The Frustration and Outlet of Career and Marriage Confronting Chinese Women

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Abstract. The paper approaches Chinese women’s frustration and outlet of career and marriage from female perspective. Although China has issued many laws and regulations to protect women's rights and interests, overwhelmed by old Chinese traditions and customs, Chinese women are confronted with frustrations in their career and marriage. What they could need to do is to find a way out of frustration and outlet in their career and marriage.

Introduction

In old China, women were left in lower status; they were deprived of political rights, lived on men for life, depended on men without equality, and could not have a say about their own marriage. In the family of feudal private ownership, men dominated and enslaved women and men controlled everything. When People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the government advanced the slogan that women can hold up half the sky. Chinese women threw themselves into the construction of New China in high spirits, found their own career and earned their own living independently, and their status is greatly improved ever since.[1]

Article 6 of China Constitution stipulates: In the People's Republic of China women enjoy equal rights with men in politics, economy, culture, society and family. Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women was first issued in 1992 and constantly improved later. The law makes specific provisions and protection against women's political rights, education rights, labour and social security rights, property rights, civil rights, marriage and family rights. Women are enthusiastically involved in social and political affairs. Women are playing an increasingly important part in social and political affairs today. Now women receive education at different levels. The gap between men and women's education level is gradually narrowed. 99.1% school age girls entered school in 2000. 95% school age girls in remote western China entered school in 2000. The proportion of college girls reached 42% or so.

But the long-term feudal society and patriarchal ideology will not change the low status of Chinese women all at once. The society is unwilling and reluctant to give women equality. Traditionally people care about whether the woman has married, got a child, and conducted herself well or not at home. Nobody cares about whether she has got a Ph.D. or makes success in her career. Therefore, laws and regulations cannot replace social customs and practice. As the long-term feudal society and patriarchal ideology still work, Chinese women suffer double frustrations in career and marriage. The improvement of women's status requires women themselves to meet the challenge and improve their inner strength to remove social prejudice and tragic color imposed on them.
Frustration in Career

Ever since the New China was founded, Chinese government has made hard and bitter efforts to change and improve women's status. But Chinese women need to change their self-consciousness first.

Stress from the Inner Heart

First, women suffer from their own psychology. The long-term feudal society and patriarchal ideology have forced women to be obedient and submissive to men's order. If they stick to their life goal and pursue for their career success, they will be accused of "not like women". In general, women's wages are lower than those of men. The senior positions are often taken by men rather than by women. The reason may be that men are ambitious for promotion and women are reluctant to strive for it. When Chinese women choose a spouse, they hope their future spouse to be better than themselves in every aspect. The psychology reflects that women are unconfident and are content to be submissive to male power.

Many women have occupied the position of CEO or CFO. They are aggressive and daring, and win the title of a tough woman. Yet the strong character will meet with great pressure at giving birth to a child. Once they leave their positions for giving birth, they cannot hold their position again or lose future promotion. Thus equality in employment and political rights are not available to Chinese women in reality.

So Chinese women need to release themselves from the feudal ideas in their mind, fight against social discrimination and pursue for their own ideal career.

Challenge from Men

Chinese women are faced with male challenge. Chinese men enjoy absolute dominance in the society on the whole. Even if men and women are equal in social status, the traditional male dominance over female hasn't changed. Female submission is required in China society. Women are not so strong as men in physical strength for physiological reasons. They are not competent for the posts requiring great work intensity. As they have to bear the social duty to look after their family, they don't command the same energy as men for their work. So under the influence of traditional sexual prejudice and discrimination, factories and companies prefer to employ men. As women will enter into menopause earlier than men, they lose to men in social competition because of the sexual difference in physical strength and energy.

Many intellectual women don't meet with inequality in the form, but they sense a kind of psychological and subtle inequality. Social inequality doesn't affect women in playing their talents fully and create their career success, yet they meet with social mores of prejudice against women, especially in academic circle. Male center in academic circle is stronger and more evident than in any other fields. Women are creatures of emotion rather than reason, and they tend to feel attack and hurt from male-centered society.

Pressure from the Family

Furthermore, women suffer from family pressure. Women's natural attributes determine that women have to bear the duty to give birth to human offspring. Thus, the social conventions impose the connection of wives and mothers with house work. Women devote more physical strength and energy to house work than men. At the same time, they have to hold a job to support family life economically, look after children and attend to the old of their husbands. After a day's work for eight hours, women go back home and devote as many times of time as men to housework. Chinese men are away from housework based on ancient Chinese traditions. As women's energy is occupied by house work, they could not devote full time to their career development and thus lose their potential chances of promotion.
Challenge from the Society

Article 13 of China labour law stipulates that women enjoy equal rights of employment with men. No companies should refuse to employ women or set a higher employment standards. Article 46 of China labour law prescribes that no companies should discharge labour contracts for non-fault reasons or economic reasons of dismissal when women are in pregnancy, childbirth and lactation periods. Chinese labour contracts as well as other laws concerned protect women in three respects: women's equal labor rights, women's rights of equal pay for equal work, and the special labor protection for women.

As women from countryside receive poor education, they are employed in low-paid jobs. The enrollment of girl students in college are lower than that of boy students. Even if girls are admitted by colleges, they are limited in their choice of specialties and careers, as girls have to follow the old customs and forced to be employed in the posts appointed to females. The wanted advertisement doesn't write that they want men only publicly, yet women are rejected for this or that reason for their gender.

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, Chinese women enjoyed equal pay for equal work. When time came to 1990s, China experienced economic transformation from a planned economy to a socialist market economy. With the system of market economy, the central government could not impose equal pay for equal work, and women no longer enjoy equal pay for equal work in practice.

Many companies require women to sign some commitments not to be pregnant or married within a certain period of years. They set limits on women's promotion and work assessment, especially for women in pregnancy, childbirth time, nursing period, or serious diseases.

As women are poorly-educated, they have to engage in jobs in harmful environments and suffer from occupational diseases, which are impossible to heal. Actually women need to be moved from high-risk posts to safer posts when they are in pregnancy, childbirth time, nursing period, or serious diseases. Even if the companies transfer women's posts out of career protection, they need to obtain the consent from women employees. In fact, before the labour contract expires, many companies hasten to transfer women's posts, and lower their wages, out of selfish purpose. More often than not, the companies will invent many excuses to dismiss women in pregnancy, childbirth time, nursing period, or serious diseases. When women report and complain their employing units with the local labour supervisory department, their appeal is not settled smoothly, because male voice outweighs female voice, and it is difficult to safeguard their legal labour rights in patriarchal society. The society think that women should be content with what they have got, and their main job is to be at home and look after family, so their claim for labour rights are not justly respected and the society won't listen to women. When women take leaves for pregnancy check-ups, they meet with wage garnishments. Maternity insurance belongs to the state compulsory insurance, but many companies refuse to pay maternity insurance costs, and women's maternity costs cannot be reimbursed. Such cases are easy to be found.

Frustration in Marriage

For thousands of years, women have been the weaker of the society. Chinese traditional mainstream thoughts advocate "three cardinal guides"; namely, the lord is the chief; father guides son; husband guides wife. In patriarchal society, women are controlled by both their fathers and husbands. Women had a subordinate status to men in China old society.

Ever since women are married to their husbands, they have to listen to their husbands. The husband is in charge of everything outside, and the wife is in charge of housework and wait on the old on the husband side. After they give birth to children, they have to take responsibility to look after and educate children all by themselves. The husband can be free to do anything they want, and many don't offer a hand in housework. Mother has a higher status emotionally at home, not in power. Women are the appendage of men with men at the center of power.
The long-term inequality in feudal society forces Chinese women to learn to be submissive and obedient. They are forced to give up their pursuit of career success in order to save the face of their husbands. Otherwise, they may lose their marriage. Because Chinese men reject able women and their success, and think able women are incompetent for the care of family and children. Many women have to live with their mother-in-law. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is inevitably tense and insolvable in China. Men choose to give up marriage merely for the maintenance of mother-child relationship. So, women have to appear weaker and more docile, and have to conceal their ambition for their career.

Although Chinese women are liberated and enjoy equality with men in law, they are nowhere to be liberated from family life. They sacrifice their career for housework, and care for children and the old. No wonder they lose equal opportunity for reeducation for their career and career development. Men gain opportunities for social communication after marriage, by contrast, women lose opportunities for social communication.

In the long history of China, treating woman as inferior to men have widely existed for a long time everywhere. The culture of China thinks that men inherit the torch of the family. Women desire that men have houses before marriage. They marry men for a home to return to. Once they are divorced, they are driven out of door, as they don't possess property rights for the houses.

The twenty-sixth provision of the inheritance law of our country says: "the property of the husband and wife earned during marital relationship are community property, if there is no special agreement. In term of the division of the heritage, half of community property should belong to the other spouse, and the other half can be considered the legacy of the heir. Women's property rights to community property shall not be damaged. In addition, the eighteenth provision of the marriage law writes: "the husband and wife have the right to community property. In 2011 the Supreme People's Court promulgated the judicial interpretation of the new Marriage Law, which has caused a great disturbance. Women will face the risk of being cleansed of their rights to community property after divorce.

China marriage law stipulates that women enjoy equal property rights to mutual property of the spouses at divorce. Yet, the majority of Chinese women are deprived of the right to family property. It is Chinese customs that girls will bring her family property to the family of their husbands, so the family property will suffer so. Therefore, women in the countryside will not inherit family property. After they marry their husbands, all the property belongs to the husbands' family. No matter how hard women devote their life to the care of housework and the children, they don't possess the right to husbands' family property and economic rights. They don't have life security at the death of their husbands and at divorce.

The patriarchal society deprive women of their rights to property and bequeath. At divorce they cannot get corresponding distribution of property rights and interests matching their contribution to their family. Public opinions bring women more harm than men at divorce and it is women that bear the blame for the breakup of marriage, namely, women are blamed to be dominating. The hardship of bringing up children alone and the energy expended on housework and nursing children make women lose the chances of competition with men at career. There is little chance of getting alimony and compensation for their service and contribution to house work, which is the usual practice in European countries and America.

From the above discussion of Chinese women, we can see that Chinese women do not possess marriage security, even if they sacrifice all their life to bear the responsibility to look after the house work, to nurse their children and attend to the old of their husbands.

Chinese married women work outside to feed their family, and work at home to nurse children and look after the old, they get nothing for the time and energy for housework and the burden of caring for children and the old. They sacrifice their chances of success in career and lose the opportunities of social communication, yet their contribution is nowhere to be respected and recognized, which is regarded by men as a natural part of women's duty.
Outlet

Although the feudal society has faded away, the feudal thinking modes do not disappear easily. The long-term inequality in feudal society forces Chinese women to learn to be submissive and obedient. Therefore, Chinese women should first get rid of feudal thinking rooted in their own minds and rise up against great pressure from the society, stick to their life goal and pursue for career success. Economic independence entitles them social status. Chinese women need to be useful persons and nurse useful children for the society at the same time. Meanwhile, women need to maintain a good social communication and win strong spiritual support. With it, they won't feel lonely and in despair. They also need to cultivate interests in life, and widen their vision.

Although women are biased in the society, they should not give up the struggle for equality with men. Those poor-educated women may lose the chance of competing with men, but the well-educated women are not in minority. We can change the situation with our efforts gradually. Nothing can be changed overnight. The equality Chinese women desire for has a long way to go, which needs several generations to fight for. Women should not be bound by traditional concept of marriage, doing housework, nurse children and looking after their husbands without corresponding respect and payment.

Both men and women help to build a family. Men and women have different perspectives in dealing with pressure and housework. They need to seek common ground and put aside differences. They need to try to find common interests and life values. Women should be clever at managing an independent job and a harmonious family relationship. Also, women need to build up their inner strength, face the plights in their career and marriage, and remember nothing is impossible to overcome with their strong will, time and endurance.

In daily life we need to learn to respect our mother-in-law as our own parents, use our moral power and improve our character accomplishment. Women should not lose themselves for marriage. Marriage is part of our life. Women and men have different destiny and trajectory in life. They try to walk in the same direction of common goal, concept and values of life and marriage. Two persons walk together to build up a family, nurse children, and experience the fun of bringing up a baby, a continuation of our life growing up in our desirable standards. Child-nursing is our duty marriage entitles us, which is the precondition for a steady and sustainable development of a nation.

A progressive, open and democratic society will show a lenient and tolerant attitudes towards divorce. When women meet with a failure of marriage, don't take negative and pessimistic attitudes and try to talk our loss and feelings out. If we can take a correct attitude towards the failure of marriage, we know that the sun also rises tomorrow.

The 21th century is such a century that is dominated by knowledge economy, informatization and lifelong education. The social environment of the information age will develop toward the direction that is beneficial to women's success. As more and more women have received higher education, they are the biggest beneficiaries of the information society.

The intellectual and knowledge economy society require women to command knowledge. The information society disseminates technology and enables everyone to share information. The boundaries of traditional occupation have been thoroughly broken, and women have a new space of career activities. They can get information by "staying indoors" rather than traveling out. In this case, men's monopoly of information is broken, the information society promotes social equality between men and women, and further liberates women, as it does not require strenuous physical labor but the knowledge and the ability to handle electronic appliances. The inherent physical disadvantages of women have been greatly reduced in the information society due to the automation of housework, and part of the housework has been socialized; work modes have been family oriented and decentralized. Female employment will take place in a relatively loose environment and vast fields. Women do not have to choose their jobs considering their families first, and do not have to choose jobs that they don't like but earn little money for a living. With the presence of cyberspace, women can press their keyboards at home to find jobs that suit their profession at home or abroad.
Women's understanding, delicacy and thoughtfulness are in line with the professional requirements of the third industry and the fourth industry, which drive men out of competition. In the information society, women are being the main force of the third industry. In the fourth industry, women are being the main force of the secretarial, public relations industry, and online retailers typical of computer operations and electronic information. Women work in private education institutions and international trade. Women are making a big money the easy way by staying at home. So, women will reexamine their outlook of career and marriage.

Conclusion

In the long feudal society of China, women never realized the importance of knowledge. The only requirement for women in old society was "morality", not "knowledge". Women's social roles were to be a "good mother", namely, "the occupation of the female" is to produce offsprings. Woman without knowledge was morally virtuous in the old China.

After the founding of new China, the social structure and economic system are changing. Theoretically, women have equal political rights with men. Women are able to enter society and play the same social roles as men. However, due to the limitations of economic development and the precipitation of several thousand years of Chinese culture, a good wife and morally-good mother are the women's model. Under this case, The separation and conflict of roles inevitably occur tragically in modern women.

The long-term of feudal society has formed deep discrimination and bias against women. Although the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women was first issued in 1992 and constantly improved, the protection against women's political rights, education rights, labour and social security rights, property rights, civil rights, marriage and family rights mostly stay in written form. The powerful forces of social customs overwhelm the power of laws.

Thousands of years of patriarchal society form the mainstream culture of male culture, with women being the object cared for by men.[3] The long-term of patriarchal society has led to women's dependence on men for everything. Even if they win economic power, women still need the care and help from men.[4] The majority of Chinese women do not have discourse power. In traditional Chinese marriage, men deal with everything outside, and women deal with what is inside at home. The equality of men and women is not decided by laws alone. The economic power determines the power of discourse.

We need to familiarize ourselves with women's rights of employment and women protection granted by marriage law. The ultimate solution is to improve women's economic status. With equal chances of education, independent incomes, and economic freedom and independence, we can hope that equality between men and women can be realized.

Women should shake off the chains of feudal consciousness of slavery. They can win economic power with their education and strong will. Chinese women need to enter into politics and have a say in the national political life. Chinese women have intelligence to manage both a career and family well. Marriage is only part of our life and not the whole life of modern women. In modern society, equality is achieved with women's independent careers and economic power. Both men and women are responsible for their marriage and family life. Women won't be limited by traditional concept of marriage any longer. Chinese women should sand firmly to pursue their career success and marriage success.

As time has entered the 21th century of information and knowledge, women are enjoying their education and career equality, and reshape their image in career and marriage.

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