

## Chapter 2

# Women's Lives in Contemporary Chinese Societies

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### Historical Background

Women's lives in Chinese societies are intertwined with diversities based on historical and political legacies, socioeconomic development, and urban–rural divides. There are also subcultural differences among the ethnic and religious minorities in various regions of China. In our examination of women's lives in Chinese societies, we cover the major geographical locations in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and focus on their common concerns. Women's studies and gender research were formally established independently in these three locations in 1985 (Cheung and Kwok 1995). Research and publications on women's issues became more accessible. Despite the political divides, the shared cultural heritage and influence of Confucian ethics prevail in these societies, which allow us to discuss the common aspects of Chinese women's lives.

The role of the state in women's lives is contextualized in the different forms of governments in these three societies. In Mainland China, the People's Republic of China was formed after the Communist Party took power in 1949. The Chinese Communist Party adopted gender equality and women's liberation as one of the targets of its struggles against the old feudalistic society. Equal rights for women were explicitly stipulated in the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China (Peng 1995).

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The All China Women's Federation (ACWF) was established at the same time as one of the largest non-governmental organizations to attend to women's issues. Its extensive organizational structure reaches every level of administration including the rural villages and urban street districts, and maintains a vertical and horizontal network capable of reaching out to women in the community. During the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, the slogan "Women can uphold half the sky" was constantly cited to promote the concept of gender equality. Since the 1980s, economic liberalization policies have transformed China into a market-based socialist economy, resulting in more opportunities and challenges for women. After organizing the 1995 Fourth World Congress of Women in Beijing, the ACWF played a more prominent national and international role in promoting the discussion of women's status and implementing the 10-year Programs for the Development of Chinese Women formulated by the State Council. Having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) early on, the Chinese Government submitted its combined fifth and sixth report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2006 which outlined the status of women.<sup>1</sup> The latest combined seventh and eighth report was submitted in 2012.

Hong Kong had been a British colony for almost a century before its sovereignty was returned to China in 1997. Under the British administration, Hong Kong had developed into a modern financial center in Asia with a strong legal framework. At the same time, the colonial government had adopted a social nonintervention approach and left much of the cultural norms intact (Kwok et al. 1997). Women's status rode on the coattails of the overall socioeconomic prosperity of Hong Kong that began in the 1970s. Until the 1990s, there was no governmental organization or policy to address women's concerns (Cheung et al. 1994). Many of the changes have been brought about by women's groups through a long process of community participation, popularization, and lobbying (Lai et al. 1997). The passage of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996, and the Women's Commission in 2001 (Cheung and Chung 2009) provided the institutional mechanisms to advance the status of women.

The Hong Kong government's second and third CEDAW Report to the United Nations, respectively, in 2006 and 2012 outlined the government's role in the promotion of women's rights and development.<sup>2</sup> Since 2001, the government has been publishing an annual report on *Women and Men in Hong Kong: Key Statistics*

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<sup>1</sup>For information on ACWF and the 10-year Programs, see <http://www.women.org.cn/english/index.htm>; the combined 5th and 6th CEDAW report submitted to the 36th session of the United Nations CEDAW Committee in 2006 is available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/403/05/PDF/N0440305.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>2</sup>Information on the Equal Opportunities Commission in Hong Kong is available at <http://www.eoc.org.hk>; information on the Women's Commission and related policies is available at <http://www.women.gov.hk>; The second and third CEDAW Report submitted to the United Nations CEDAW Committee in 2006 and 2012 are available at <http://www.lwb.gov.hk/UNCEDAW/index.html>.

(Census and Statistics Department 2015a, b) which presents sex-disaggregated data on major social indicators. The democratization of the political system in the 1990s has continued since Hong Kong reunited with China as its Special Administrative Region in 1997. The activist roles of feminist scholars who participate in government committees have complemented those of community women's groups in bringing about these institutional changes.

In Taiwan, the women's movement also helped to propel institutional mechanisms to promote women's status. Feminist scholars have played a similar role in advising government committees and introducing legislation to protect women's rights in abortion, sexual violence, domestic violence, employment, and education (Ku 2005). The suspension of martial law in 1987 and the subsequent democratic development in the political system encouraged greater political participation by women and ushered in a more active and diversified women's movement. A cross-department Commission on Women's Rights Promotion was set up in 1997 by the government. The establishment of the Foundation of Women Rights Promotion and Development in 1999 provided a link between the government and civil society to develop public policies and raise social awareness on women's issues. Since 2004, the Foundation has published an annual report, *Images of Women in Taiwan*, which presents sex-disaggregated statistics to illustrate women's status.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding the differences in historical and political contexts, women in these Chinese societies share common concerns. Despite the institutionalization of central mechanisms to promote women's status, cultural barriers prevail in these collectivistic societies that share their roots in Confucian ethics and patriarchal values. At the same time, modernization, globalization, and the interrelated economic development have brought these societies closer together. The rapid growth of business investment from Hong Kong and Taiwan in the coastal regions of China has impacted the increase in travel, information flow as well as cross-border marriages and relationships. In this chapter, we provide an overview on some of the prevailing concerns from a psychosocial perspective and review the issues related to gender roles and stereotypes, marriage and family, paid and unpaid labor, violence against women, and mental health.

## Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Traditional Chinese femininities and masculinities have undergone transformations through history (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002). The early psychological studies on gender have focused on gender roles (Cheung 1986; Cheung et al. 1997; Keyes

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<sup>3</sup>Information on the Foundation of Women's Rights Promotion and Development and related gender issues in Taiwan is available at <http://v1010.womenweb.org.tw/index.asp>; *Images of Women in Taiwan* is available at [http://v1010.womenweb.org.tw/Page\\_Show.asp?Page\\_ID=108](http://v1010.womenweb.org.tw/Page_Show.asp?Page_ID=108).

1983), confirming the sex role stereotypes found in Western studies. In general, masculine characteristics were considered more desirable than feminine characteristics in these early studies. These stereotypic perceptions of sex roles among school children were found to increase from primary school through senior high in both Hong Kong and Taiwan (Cheung 1986; Williams and Best 1990).

Gender differences are found in studies of personality traits that converge with the patterns of stereotypes. On the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI-2) which was derived indigenously to cover personality characteristics relevant to Chinese culture, gender differences were found in the national normative sample which included over 1900 adults from different regions in Mainland China and Hong Kong (Cheung et al. 2004). Men scored significantly higher on scales measuring novelty, diversity, divergent thinking, leadership, logical orientation, enterprise, optimism, and internal locus of control. Females scored higher on emotionality, inferiority versus self-confidence, face, veraciousness, social sensitivity, and harmony. On the clinical scales, females scored higher on anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, and somatization. Males scored higher on pathological dependence, hypomania and antisocial behavior. These gender differences necessitated the development of separate gender norms for clinical assessment. Gender differences were also found in a representative adolescent sample of 2506 Hong Kong secondary school students aged 12–18 (Fan et al. 2008). The Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory—Adolescent Version (CPAI-A) was used in the study. Male students scored significantly higher on the scales of Enterprise, Optimism versus Pessimism, Ah-Q Mentality, and Antisocial Behavior than did their female counterparts. Gender differences in Leadership, Ren Qing (social reciprocity) and Alienation increased with age while a decreasing trend was observed in the scales of Discipline and Family Orientation, and Depression. Gender roles are valued differentially. Masculine and androgynous roles were associated with higher self-esteem (Lau 1989). Masculine students preferred more agentic and personal values whereas feminine students preferred more expressive and communal values (Lau and Wong 1992). In a survey of college students' preference for gender characteristics in gender-typed jobs, masculine applicants were preferred over feminine applicants in the work sphere (Francesco and Hakel 1981).

The problem of gender stereotypes in schools has been pointed out in a number of studies that reviewed school subjects and textbooks in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China (Cheung 1996). The Equal Opportunities Commission (2000b) in Hong Kong undertook to examine the extent of the problem in primary and secondary schools and found that gender stereotypes were extensive in the textbooks. A large-scale survey of students' attitudes in Hong Kong (Equal Opportunities Commission 2000a) showed that these gender stereotypes were transmitted and reinforced in school and continued through college (Yim and Bond 2002). Male students tended to endorse more gender stereotypes than female students. These stereotypes affect students' choice of school subjects and careers. Teachers traditionally tend to encourage boys to take science subjects and girls to take arts subjects. Gender segregation in the fields of studies in university is still prevalent despite increased enrollment and improvement of academic achievement of women

in college (Mak 2009). The establishment of gender research or women's studies centers in Chinese societies in 1985 has helped to raise gender sensitivity at the university level, although these programs tend to be marginalized by the mainstream in the conventional university system (Cheung and Kwok 1995).

Recent cultural studies have reviewed the impact of the media, including television, magazines, and popular culture on gender stereotypes. In the past 10 years, studies have examined gender messages in different media such as television, magazines, and popular cultures. In television advertisements and programs, men are generally portrayed in authoritative roles and women in subordinate roles (Furnham et al. 2000; Siu 1996; Young and Chan 2002). Concern about gender images in the mass media has been voiced by women's groups across Chinese societies. The Center for Women Studies at the China Women's College (2001) produced a video to illustrate the problem and promote gender consciousness. However, these campaigns do not seem to have a strong impact on mass media.

Marketing of products directed at women's image has increased with the economic liberalization in China and economic prosperity in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the past two decades. Following Western trends of promoting body slimming in women's products, advertisements in Chinese societies in the past few years have targeted weight reduction as the ideal body image and beauty standard for women as a sex object (Lee and Fung 2009). In their review of classical Chinese literature, Leung et al. (2001) found that the growth of the slimming industry could not be attributed entirely to Western ideology. Thinness and fragility were standards of female beauty in ancient China, where thinness was associated with upper-class women. In one study, although a substantial proportion of Hong Kong women were reported to be under weight, Chinese adolescent girls still reported a high level of dissatisfaction with their body weight (Leung et al. 2004).

## Marriage and Family

Women's roles are closely tied to the family. Traditional roles of Chinese women surround those of obedient daughters, virtuous wives and kind mothers. Confucian ethics prescribe the hierarchical relationships within the family under which women submit to the dominance of the male figures by obeying their fathers when they are young, serving the needs of their husbands when they are married, and following their sons when they are old (Jaschok and Miers 1994; Watson and Ebrey 1991; Wolf 1972). These traditional values intersect with the modernization process in Chinese societies to create new tensions (Chan and Lee 1995).

The Chinese family structure has undergone major changes in the past 20 years. Age of first marriage for women and men, and consequently age of childbirth, has increased. For example, the median age at first marriage for women in Hong Kong increased from 23.9 in 1981 to 28.9 in 2011. The median age at first childbirth for women increased from 25.1 in 1981 to 30.0 in 2011 (Census and Statistics Department 2012). In Taiwan, the median age at first marriage for women increased

from 24 in 1983 to 28 in 2010 (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Taiwan 2010). Access to contraception, coupled with voluntary or imposed birth control, has resulted in the overall decline in fertility rate and smaller family size with an average of less than two children per couple.

The one-child policy in China, which started in the late 1970s as a means to control the population growth, has been relaxed slightly in rural areas to allow couples to have a second child if the first-born is a girl, and to allow ethnic minority groups to have two or more children. The policy ended in 2015 when all married couples were allowed to have up to two children. There is a concern that male preference has affected the disparity in sex ratio in birthrate, with the national sex ratio of the 0–4 age group in 2004 being 122.69 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2004), and the latest ratio in 2013 is 117.30 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2014), despite the fact that sex-selective abortion, infanticide and abandonment are illegal. The female infant mortality rate in 2012 at 15.90 per thousand live births is higher than the male infant mortality rate of 15.38 per thousand live births (U.S. Global Health Policy 2013). There has been a conscious campaign since the implementation of the national family planning policy to promote equal value of male and female children, even though traditional preference for sons in Chinese families still prevails in rural areas. One should note, however, that in Taiwan, where birth control is voluntary, the sex ratio of new born babies was also 108 in 2011, suggesting that sex selection for sons is practiced in Taiwan (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics 2013). The sex ratio of the 0–4 age group in Hong Kong in 2014 was 107.2 (Census and Statistics Department 2015a, b).

The changes in the family structure as well as greater attention to an individual's freedom of choice and expression also impact contemporary Chinese attitudes toward sex and sexuality. So and Cheung (2005) reviewed Chinese views of sex and sexual dysfunction, and discussed the applicability of sex therapy for Chinese couples. Traditionally, female sexuality was tabooed, and sex only served the purpose of reproduction or a husband's pleasure. By the end of the twentieth century, sexuality had become recognized as an individual's choice. In large-scale community surveys of sexual behavior (The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong 2000; Liu et al. 1997), respondents are more ready to approve of premarital sex. However, sexual knowledge is still limited and sex education in schools is resisted by parents (The Family Planning Association 2011). Sex books or films are denigrated as immoral. Inadequate sexual knowledge may affect sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Sexual disharmony as a cause for divorce is also on the rise (The Family Planning Association 2012).

The overall divorce rates in Chinese societies have likewise increased. For example, in Hong Kong, the number of divorce decrees rose from 2062 in 1981 to 22,271 in 2013 (Census and Statistics Department 2015a, b), at a rate of around 3.1 per 1000 marriages. Similar rate increases in China and Taiwan have been noted and attributed to more liberal attitudes toward divorce, simplified marriage, and divorce laws, and greater economic independence among women. More Chinese women are initiating divorce applications. On the other hand, the issues of alimony

and maintenance remain a problem for many divorced women who have to rely on their ex-husbands for financial support. Divorced women tend to be socially isolated and their chance of remarriage remains low in Chinese societies. However, the psychological adjustment and life satisfaction of single mothers could be enhanced by fostering their self-regard and relational network, especially with trusted others (Choy and Giovanni 2002).

The reunification of Hong Kong with Mainland China saw the increase of young women migrants from rural China who are married to older Chinese men in Hong Kong. Many family and social problems have been linked to the adjustment of these newly arrived migrants with young children. With the increase in cross-border travel and work, there is an increase in casual sex and extramarital relationships with women in Mainland China. It is not uncommon for Chinese men from Hong Kong and Taiwan to set up a second household in China where they are working. The phenomenon of second wives or mistresses has raised so much concern in both China and Hong Kong that there were suggestions for legal reforms of marriage laws to restrict or even punish such behaviors. The gendered perspectives of this phenomenon were discussed by Tam (1996).

The increased use of prostitution among travelers has also raised concern about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Abdullah et al. (1999) found that the highest risk for travelers was among older and married men with lower perceptions of the risk of HIV infection. The number of female AIDS infections in China is also increasing at a faster rate than that of men (Xiao 2005). As a preventive measure, many women's groups have called for health services and programs to empower women to negotiate safe sex with husbands who are suspected of engaging in casual sex.

In general, social services have responded to changes in the family system by providing more support to newly arrived migrants, divorced women and single parents (Commission of Poverty 2016). However, many professionals maintain traditional family concepts and gender stereotypes. Feminist approaches in these social services are rare.

## **Paid and Unpaid Labor**

Women's labor force participation rate is lower than that of men worldwide. In Mainland China, women constituted 45.3% of the workforce in 2000, and increased to 49.2% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010)—one of the highest rates in the world. However, with the economic restructuring in China, the urban employment rate of women dropped from 86.3% in 1990 to 63.7% in 2000 (Liu 2005), and it was 53.3% in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010). The majority (50.2%) of women's employment was in the agricultural sector (National Bureau of Statistics in China 2010). In Hong Kong, the labor participation rate of women had risen gradually from 48.9% in 1986 to 54.6% in 2014 (Census and



Statistics Department 2015a, b). The corresponding rate in Taiwan in 2013 was 50.5% (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Taiwan 2016).

Despite the increase of women in the labor force, occupational sex segregation horizontally and vertically remains strong. Women predominate in clerical and service-related sectors (Census and Statistics Department 2012; Foundation of Women's Rights Promotion and Development 2005). Economic globalization has led to deindustrialization in Hong Kong and Taiwan, with factory jobs for women moving to the coastal regions of China (Ngo and Pun 2009). Subsequently, there is an increase in young women migrant workers from rural China to work in these factories in Southern China. In all Chinese societies, women are in the minority of the managerial and administrative positions. In Hong Kong, women constitute 33.7% of the managers and administrators and 36.3% of professionals (Census and Statistics Department 2015a, b). In Taiwan, 21.6% of the elected representatives, managers, and administrators and 50.4% of the professionals are women (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Taiwan 2012).

One of the barriers for women getting into senior positions at work is related to their family responsibilities. Although legislation is in place to protect the employment rights of women during pregnancy and those with family responsibilities, biases of the employers and actual family commitment form the glass ceiling for many women aspiring for advancement. In Taiwan, 34.63% of married women aged 15–64 dropped out of the labor force, of which 26.8% gave up their jobs for marriage and 21.0% quit due to pregnancy, although about half of those who quit returned to work afterward (Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Taiwan 2016). The labor force participation rate for women in Hong Kong in 2011 dropped to 46.8% for ever married women (Census and Statistics Department 2012). However, the latest statistics shows that for women with a post-secondary education (degree), the participation rate remains high at 73.9% (Census and Statistics Department 2012). Access to affordable foreign domestic helpers has helped many professional women to continue their paid employment after marriage and childbirth.

The invisible work performed by women has been largely ignored in the consideration of national economy. Despite the increase in women's participation in the labor force, women still spend more time than men in providing for the needs of the household. In China, although there are no significant differences in whether women and men do housework, there are significant differences in the amount of time that women and men spend on housework (United Nations Development Programme in China 2003). In Taiwan, the female domestic work participation rate is over 75%, while the male rate is only 31–35% (Foundation of Women's Rights Promotion and Development 2005). In Hong Kong, a time use study conducted in 2013 showed that for economically active persons, women spent an average of 2.6 h on household commitments per day as opposed to 0.8 h among men (Census and Statistics Department 2015a, b). Even for families who have hired domestic helpers, women still bear the major responsibility in emotional labor and caretaking of children, the sick, and the elderly members of the family (Choi and Lee 1997).



The multiple roles adopted by women have been a topic of concern for psychological and management studies of women in the labor force. While earlier studies on work-family relationships have focused on interference and conflict, more recent studies have examined the interface between work and family, and how the quality of different roles, spousal support, and coping behaviors intervened with the outcome (Aryee et al. 1999; Ngo and Lau 1998; Shaffer et al. 2001; Yang 2005).

In a community survey of Chinese women in Hong Kong, Tang et al. (2002b) showed that women in paid employment reported less psychological distress than non-employed women. Employment increased women's economic independence, access to social support, and self-esteem. With additional financial resources for their families, they had more negotiation power in obtaining help from their spouses and in hiring domestic helpers. The quality of the multiple social roles of employed women rather than the number of roles per se was related to the level of psychological distress. Overall role reward and role balance were related to a lower level of distress.

In studies of work-family balance in Chinese societies, some researchers have argued that the roles of the individual and family are blurred in Chinese culture, where work serves a utilitarian function for the long-term benefits of the family (Yang 2005). In contrast to American culture, work and family are not constructed as separate spheres. Thus, conflict is not considered inevitable. In particular, the support of the extended family and the value of work as a means to contribute to the well-being of the family mediate the relationship between work commitment and satisfaction with work and family roles (Ho et al. 2013).

In a qualitative study of 40 top women leaders with family responsibilities in Hong Kong and China, Cheung and Halpern (2010), Halpern and Cheung (2008) found that notwithstanding their success at work, these women leaders considered children and/or family their priority. Only a few considered work and family demands to be in conflict. In particular, some of the senior women leaders in China took pride in the recognition of their success in both realms of work and family. A happy family was regarded as a measure of the success of their work.

## Violence Against Women

The central role of the family in Chinese culture poses an enigma when the family becomes the abode of violence. Wife battering is considered a legitimate means to put women in their rightful place in traditional Chinese families. Domestic violence remains a private matter. In the first book on violence against women in Asia, Cheung et al. (1999) noted that the book's authors from nine Asian countries converged on the topic of domestic violence when they were asked to contribute a chapter on the topic of violence against women. Cheung et al. (1999) observed that despite the feminist movements in Asia in the 1970s and 1980s, the fundamental

institution of the family and the collective values embodied by the family unit have not been challenged.

Chinese women have begun to break their silence on domestic violence in the late 1980s and campaigned for laws to protect their rights and services to support the survivors. The first shelters or hotlines for battered wives were set up by women's groups in the 1980s. In Mainland China, the first national survey on the status of women conducted by the All China Women's Federation included a section on spousal violence for the first time in 1990 (Wang 1999). Similar surveys conducted in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1990s revealed a rising trend in spousal abuse reported by women (Chen 1999; Tang 1999).

The reported rates of domestic violence in the criminal justice and social service systems underestimate the prevalence of the problem. Women's groups have complained about the biases and gender insensitivity of law enforcement and medical personnel that deter reporting. Police officers were found to attribute blame to the victims and misconceive the value of maintaining family harmony when handling cases of domestic violence (Tang 2003). Furthermore, underreporting of domestic violence may also be due to the traditional Chinese belief that family problems are private issues and their disclosure may bring disgrace to the family (Chan 2012).

Other psychological studies have identified the psychological impact of spousal abuse on Chinese women and their children (Tang 1997), as well as the impact of psychological abuse (Tang 1998). The risk markers for spousal violence include young couples, large age gaps between spouses, marital conflicts and dissatisfaction, and male dominance in the relationship (Chan 2004). Cheung and Choi (2016) found that mismatched gender values with their male partners may also be a major reason for spousal abuse. For nontraditional wives, physical assault by their husbands would be more likely if their husbands were traditional. Notwithstanding women's social advancements, husbands of women who have more resources than them may resort to domestic violence as a means to reclaim their lost power (Pyke 1996). Abusers tend to believe that using violence to control their wives is acceptable. The attention to the characteristics of abusers and preventive measures has led to the call for services to be set up to help abusers to address their belief systems and to manage their emotions (Chan 2006).

Family violence has attracted public attention in recent years as the result of a number of high profile family tragedies in Hong Kong, some involving newly arrived wives from Mainland China who joined their husbands in Hong Kong (Women's Commission 2006). Concerted efforts from stakeholders have called upon the government to adopt a coordinated strategy that includes women's empowerment, community support, prevention, early identification and intervention, criminal justice responses, and research. The government has commissioned a number of research studies to examine new intervention approaches and problems of psychological abuse.

Campaigns to address violence against women have been launched mainly by women's groups who recognized the inadequacies of existing services and legal protection. The involvement of feminist scholars in these campaigns has

encouraged action research on the issues. One early example is the War-on-Rape Campaign launched in Hong Kong in 1977 to raise public awareness on issues related to violence against women. The campaign adopted a community psychology approach (Cheung 1987) involving multidimensional strategies in public education, legal reforms, services, advocacy, and social actions. Evaluation has been built into public education campaigns (Lee and Cheung 1991) as well as crisis intervention services (Cheung and Ng 2004).

Psychological studies have addressed issues related to sexual aggression in dating relationships (Tang et al. 1995), knowledge of sexual abuse and self-protection skills (Tang and Lee 1999), and sexual harassment (Chan et al. 1999; Tang et al. 1996). Related research has shown that while new trends toward more egalitarian and harmonious gender relationships have emerged within the families and in society, gender violence has also become more visible in families, educational settings, and workplaces in Chinese societies (Tang et al. 2010).

The problems encountered by survivors of violence against women have been examined in terms of rape myths (Lee and Cheung 1991). Tang et al. (2002c) examined the tendency to blame the victims in a focus group study involving around 200 community participants in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. They found that Chinese tended to use psychiatric attributions to explain violence against women by the perpetrators, removing the responsibility from men. Instead of adopting the psychoanalytic explanation of masochistic sexual desires in women, Chinese respondents adopted the shared responsibility explanations to blame the female victims for provoking violence in men.

In a study involving over 3500 human services professionals in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China, common patterns were found across the three Chinese societies in the way that these professionals defined violence against women (Tang et al. 2002a). Significant differences in the definitions were obtained between men and women and among types of professions. Men tended to adopt a narrower definition of what constitutes violence against women, paying less attention to psychological harm and women's rights. Among professionals, police officers, lawyers, and doctors adopted the most restrictive definition of violence against women, whereas social workers, nurses, and psychologists adopted the broadest definition of violence against women. In this study, there were no significant differences in the professionals' general attitudes toward women. However, regional differences showed that participants from Taiwan held the most liberal views, whereas those from Mainland China held the most traditional attitudes toward women's roles in society.

## Mental Health

Epidemiological data show that higher rates of major mental disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety-related disorders are diagnosed in women than in men in Mainland China (Zhao 1986; Shen et al. 2005), Hong Kong

(Chen et al. 1993; Lee et al. 2007), and Taiwan (Liu et al. 2002). This may represent a true gender difference in mental health status or may simply reflect that women relative to men are more willing to admit or report psychiatric symptoms. Similar to women in other countries, the mental health of Chinese women may be adversely affected by internalized rigid gender norms; institutionalized discrimination in education, employment, and economy; competing demands from work and family; pervasive gender-based violence; gender bias in service delivery and policy formation in the health care system; and cultural gender ideologies (World Health Organization 2000).

As in the case of Western countries, depression has become more prevalent in Chinese societies as compared to previous decades, and is diagnosed more frequently in women than in men. A survey of over 5000 Chinese residing in Hong Kong shows that the 12-month prevalence of depression is 9.7% for women and 6.8% for men (Lee et al. 2007), which are much higher than the lifetime prevalence of 2.4% for women and 1.3% for men as documented by an earlier survey conducted almost two decades ago (Chen et al. 1993). In Mainland China, while marked gender differences in depressive disorders were noted in the Twelve Centers Epidemiological Survey in the 1980s (Zhao 1986), a household survey of two metropolitan cities found no significant gender difference (Shen et al. 2005). In most surveys, women in the 25–35 age group are at the greatest risk of depression. High rates of depression and a significant decline in the quality of life are also noted among older women aged 70 and beyond (Chan et al. 2006; Ho et al. 2000).

Depression in women is also common during the transition from pregnancy to motherhood, and may have significant adverse or even fatal maternal and child health outcomes. In Hong Kong, large-scale surveys indicate that prevalence rates of depression and psychiatric disorders are 6.4 and 8.3% throughout pregnancy (Lee et al. 2004a), 12% following miscarriage (Lok et al. 2004), and 11 and 13% during the first 3 months in the postpartum period (Lee et al. 2001). A more recent survey in Hong Kong shows that 9.9% of pregnant women in the 2nd trimester, 7.8% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester, and 8.7% at six-week postpartum have depression symptoms (Lau et al. 2010). Yang et al. (2015) also note that major depression during the postpartum period among Chinese women is typically chronic and severe. There are both cultural risks and protective factors for the development of antenatal and postnatal depression (Lau and Wong 2007; Lee et al. 2004b; Zeng et al. 2015). While cultural postnatal rituals such as mandated postnatal support by a dedicated lay person appear to be a protective factor against prenatal and postnatal depression, conflicts between daughter- and mother-in-law is a more salient risk factor than a poor marital relationship (Lau 2011; Lau and Wong 2007).

Early studies on suicide (Wolf 1975) showed that suicide had long been an escape for Chinese women of all socioeconomic classes when their situation became unbearable. The Chinese societies are the only societies with female suicide rates higher than those for males (Wang et al. 2008). Large-scale surveys in Hong Kong also indicate that rates for lifetime suicidal ideation are consistently higher in women than in men, 31% versus 24.6% (Liu et al. 2006). Among those reporting suicidal thoughts, the highest rate is in the 20–24 age group: 1.7% have had at least

one suicidal attempt in the past year, but only 0.2% have ever received professional service (Liu et al. 2006). Suicide rates of Chinese women are also higher than some Western countries, especially among young, rural Chinese women. In Mainland China, there is a marked peak of female suicides in the 20–24 age group, and suicide rates among women are five times greater in rural areas than in urban areas, 78.3 versus 15.9 per 100,000. Hopelessness, depression, and marital dissolution are often major reasons for women's suicidal ideations and attempts (Li and Baker 1991).

Schizophrenia and anxiety-related disorders, which are diagnosed at roughly equal rates for men and women in Western countries, are diagnosed more frequently in Chinese women. In Mainland China, the Twelve Centers Epidemiological Survey showed that the lifetime prevalence rate of schizophrenia for women was almost double that for men (7.07 vs. 4.33 per 1,000), and this marked gender difference held good in both rural and urban areas (Chen 1986). Recent surveys show that more women than men report anxiety-related disturbances in Mainland China (Shen et al. 2005) and social anxiety in Hong Kong (Lee et al. 2005a). The female-to-male ratio of individuals diagnosed with panic disorder (about 2:1) is quite consistent in large population surveys conducted in Hong Kong in the 1980s (Chen et al. 1993) and in recent years (Lee et al. 2005b). Throughout Chinese societies, women relative to men also report higher rates of life stressors, losses, victimization experiences, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Tang 2007).

Despite higher rates of major mental health disorders relative to men, Chinese women generally occupy fewer psychiatric hospital beds and receive fewer resources (Pearson 1995). For example, significant gender differences are noted regarding the payment status of men and women in Mainland China. As men are more likely to be employed and in the labor force, they are typically supported by health insurance provided by their employers and retirement plans. Women, who are more likely to be home-makers during young age and widowed in older age, are often dependent on family support or charity to pay for their mental health care expenses (Yong and Bian 2014).

## Views of Women's Future

Chinese women have made significant advances in the twentieth century in terms of their rights and social status. Higher educational attainment and labor force participation have raised the status of women in society (Choi and Cheung 2012). More women have become professionals and managers, but women in decision making and leadership positions are still in the minority. Cultural norms and stereotypes persist as implicit barriers. The socioeconomic changes resulting from globalization and economic liberalization in Greater China pose new challenges to women's status. While there are new economic opportunities for some women, there are also threats of increased poverty to others who are left behind by the economic restructuring. With the adoption of a market economy in China,

commodification of women as sex objects begins to infringe upon the socialist values of gender equality. New patriarchies emerge with the normative legitimization of Chinese men keeping mistresses and second wives across the border. While taking stock of the past progress, the institutional mechanisms set up to promote Chinese women's advancement need to study and address these new challenges.

In the twenty-first century, women's development programs should move beyond the paradigm of women and development (Rathgeber 1990) that involves only women. A more multidimensional approach is needed to analyze gender perspectives and to incorporate gender considerations to achieve equitable solutions for women and men. Women are diverse and their challenges intersect with their age, economic, educational and family background. Ways to address these challenges also require interventions at the individual, group, and societal levels. At the individual level, women's competence and efficacy can be strengthened through programs taking into account of the needs of women. Mentoring programs and support networks, childcare support, shelters and crisis intervention centers should be set up to address the diverse needs of women at work and in their families. In addition to women-specific policies and services, the next stage of ensuring sustainability of women's empowerment is to mainstream gender in all policies and legislation which should consider the perspectives of women as they may differ from those of men.

Notwithstanding a gender mainstreaming approach, gender-sensitive approaches to address specific needs and concerns are still necessary. However, women's empowerment is not just women's work. Women's issues involve men as actors and participants. Engaging males as equal partners and allies and enlightening the media, particularly social media, are important strategies. Gender education for boys and girls will help to prepare the future generations.

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## **Suggested Readings and Resources for Further Study**

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Women's Evolving Lives

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