

**Keywords:** *Chinese Feminism, History of Chinese Feminism Development, Significance of Gender Equality.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Exploring the current development process of China's feminism is rarely seen from the beginning of the development of Chinese culture to today's era. This paper aims to fill in this research gap and provides a clearer understanding of the development of China's feminism. Also, this paper summarizes several feminist papers from different times, sorting out a clear history of the development of China's feminism, and the problems faced by China's feminism in the development process. Then, this paper summarizes problems in today's era and puts forward solutions, which also illustrates the importance of feminism for the continuation of human civilization.

## 2. EXPLORING CONDITIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN PRIMITIVE AND FEUDAL SOCIETIES

### 2.1 The Equality between Men and Women in Matrilineal Family

"The whole history of humankind is a play made by both sexes" [1]. Exploring the conditions under which gender equality is established is the foundation for achieving the goal of gender equality. In this process, people need to move towards new extremes if only finding answers in patriarchal clan society. Hence, it is also necessary to find new checks and balances in maternal clan society. For gender equality, if we assume

that gender comparison is on an axis, it is important to explore an intermediate value where equality should be located. First, we should make sure what are the extreme values at both ends of the number axis represent respectively. The left extreme of the number axis is the patrilineal family thoughts through thousands of Years. Both Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasties are the products of patriarchal consciousness. If we want to explore a path that is truly suited to China's development of gender equality, it is not enough just based on the extreme leftist patriarchal ideology. Hence, the primitive matriarchal clan on the edge of history - a far away society with the rudiment of feminism - will become the key objective of our discussion and balance.

First of all, there are some factors to consider, including the social characteristics of the primitive matriarchal clan, low levels of agriculture and productivity, extremely scarce material life, and an urgent desire to develop the labor force. In the process of transformation from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal society, it can be found the physiological advantages of men are gradually revealed. In this stage, the level of productivity has been greatly improved, and men have played an important role in the production field. Therefore, their social status has gradually increased [2]. Although it is restricted by the backwardness of civilization, matriarchal social thought cannot be used for reference, we can also know the realistic basis and necessity of gender equality in today's era. It can be inferred that when a society is in a stable stage, the

material production is extremely rich and the need for a labor force is relatively low, the advantages of a patriarchal society will no longer exist, which is also in line with the current situation of society. Nowadays, society is in an era of relatively developed social productivity. At this stage, social productivity is no longer the main balancing factor of social development, which is the reason why the concepts of subject and other in gender should not continue.

### ***2.2 Women's Pursuit of Excellence in Male Discourse System in the Tang Dynasty***

When we review the history of feudal society for thousands of years, we will find that in the unprecedentedly developed Tang Dynasty, there were women who were called emperors in the patriarchal society, but this does not represent the developed feminist thoughts in Tang Dynasty. But we can get two inspirations.

First of all, the material basis of the Tang Dynasty reached the heyday of the time. After the material basis was satisfied, people would inevitably pursue the richness of the spiritual field. The freedom of society and the openness of people's wisdom made women at that time have a window to emancipate their minds. Therefore, as wives or daughters of men at the top of the social power system, some women appeared to the idea that women could also be emperors and began to question the patriarchal society. From this, it is obvious to find that the people's thinking is pre-development, where the civilization development trend must be gender equality. This is also testifying to the conditions under which gender equality can exist as explored in a matriarchal society.

Secondly, women's power should be equal to males. Matriarchy Conception was proposed: in the Women's Kingdom in the Tang Dynasty that although Wu Zetian sat in the dragon chair of the emperor as a daughter and established the Wu Zhou Dynasty, she was not a matriarchy, the Queen or the Queen's head. The rule of the whole Tang Empire is still deep-rooted patriarchy [3]. For a long time, women have been standing in the patriarchal discourse system to pursue excellence. Nowadays, the symbol of excellence in society inevitably has the shadow of patriarchal ideology. When a woman occupies the peak position of power through her struggle, she is full of confidence in her intelligence and courage, but she might be anxious about her gender. 'Women are inferior genders' is the common law of patriarchal culture [4]. Therefore, an important step toward gender equality is to deconstruct the symbols of excellence in today's society and to carefully differentiate and analyze the remaining patriarchal ideology-oriented standards of excellence, to remove and replace new standards of true equality.

### **3. THE ILLUSORY MALE-LED EQUALITY AT THE END OF THE FEUDAL SOCIETY**

When the feudal society ended and the nature of the country fluctuated, many new ideas entered people's lives in the form of ideology. Distinguishing whether it is politically correct can be done to explore whether the reforms of the period have solved the problems of reality. This is also a kind of enlightenment. In addition, when confirming the boundary between women's rights and obligations, it is more necessary to distinguish whether there is a direct orientation between the new obligations imposed on women and their rights thus obtained. In other words, we should strictly examine whether the new obligation imposed on women is to support women's new power, rather than impose new obligations in exchange for men and women's common power. With the development of society, "female nationals" will inevitably become the group of enlightenment attention. They were asked to take the responsibility of resisting foreign aggression and saving the nation from peril [5].

Also, it is important to realize that only women's independence can liberate women. It can be found that in the Revolution of 1911 or the New Culture Movement, the leaders are all males. More importantly, in men's leadership of gender emancipation, women who are deeply affected are demanding themselves with male standards in the process of achieving their emancipation. Whether the women's revolution will be successful or not depends on the extent to which she has reached the male standard of society. This is not positioning their characteristics can have the role. For example, Qiu Jin's understanding of women's liberation is biased on this point, she desires to get rid of the shackles of male chauvinism and enhance her sense of autonomy, but the means of struggle inadvertently reached the extreme - she refused to play her gender role [5]. When asked why to make full men's dress, she answered: 'Men are strong, women have been oppressed, I hope to establish men's strong heart, intend to first shape into men, until the heart also become men [5]. It is not difficult to see that Qiu Jin negates his 'female' and forgets that 'human' is based on gender [5]. This implicitly leads to gender discrimination [5]. Therefore, what kind of female image can better express the meaning of gender equality? At that time, Bihong Chen, a female translator at the beginning of the 20th century, answered her translation works: 'Let women make their own choices, surpass men with courage, or imitate men's weakness' [6].

## **4. FEMINISM AS A NEW DISCIPLINE IN THE POST-NEW CHINA PERIOD**

### ***4.1 Deconstructed***

The development and liberation of women's thoughts in the post-New China period are more advanced than that in the New Culture Movement period. From the female images of artistic works in this period, it can be seen that women's roles are ideologically visualized, while women's self-consciousness is ignored and diluted. Women's images begin to be masculine, and visual consciousness becomes the standard for reconstructing women's bodies [7]. Women in this era often take the image of 'iron girl' as their goal. This masculinized female image is a transversion of identity in gender. Visual consciousness becomes the standard for constructing the female body. Women's self-consciousness has been weakened in the transformation of their roles and images and has become a cultural symbol of ideology [7]. When women form their sense of equality, they place themselves in the position of others. In contrast, male identity is the self of gender. In the process of this incomplete awakening of female consciousness, the female labor force was liberated, but it was ideologically embedded in the constraints of invisible patriarchy and confirmed in the 21st century. In a relatively relaxed state of social productivity, a large number of women choose to become housewives. The invisible thought of males and females is still confined to the life planning of Chinese women. The liberation of women's external image cannot lead to the transformation of their internal thoughts. Therefore, to explore the stage of the development of the gender equality revolution, we should abandon all external factors. The external image without internal independence is still a shackle.

### ***4.2 The Breakthrough of Traditional Culture***

Traditional culture has been measured in its value in the period of highly volatile development of thought. From the perspective of women's ideological emancipation, women's thoughts even converge and return after the founding of New China, but from a more macro point of view, this is a new milestone as rivers flow from tributaries to new trunks. Therefore, the ultimate goal of developing feminism in different countries is the same, but the development path will inevitably vary according to the historical background and cultural differences of different countries. For China, the thought of feudal society is completely formed under the patriarchal ideology. Accepting such historical thought will inevitably become pressure on the development of feminism. But the uniqueness of a country is also because of its history. In China, there is a thinking mode of men's respect for women's inferiority under the influence of Confucian tradition. It is also a

psychological tendency of women's philosophy of respecting mothers and advocating gentleness under the influence of Taoism, remaining an ideological form of equality under the influence of Buddhism. In this case, the introduction of gender studies in other countries cannot be just brought in. It needs a review and reflection on the philosophical and cultural levels. This is the beginning of localization [8]. Only with the historical trend of thought together, the development of civilization advance steadily and can have the cornerstone support.

## **5. THE STANDARDS OF MODERN FEMINISM DURING THE REFORM AND OPENING-UP PERIOD**

During the Reform and Opening-up Period, women's independent liberation has made rapid progress, when several hard standards that can truly protect women's rights have been established. Firstly, China's social structure must be changed in the direction of gender equality. Secondly, the market economy encourages women to participate in the competition in the way of equality of opportunity and survival of the fittest, which is completely different from the planned economic system that mobilizes women's enthusiasm for "masters" mainly by gender equality and egalitarianism. Although the market economic system makes women bear more pressure, it stimulates women's self-consciousness. Third, the diversity of social and cultural characteristics makes the changed of Chinese women's values from monism to pluralism, from closed to open, and from weak to prominent [9]. These three hard standards have become an important inspiration for the development of modern feminism.

## **6. THE EMERGENCY OF NEW FETTERS OF FEMINISM**

In today's era, the emergence of the mass media has brought people's enthusiasm for the discussion of controversial issues. Hence, any action will be brought out to discuss whether it meets the standards of equality and the designation of women's independent standards. It is clear and complex that women's actions are under scrutiny. Any actions that do not meet the standards will prove a reversal of gender awareness in the context of stigmatization and the precise establishment of standards. The gradual elevation of women's standards is the only way for women's liberation reform. Among radical feminists, Rubin argues that patriarchal society uses the physiological characteristics of men and women to create concepts such as masculinity and femininity, thereby legitimizing male domination of women through this stereotype [10]. Daly completely denied masculinity and femininity, arguing that this is a value-oriented institutionalization of social gender roles and a lie that the patriarchal system creates a confrontation between men and women [11]. Moreover, the Internet itself is not

gender-neutral. The dominant position of men in the network community makes women at a disadvantage in network communication. In this gender-oriented network environment, women's behaviors are more likely to be amplified, labeled, and even stigmatized [12].

## 7. CONCLUSION

With the development of Chinese feminism, it has gradually developed by the social background of stability. The process of controversy and confusion is the threshold to explore the road. Only through this threshold can it be possible to achieve equality between men and women in the spiritual field. At present, Chinese feminism has encountered three thresholds: the first is to impose new obligations on women, which must be to support women-only belonging to the new power. The second is not to pursue excellence in the patriarchal discourse system, nor to pursue absolute equality between men and women. Thirdly, there cannot be too many requirements for equality. The more constraints are, the more offset the route is. The significance of equal rights is not only spiritual liberation but also the basis for the long-term continuation of civilization. Under the influence of the contradiction between the survival consciousness of the patriarchal clan and the pursuit of gender equality, women will lead to resistance to fertility, which is also a fatal reason for the increasingly serious aging of the population. In the patriarchal society, women as appendages and commodities, and women's fertility is regarded as the value and role of commodities. In the feudal patriarchal society, women are oppressed with limited choices. With the development of the times, the awareness of women's self-consciousness has become inevitable. In the process of the conflict between the residual patriarchal consciousness and the awakening of women's self-consciousness, the definition of fertility has made rapid progress, from breeding offspring for men to be the master of their bodies. In the concept of being the master of their own body, there is still a patriarchal consciousness. Women's fertility is faced with workplace discrimination and aesthetic discrimination under the male gaze. Resistance to fertility has become one of the most anxious phenomena in all kinds of behaviors of women against the patriarchal society because reproduction is related to the future of human survival. Only with the real success of the battle for gender equality, the meaning of fertility can truly become for human reproduction.

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