

SELECTED PAPERS OF CONFERENCE ON  
GENDER STUDIES IN CHINESE SOCIETIES

# 華人社會之性別研究

研討會文選

Edited by

Fanny M. Cheung      Wan Po-san  
Choi Hang-keung      Choy Lee-man

張妙清    尹寶珊  
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合編

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## Preface

IN 1985, the last year of the Decade of Women, ~~the first women's studies~~ or gender studies programmes were set up independently in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The three programmes have since remained active in promoting research, publication, and local academic exchange. The number of scholars in women's studies has been on the rise since then.

Women in the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan share the same historical and cultural heritage. At the same time, they went through convergent as well as divergent development in terms of their social status and gender roles under different political, economic and social systems. These similarities and differences provide an important perspective to the study of Chinese women. Hong Kong serves as an entrepot for academic exchange among Chinese scholars. In 1988, Prof. Nora Chiang of the National Taiwan University and Prof. Esther Chow of the American University visited Hong Kong and discussed the development of women's studies in Chinese societies. Independently, they both suggested the idea of holding a conference in Hong Kong to facilitate an interchange of research experiences and directions for women's studies scholars from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

The Gender Role Research Programme of the Centre for Hong Kong Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong took the initiative to host the first conference on gender studies in Chinese societies. The objectives are to provide an opportunity for scholars from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other overseas Chinese societies to exchange their respective research experiences and insights, as well as to strengthen their networks.

The conference was held in Cho Yin Hall at The Chinese University of Hong Kong from November 9-10, 1989. The conference was divided into six sessions, including 'Historical Perspective of Gender Studies', 'Gender and Health', 'Career and Work', 'Education', 'Gender

Stereotype', and 'Gender Studies: Issues and Directions'. A total of 30 papers were presented, including eight from China, seven from Taiwan, two from U.S., and the other 13 from Hong Kong. The speakers came from a variety of academic disciplines, including History, Medicine, Public Health, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, Philosophy, Religion, Education, Literature, Management, and Marketing. The number of participants including the speakers were about 150. The conference programme for the two days was tightly scheduled. The discussions on the papers were vigorous. Plans were also made for future links and cooperation within and between regions.

The conference papers will be published in two separate volumes. This conference proceeding will include the Chinese and English papers dealing with specific and empirical research topics. The theoretical papers will be published as a Chinese book with additional chapters from other contributors. We hope that these preliminary efforts will stimulate further developments in gender studies in Chinese societies.

The funding of the Conference on Gender Studies in Chinese Societies as well as the publication of this conference proceeding was supported by a grant from the Madam Tam Jen-chiu Research Fund. I would also like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the Organizing Committee and the colleagues of the Centre for Hong Kong Studies. Gratitude is due to all of them for their support.

Finally, a note on the organizational changes of the Centre for Hong Kong Studies. Since September, 1990, the CHKS has been reorganized and merged with the new Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The new Gender Research Programme is targeted as one of the strategic research programmes of the Institute. Its scope is extended to include the Asia-Pacific region. The publication of this Conference Proceeding is also taken over by the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies for whose support we would also like to express our gratitude.

Fanny M. Cheung  
January 1991

# 華人社會之性別研究研討會 序

張妙清

一九八五年是聯合國訂立國際婦女十年的最後一年，而於當年在中國、香港、台灣不約地成立了第一所婦女或性別研究中心，分別推動研究、出版、及本地學術交流。從事婦女研究的學者，亦日漸增加。

中國、台灣和香港都承接着相同的歷史和文化背景，但在不同的政治、經濟和社會體制下，三地婦女的地位和性別角色，都有異同的發展。香港是海峽兩岸學術交流的滙集處。八八年間，國立台灣大學姜蘭虹教授及美國大學周顏玲教授先後訪港，討論華人社會的婦女學發展，並提議在香港舉行會議，讓中港台三地的婦女研究學者交流磋商研究經驗和方向。

香港中文大學香港研究中心屬下的性別角色研究計劃遂發起這首次「華人社會之性別研究研討會」，目的是讓中、港、台及海外華人社會的學者聚首一堂，交換各地性別研究的經驗、心得與見解，互相切磋，並加強彼此的聯繫。

這次會議於一九八九年十一月九日至十日在香港中文大學祖堯堂舉行。會議分為六節，包括「從歷史觀點看性別研究」、「性別與健康」、「事業與工作」、「教育」、「性別塑型」、及「性別研究：問題與方向」。報告的論文共三十篇，其中八篇來自中國、七篇來自台灣、兩篇來自美國，其他十三篇是香港的論文報告。講者的學術背景跨越多項學術，包括歷史、醫學、公共衛生、心理學、社會學、人類學、地理、哲學、宗教、管理及市場學等。連同講者在內，參加會議人數共約一百五十人。兩日來的會議程序緊湊，除就論文的內容作出熱烈的討論外，更商討日後個別及地區性的聯繫和合作。

會議的論文將分兩種形式出版，以專題作研究的中、英文論文，現輯成此論文集。而理論性的論文，則準備加添幾篇文章再以中文專書出版。我們期望這些初步的工作能刺激起華人社會性別研究的發展。

「華人社會之性別研究」研討會的召開及這冊論文集的印製，承譚紉就女士研究基金資助，並得籌備委員會及香港研究中心各位同寅鼎力支持，謹此致謝。

最後亦須交待研究中心的改組。一九九〇年九月起，香港研究中心歸入新成立之香港亞太研究所，而性別研究計劃編為研究所之重點研究，範圍擴展至亞太區域。此論文集亦相應交由香港亞太研究所出版。

## Opening Remarks

*Lady Akers-Jones, MBE, JP*

I WAS delighted to be invited by Dr. Lau Siu-kai to officiate at the opening ceremony of this Conference on 'Gender Studies in Chinese Societies' and I congratulate the Organizing Committee and its convenor, Dr. Fanny Cheung, on attracting such an erudite assembly of speakers for the two days of the Conference.

I have read the programme of subjects on which papers will be given by academics from the People's Republic of China, the USA, from Taiwan and of course from Hong Kong. It is most encouraging that academia is researching the role of women in the present day and the effect it has upon her mental and physical health, and upon the family, all the way from childhood to old age, the necessity of wider education and its relevance to a future in the professional, business and industrial worlds, and the difficulties and stresses faced in balancing the natural female and inescapable responsibility of bearing the future generation with economic necessity and fulfilment of personal aspiration. But I would emphasize it is not just an academic problem but is of vital importance to the social and political development of nations and to the prosperity and well-being of their peoples.

In Hong Kong there is no doubt that the role of women has gone through a revolution in a very few years. Our industry depends upon women workers, our office workers are now largely women and there are many women among our legislators. With this change has come a steady decline in the size of the family. Women have fewer children, they



work more, they participate more in community life.

It seems, too, that these changes which we observe here are a reflection of a situation which is not confined to Hong Kong. To take one example, there is a shortage in many countries of nursing staff in hospitals, work traditionally performed by women. It is not uncommon to discover that the nursing staff in the hospitals in many countries now come from other countries around the world. In other words the changing role of women in society is giving rise to problems and adjustments in national communities which go beyond national boundaries.

At the end of the eighties, therefore, it is most timely to take stock of just what has been happening and what is likely to happen in the years ahead and hopefully to give some indication to Government leaders of the lines on which they should be thinking.

In Hong Kong the better-off woman is fortunate to be able to free herself from many domestic and child-minding chores by the availability of help from the Philippines and surrounding countries. Here again this has given rise to adjustments in society both here and in the Philippines and is making a substantial contribution to the economy of these places.

I work for the Hong Kong Girl Guides Association which is part of a world organisation for girls and young women. I am also interested in the problems which women face in their daily lives from having been uprooted from familiar surroundings and neighbours to a different life-style. I helped to form the Yin Ngai Societies in our multi-storey housing estates to help women in these estates to provide support and a social group in which to make friends. I imagine that it is these activities which explain why I was invited to officiate at the opening ceremony this morning! I will be very interested to read the results of your conference and the various contributions you have to make.

May I wish you an interesting and fruitful exchange of views and ideas during the Conference and thank you all for coming to take part.

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## Waged Work at Home: Married Women's Participation in Industrial Outwork in Hong Kong

*Lui Tai-lok*

INDUSTRIAL outwork was for long portrayed as an anachronism. It is generally assumed that outwork is transitory in nature; as industrialization gets under way, it would be replaced by the factory system gradually (Braverman, 1974; Marglin, 1974; Smelser, 1959). In case outwork is used for production in contemporary industrial societies, it would be largely confined to the 'traditional' sector, and diminishing in use. However, recent studies of labour market segmentation have provided evidences of the persistent use of casualized labour and have put forward the argument that various non-standard job-forms are useful for helping management adjust to flux and uncertainty in the business environment (Berger & Piore, 1980; Tarling, 1987; Wilkinson, 1981). More importantly, starting from the mid-1970s there have been a number of studies which brought the conditions of women outworkers back into the agenda of research on women and work (for example, Allen, 1983; Allen & Wolkowitz, 1987; Brown, 1974; Cragg & Dawson, 1981; Crine, 1979; Hakim, 1987; Hope, et al., 1976; Hoy & Kennedy, 1983; Mitter, 1986; Singh & Kelles-Viitanen, 1987). In the context of mass unemployment and the emergence of the feminist research on women's domestic labour, the 'rediscovery' of outwork has added a new dimension to the study of work and employment. As succinctly summed up by Allen and Wolkowitz (1987:2), '[b]y demonstrating the gap between dominant con-

ceptions of women primarily as housewives and the reality of women as waged workers, they have shown the inadequacy of models of work based only on men's employment patterns. Feminist researches have asked new questions about waged and unwaged work, the social relations through which these are controlled and the ways in which they are rewarded and measured.'

This paper is an attempt to look into the social processes which structure the supply of married women's labour to industrial outworking in Hong Kong. Of course, this is not to suggest that the persistence of industrial outwork in contemporary Hong Kong can be explained merely in terms of the supply side of the question. Elsewhere I have put forward the argument that industrial outwork is an integral part of production in contemporary industrial societies and its existence is to be explained by the interactions between factors on the demand and the supply side (Lui, 1985 & forthcoming). Nevertheless, it is equally important to note that the question concerning the supply of women's labour to outworking remains under-theorized (cf. Humphries & Rubery, 1984). It has to be emphasized that the advantages of industrial outwork as a form of flexible labour organization to employers do not explain why people (mainly married women) take up this form of paid work. And, turning to current researches on industrial outworking, the most frequently cited explanation of why mainly women doing outwork is that married women are greatly restricted by their family responsibilities in their participation in economic activity. When they need to finance the household economy, they have to find a form of paid work which can fit in with their role of housewife (see, for example, Allen & Wolkowitz, 1987; Cragg & Dawson, 1981). Such an explanation requires further elaboration and exploration. In particular, it needs to grasp the dynamics of the structuring of ideological and economic constraints, which condition the lives of women outworkers (cf. Yeandle, 1984).

## Industrial Outworking as a Family Work Strategy

This paper attempts to probe into the reasons why some married women

are engaged in industrial outwork. The theoretical background of our discussion in the following sections involves a sociological analysis of the supply of women's labour. Given the limited scope of this paper, this is not the place to go into a detailed review of current studies of the issue. It is, however, essential to highlight some of the major issues in the sociological analysis of women's supply of labour here for the purpose of outlining the conceptual elements for our analysis of the informants' participation in industrial outwork.

Reviewing the existing literature on labour market studies, it can be suggested that most theoretical analyses of the question of labour supply come from two contrasting perspectives, namely the Marxist thesis of the industrial reserve army and the 'new home economics'. As regards the Marxist concept of the industrial reserve army, i.e., the floating, the latent, and the stagnant labourers, it is defined in terms of the functions for capital. That is, its explanation is functionalist and tends to assume that the conditions of the industrial reserve army are conditioned by the requirements of capital.

Contrary to the Marxist thesis of the industrial reserve army, Becker (1981) attempts to provide a micro-analysis of human behaviour which can analyze women's participation in labour and the division of labour in households. Though neo-classical economics has frequently been criticized for its conservative orientation, in the case of the 'new home economics', one has to admit that its analysis does cast new lights on our understanding of families. In their review of the 'new home economics', Berk & Berk (1983:381) point out the major conceptual challenge to family studies put forward by Becker:

In effect, the New Home Economics asserts that family sociology has too often looked for the wrong thing in the wrong place. Families are really 'about' the production of household commodities; instrumental activities are alive and well in the household; and *all* family members are implicated.

The important issues which have been brought up by the 'new home economics' include, first, the observation that household work occupies

an important place in family activities. Second, families have to decide the allocation of time between the market and household sectors, and this carries the implication that household and market activities cannot be studied in isolation. Essentially, Becker's analysis focuses on the household production function and the household is taken as a unit of production. Given the assumption that families, subjected to the constraints of their financial resources and the amount of time available, seek to maximize utility, the explanation of the allocation problem can follow the deductive logic of the standard micro-economic relationships for optimality. The interesting issues are: 'how much time will be allocated to which activities, and whose time that will be' (Berk & Berk, 1983: 378). It is expected that '[s]pecialized investments and time allocation together with biological differences in comparative advantage imply that married men specialize in the market sector and married women in the household sector' (Becker, 1981: 25).

No doubt the 'new home economics' has provided us with some insightful ideas concerning our understanding of the family and the supply of women's labour. In particular, it has pointed out that the family should be conceived as a production and consumption unit and that the supply of women's labour should be analyzed in the context of the organization of their family lives. Nevertheless, the 'new home economics' is far from adequate to provide a useful framework for the analysis of women's participation in labour (Ben-Porath, 1982; Berk & Berk, 1983: 383-91; Dex, 1985: 75-6; England & McCreary, 1987; Hanan, 1982; Joseph, 1983: 31-4; Walby, 1986: 71-4). In the first place, the assumption that there is a single utility function simply ignores the issues concerning how household decisions are arrived at and how the dynamics (i.e., power relations) among members of household affect these decisions, which by themselves, are problems requiring investigation. Second, '[t]here is a recognition that the necessary time spent on housework done by one partner involves an equivalent reduction in time available for work, or vice versa, but the causal mechanism is assumed and one could argue another case' (Dex, 1985:75-6). That is, the 'new home economics' has paid insufficient attention to the socio-economic

context in which women participate in economic activities. The problem is not only that our understanding of women's position requires an investigation into the opportunity structure of the labour market, but also that the inter-relationship between work and home and the repercussions of one upon another complicate the processes through which decisions concerning women's labour participation are arrived at. Third, it is problematic to assume tastes and values as given, as found in Becker's analysis. This is not to say that one therefore turns to another direction and assumes socialization explains all human behaviour and denies the value of rational choice analysis (cf. Wrong, 1961; Granovetter, 1985). The crux of the problem lies in the black-box approach of the 'new home economics', which fails to see how economic behaviour is actually embedded in social relations. In other words, if families seek to maximize utility, they do not do it in a vacuum. Not only the environment is not static, but that social relations also structure how families optimize their resources in a given context. Our contention is that the black-box itself requires investigation and one has to take those questions concerning why and how women decide to participate in economic activity seriously.

To sum up, it is contended that our analysis of the supply of women's labour must start with the recognition that women have an active role to play in deciding their labour participation. Moreover, women should not be simplistically conceived as a homogeneous entity. Any investigation of women's supply of labour must recognize the effects of social background on their work behaviour. Last but not least, the family context has a significant effect on women's labour participation. The assumption of a single household utility function is problematic because it fails to take into account the element of power in family life.

Recent researches on family and family history have put forward the idea of family work strategy (Anderson, 1971; Hareven, 1982; Pahl, 1980 & 1984; Pahl & Wallace, 1985; Scott & Tilly, 1980; Tilly, 1979 & 1985; Tilly & Scott, 1987). At present, the concept of family work strategy is still in the state of early formulation and much is required for further clarification (Crow, 1989; Morgan, 1989). But it should be recognized



that the concept does help to identify certain elements which can further contribute to a sociological understanding of women's supply of labour. Generally speaking, the concept of family work strategy is concerned with the way a family allocates its time and resources to get work done. The important point is that how work is done is not an individual decision as the allocation of time and resources relates to the organization of family life as a whole. Therefore, the formulation of the family work strategy can be seen as a social process of conflict, negotiation and compromise among family members in deciding the arrangement of individual members' roles in the family and how domestic and market activities are to be carried out. In brief, by family work strategy, we mean the strategy adopted by a family to maintain a certain standard of living and household care, to manage family responsibilities with a certain form of division of labour, and to finance the family budget.

The major contribution of the concept of family work strategy to our analysis of women labour lies in its emphasis on a non-atomized approach to the understanding of women's labour supply. Also it has highlighted the processes of the organization of family life in the allocation of time and resources to household and market activities. Indeed, an investigation of these processes will show how economic and ideological constraints interact to influence the adoption of a particular family strategy for work and family responsibilities. Put it another way, in the processes of allocating resources to meet different needs, the family has to develop its expectations of how family responsibilities are managed and how different members fulfill the expectations of their roles. Yet this does not suggest that women are, therefore, passive supports of the social structure, and that their actions can be read out from their structurally determined positions. Rather, the emphasis on the notion of strategy suggests that while the economic and ideological constraints mediating through the family impose certain limitations on women's actions, it is of importance to recognize the active role played by women themselves in negotiating the ways of performing their roles in relation to their engagement in household and market activities. That is also to say that the concept of family work strategy highlights not only