

A Cross-cultural Feminist Analysis of Dominant Discourse on Modern Chinese Marriages: Is the personal still political?

Casper Lötter

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7787-1419>

North-West University, South Africa

casperltr@gmail.com

Abstract

In view of China's deepening engagement in Africa, I consider progress with regard to gender roles as a valuable measure by which to comparatively gauge the emancipatory feminist potential of Chinese and South African marriage practices. By way of cross-cultural feminist analysis, I thereby attempt to evaluate the institutionalised master discourse on gender dynamics within marriage in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In particular, this ideological critique will employ second-wave feminism's "personal as political" theoretical lens, as well as both Jacques Lacan's theory of discourse and Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between orthodox and heterodox discourses. Additionally, the dominant discourse on marriage in the post-Maoist PRC is argued to be both oppressive (same-sex marriage remains illegal) and progressive (divorce by agreement is an administrative act). If therefore, the twenty-first century is indeed to be a time of Chinese global dominance, such investigations are pertinent to questions of global gender equality, as well as to cross-cultural social justice discourse in general.

Keywords: cross-cultural feminist analysis; marriage practices; the personal as political; dominant gender discourse(s); People's Republic of China (PRC); South Africa

There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in. (Leonard Cohen 1992)

I have never been fooled by Chinese women—not even the beautiful flower girls. Chinese women are the strongest women in the world. It is the strength that centuries have given them. It is the strength of the unwanted. (Pearl S. Buck [赛珍珠] *Letter from Peking* 1957)

UNISA 
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH-WEST
AFRICA
PRESS

Phronimon

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon>

Volume 23 | 2022 | #10037 | 26 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/10037>

ISSN 2413-3086 (Online), ISSN 1516-4018 (Print)

© The Author(s) 2023



Published by Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

Introduction

We live in a global village where cultures often, for various reasons, cross-pollinate. Specifically, our current century promises an Eastern global dominance, particularly in China and/or India. In this multi-polarised world, away from unipolar America (Crotty 2015; Eco 2008; Jacques 2012; Zakaria 2011), rising Asian concerns will confront Euro-American ones. Moreover, since South Africa boasts an ongoing economic, cultural and developmental arrangement with China, how then do we constructively learn from them, while opposing their hegemony?

Regarding post-Marxism, Jürgen Habermas (1984, 358; 1987, 3–42) supports critical social theory’s project of scrutinising past and present emancipatory institutions and practices in both the Global North and South. In this same spirit, I argue that both gender roles and women’s rights are very pertinent issues for understanding Chinese-African relations. For example, preliminary indications show that femicide in China has reached disturbing proportions (Law and Liu 2008; Liu 2002; McLoughlin, Gould, and Malone 2015; Murray and Lopez 1996; Phillips et al. 2002; Phillips, Lee, and Zang 2002; World Health Organisation 2009).¹ Femicide is infanticide and suicide by young women and girls, the latter attempting to escape undesired marriage, oppressive practices within marriage, and/or stigma over early widowhood. Similarly, South Africa is among the world’s least safe countries (Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index* 2018), wherein women are often caught in the crosshairs when incompatible worldviews (such as monogamy versus polygamy, or feminism versus patriarchy) clash. Within this violent context, I will consider what South Africans may learn from mainland China—marriage practices being our example.

Feminism appropriately views marriage as a vestibule of the feudal-patriarchal ownership of women (Brownmiller 2000, 67; Hamilton 1981), however much modern progress has redeemed it as a personal choice. Therefore, this feminist study of the dominant/master discourse of the post-communist People’s Republic of China (PRC) could potentially glean valuable cross-cultural insights when paired with a developing nation like South Africa.

Cross-Cultural Analysis as Research Methodology

Various methodologies attempt to facilitate cultural borrowing, but cross-cultural analysis is (as one would imagine) particularly appropriate for such an endeavour. Lisa Heldke (2002, 111) defines cross-cultural analysis as “exploring and evaluating concepts and practices from a culture other than one’s own, using tools from one’s own culture.” Moreover, according to Niall Ferguson (2012a; 2012b), interaction between different

1 Although most of these sources are older than 10 years, there is regrettably nothing more recent on this topic. Nevertheless, certain sources (Liu 2002; Murray and Lopez 1996; Phillips et al. “Risk factors” 2002; Phillips et al. “Suicide rates” 2002) are vital for an understanding of the phenomenon.

cultures has always been, for better or worse, a powerful driver of historical transformation. Similarly, academic comparison of dissimilar societies also invariably reveals the researcher's own cultural biases (Martin 1989, 4, 11).

Now, let us briefly look at Gadamer's hermeneutical model, which could hopefully help us to account for cultural biases, if not prejudice in general. Following on from Heidegger's belief in the radical "thrownness" of human existence, Gadamer suggests that we are embedded within our own history, culture and language as a result of our historically conditioned consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) (Grondin 1994, 108, 116). This cultural tradition settles our prejudices or pre-understandings of things and is the reason why Gadamer is particularly dismissive of the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudices" (Grondin 1994, 111). We can, after all, only come to some appreciation of a fact, text or work of art through such prejudices. Crucially, these biases are therefore not (necessarily) mere hermeneutical obstacles to our understanding, but can in fact also be transcendental "[pre]conditions for understanding" (Grondin 1994, 111). But even as Gadamer (1975, 238) rehabilitates the status of prejudice or biases, he simultaneously cautions the reader to be critically "aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's fore-meanings."

This wise counsel of Gadamer is perhaps easier said than done. Even though I am fairly familiar with many features of Han Chinese culture (the most populous of the numerous ethnic groups living within China), having lived within a Chinese community for many years, I nonetheless found myself having to constantly mediate and negotiate my own exoticisation of these societies, which are so very different from our own. My own biases concerning modern Chinese culture are also further mediated by my choice of research methodology, namely cross-cultural analysis.

I firstly aim to demonstrate this methodology's efficacy in deconstructing discourse in such a dissimilar setting as modern China. I secondly probe contemporary Chinese gender discourse from a feminist perspective, that is, the belief that society mostly disadvantages women, that this is largely intended for the benefit of men, and that everyone's experiences are at least partially the result of their survival responses to patriarchy (Allen and Young 1989, 4; Brownmiller 2000, xxx; Richards 1991, 13–4).

Because women are marginalised in not just the public, but also the private spheres of home, bedroom and kitchen, one popular feminist motto is "the personal is political" (Brownmiller 2000, 44–45, 102ff, 194ff; Steinem as quoted in Duplessis and Snitow 1998, 13; Winslow 1998, 240, 242). In addition, because patriarchy must be collectively combated as a system (Kesselman 1998, 42; Steinem as quoted in Duplessis and Snitow 1998, 13; Winslow 1998, 240, 242), all cultural practices and artefacts are suitable for ideological critique (Duplessis and Snitow 1998, 7, 10–2; Epstein 1998, 147–8; Nestle 1998, 345). As for our focus of study, marriage practices are particularly well-suited for a cross-cultural feminist project such as this work. Similarly, postcolonial feminism, as

Rosemary George (2006, 211) observes, aims at “interrupting the discourses of postcolonial theory and that of liberal Western feminism, while simultaneously refusing the singular ‘Third World Woman’ as the object of study.” One may add to this definition Giyatri Spivak’s (1981, 183) warning that “the uterine norm of womanhood supports the phallic norm of capitalism.” With these considerations in mind, cross-cultural analysis and postcolonial feminism are also paired together in this contribution on account of their comparative affinity with cultural sensitivity. Such is particularly necessary for this historical investigation of marriage in (now supposedly socialist) China for any emancipatory potential in order to perhaps improve marital relations within post-apartheid South Africa. This contribution, therefore, draws upon the valuable insight of Terry Jackson (2012, 2902), namely the recommendation to develop “a cross-cultural conceptual base from which methodology can be developed, and to point to a research agenda that can inform both practice and policy.” In addition, Jackson (2012, 2902) has also expressed at least partial approval of this paper’s postcolonial feminist theoretical lens. Now I proceed to consider the parameters of such a research agenda.

Postcolonial Feminist Research and Gender Roles

The myth of biologically determined gender roles is reproduced by the master’s discourse, as Lacan explains, and then problematised by the hysteric, whose discourse cannot by itself integrate into general society. Lacan’s theory on the formation of discourse will be discussed later. Meanwhile, Helen Haste (1993, 107) argues that few sites evince such “complex and deep-seated resistances” to change than traditional gender categories, and thus recommends that society should find new ways to question them (Haste 1993, 101). Women’s perspectives obviously differ from even men of their own culture, and, as feminists like Gerda Lerner (1981) demonstrate, this results in women experiencing their own separate historical narratives. Thus, Yanagisako and Delaney (1992, 14, 20) argue that cross-cultural, women-centred analysis serves a very unique methodological function. “Its overtly political nature,” state Warhol and Herndl (1991, x), “is perhaps the single most distinguishing feature of feminist scholarly work.” More specifically for our purposes, postcolonial feminists in the Global South critique those gender roles found in previously colonised nations (Mohanty 2006, 52; Suneja 2002, 40–43), including the neocolonial reproductions of those found in the West (Chow 2005). Yet Giyatri Spivak’s (1988) insistence that the subaltern (like “Third World Women”) cannot speak, should be largely treated as well-intentioned stereotyping. For example, Tang (2010, 548) argues that Chinese women are increasingly interrogating and constantly renegotiating with China’s (of at least 56 ethnicities [Mullaney 2011, 1–3]) patriarchal cultures. Similarly, Tani Barlow (2002, 156) recommends that “the still unpredicated female subject” searches for woman-friendly spaces beyond the “damaging codes of masculine gender performativity.” To effectively dismiss the agency of women from the Global South as negligible, the way Spivak does, is precisely the sort of reductive sentiment against which postcolonial feminists warn.

Susan Mann (1997, 200) demonstrates, for example, how prioritising Chinese women's views shatters the former "male" understanding of, for example, the apparently "unimportant" socio-political role of Qing-era Buddhism during the Manchu rule. The essentialist "male" historical narrative situated Buddhism on the periphery, while a previously neglected "female" point of view has more recently illuminated the support of women who had enabled the monks to persevere and survive the relentless Confucianist persecution. Although, in the spirit of post-structuralism, one should guard against essentialist thinking (like gendered history), exploring silenced knowledge can nonetheless be very valuable. Moreover, despite initial reluctance from feminism to discard this gender essentialism, third-wave feminists are characterised by their commitment to incorporating social diversity into their politics (Boonzaier and Shefer 2006, 7–8; Nestle 1998, 345), as well as by their greater scrutiny of the more pernicious (and enduring) aspects of patriarchy (Allen and Young 1989, 12; Boonzaier and Shefer 2006, 4–5; Flax 1996, 4, 20). These feminists believe that by spotlighting these neglected areas of "knowing" (and admittedly risking epistemic essentialism), society's various inbuilt knowledge systems will "self-correct." Clearly, this school of thought has a particular appreciation for how bias, as Elizabeth Spelman (1990, 9) reminds us, embeds all privilege.

Third-wave feminism also shares many philosophical concerns, such as self-reflexivity, with other critical approaches (Boonzaier and Shefer 2006, 5–6, 9). Deniz Kandiyoti (1996, 5–6) explains that feminism's more recent preoccupation (since the 1960s) of post-structuralist questions concerning difference and identity was a necessary response to the second wave's fetishisation of both a "universal womanhood" and a supposed monochromatic form of oppression experienced by all women in all cultures at all times. What the third wave brings into focus, therefore, is that patriarchy is not the only adversity that women face (Epstein 1998, 64–5, 69; Martinez 1998, 118, 120). Moreover, while postcolonial feminists may still consult bourgeois Western feminists, they also "highlight ... the specificity of Third World women's experiences" (Kandiyoti 1996, 5). In this respect, it is worth noting that, as shown in Derek Sayer's (1979, 11) excellent study of Marx's general methodology, the latter employs a dialectic between empirical analysis and "the falsity of ideology, without abandoning his materialist view of consciousness." Similarly in this paper, I wish to ground my cross-cultural analysis with both empirical data and feminist theory, as well as with a view towards emancipatory practices.

Regarding feminism specifically, Donna Haraway (1990) explains how one actually inherits one's gender and calls this social phenomenon a "gender identity paradigm," which, as per Foucault's (1973; 1991) ideas on discursive subjectivity, is a spatial-temporal process. Similarly, according to Judith Butler (1990), we perpetually "perform" our adopted gender under great compulsion.

Now, a cross-cultural analysis has four components: a theory of discourse, an evaluation of cultural production, a subversive reading, and a contextual assessment of said reading.

These elements are closely related and discussion will, of course, overlap. For now, let us start by considering the theory surrounding cultural hybridisation.

Cultural Hybridisation

How feasible is the cultural hybridisation of Chinese and South African marital customs? To this end, we will consider Tom Zwart's receptor approach (2012) together with Derrida's (1982, 317) intercontextual transplantation of ideas (his "sliding" of the "signifier"). My project will engage with marriage practices from late nineteenth century China to post-Mao, in the hopes of transposing something helpful to post-apartheid South Africa. Cultural hybridisation appeals to cultural legitimacy, as per Tom Zwart's receptor approach.

The Receptor Approach

Zwart's (2012, 546–547) receptor approach encourages non-Western "home-grown remedies" for greater cultural legitimacy, which manifests when foreign concepts beneficially hybridise with the new context's norms. This receptor approach is named after how receptor molecules act as gatekeepers (Zwart 2012, 548); similarly, respect for cultural integrity is necessary for new ideas to resonate with the host's interior logic. Adding more elements within the new context may even increase both legitimacy and feasibility (Zwart 2012, 554).

Influential receptors in Africa include religiosity, independence, and extended family (Nhlapo 1997, 138). Accordingly, Zwart (2012, 559) states that "the remedy should be tailored to this rationale." One promising Chinese import is the Pledge Society, which opposed foot binding in China with considerable success (Mackie 1996, 999–1001). Likewise, societal preference for "circumcised" girls as future wives in China resulted in the abolitionary counterweight of boys publicly vowing to marry "uncircumcised" girls, similarly to a greatly successful Senegalese campaign. In South Africa, combining indigenous shamanic practices with Western medicine helped to contain the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Liddell, Barrett, and Bydowell 2005; Wreford 2009). These examples demonstrate the receptor approach's great reliance upon ethnography (Ibhawoh 2000, 838, 856–8). Zwart (2012, 564) comments as follows:

To be able to reach and treat patients who shun Western medicine, the HOPE project recruited a number of traditional healers who were willing to incorporate counseling, testing, and antiretroviral treatment into their divination practice. Consequently, the patients who would usually avoid Western biomedicine, but were attracted to traditional healing, were exposed to the benefits of Western biomedicine nonetheless. Rather than replacing the local approach towards healing across the board by scientific medicine, which would probably have driven away the patients, the experiment added to the already existing and operative indigenous system.

Yet, despite the advantages of a hybrid approach, the receptor approach still suffers from its potential for cultural relativism (Olivier 2005, 79n6). However, in exploring possible

methods for the hybridisation of cultural practices, we also necessarily operate according to “both/and” inclusive reasoning. Similarly, Angela Davis (1990) expanded her investigation of Egyptian women’s sexualities (specifically concerning female genital mutilation) to include the postcolonial urgency for economic emancipation. Considerable worth indeed lies in discursively “thinking them together” (Olivier 2013). This poststructuralist methodological marvel leads us to a consideration of Lacanian discourse theory, in which the nature of master or dominant discourse will be examined.

Lacan’s Theory of Discourse

Jacques Lacan’s important and innovative work on discourse attempts to describe both the nature of subjectivity and the relationships between different types of discourse (Lacan 2007; Olivier 2012). Lacan understands discourse as a “naturalising” exercise (2007, 13), whereby a distinct psychic formation occurs according to one of four discursive models.

Firstly, the master’s discourse represents the social dimension into which the subject acquires language and normative socialisation, which is accompanied by the suppression of undesirable elements into the unconscious. This latter process is similar to film editing, wherein miles of reel are organised into a coherent narrative by “cutting out” (repressing) inconsistencies, and thereby eliminating various (possible) historical perspectives. Secondly, the slave’s discourse, such as that of the university, has one predominant aim, namely the production of supposedly unitary, non-contradictory knowledge that legitimises and reinforces the master’s authority.

In contrast to the master and the slave, which attempt to portray a relatively smooth and uncomplicated version of reality, the discourses of the hysteric (third) and the analyst (fourth) are the critical responses that must articulate the inherent contradictions within this narrative. The hysteric’s discourse unremittingly interrogates the various (and inevitable) limitations of the knowledge produced by the master and the university, who masquerade ideology as “objective truth” largely in order to preserve their own power. Concurrently, the analyst’s discourse (Lacan 2007, 13ff) must illuminate the master’s modes of coercion upon the individual’s life. Thus, with the help of the analyst as facilitator, the subject can access and explore psychic potentialities that were previously mystified by the master’s perceived totality. In this way, the analyst also functions as mediator between the hysteric and the two hegemonic discourses, in order for the former two subversive discourses to progressively weaken each succession of the master discourse.

Similar to this dynamic, John Heritage (2006, 146) defines critical discourse analysis as the study of how texts are influenced, as historical artefacts, by certain forms of systemic discrimination against various marginalised groups. By such means, discourse analysis also contemplates possible avenues for the future emancipation of both marginalised individuals and their communities. Likewise, since culture is both sustained and maintained within community, I now turn to a consideration of the role of culture in the formation of discourse.

Culture

In one sense, culture can be defined as the product of pliable, contradictory and oppressive discourses amalgamating into one normative, seemingly cohesive whole (Yanagisako and Delaney 1992, 15–19). Therefore, cross-cultural analysis should reveal the cultural production of normality by, for example, facilitating dialogue between contradictory discourses. Revealing each discourse's history and point of origin should thus greatly lessen its potency. I shall therefore attempt, at a later stage, to describe the discursive configuration that affects contemporary Chinese women and their marriage practices. To this end, it is often necessary to read against the “grain” or greater temptations of normality.

Reading against Normality

By adopting a cross-cultural feminist methodology, the researcher is then able, like the hysteric, to more effectively problematise established cultural norms. Its advantage is its recognition of the historicity of what would otherwise be considered “timeless” cultural institutions and “universally recognised” discourses (Yanagisako and Delaney 1992, 9–14). Foucault's histories and archaeologies of, for example, the prison (1991) and the clinic (1973) are very famous and well-respected works of this nature. Consequently, I shall attempt to apply this form of historical analysis to gender roles in the post-Maoist PRC. At this point in the discussion, however, I wish to consider the value of a contextualised reading.

A Contextualised Reading

This reading, itself bound to be considered profane by the generally more traditionalist Chinese themselves, cannot, as I hope to show later, be universalised. In fact, it “must take into account specific systems of classification and meaning” (Yanagisako and Delaney 1992, 20) and their (inevitably conflicting) discourses, practices, institutions and cultural formations.

Similarly, Edward Said (1978) defines “orientalist discourse” as that intellectual apparatus that justifies the imperial exploitation of the Global South, and which portrays people of colour as destitute without the white man's “civilisation.” For example, foot-binding and femicide are two of the West's most infamous preoccupations with China (Jayawardena 1986, 174–5) that circulate even today, and therefore need especial understanding within their cultural context.

Habermas (1984, 132) likewise insists on “hermeneutical sensitivity” in any cultural reading, although for him (Habermas 1990), this analysis requires scrutiny from the “outside” of “the reasons from the inside.” Although this reading strategy will not likely endear Habermas to Chinese audiences, I intend to do just that. Unless very well-versed in Chinese culture and history, we will not see the forest for the trees or, according to a Chinese idiom, we will only perceive like the frog at the bottom of the well.

I have attempted to show gender roles as a vital topic for cross-cultural analysis. Now I turn to this contribution's investigation into master discourse on gender roles in contemporary Chinese society, and to this end, I highlight two cautionary observations regarding discourse in China.

Two Cautionary Notes regarding Discourse in China

During our discussion of the fluctuations within institutional gender discourse in contemporary China, I urge the reader to keep two cautionary notes on the nature of discourse firmly in mind. This will allow for a more nuanced appreciation of the relationship between ideology itself and dominant discourse.

Firstly, let us not assume that institutionalised gender discourse (Lacanian master discourse) in China has necessarily always been antagonistic towards women's interests. In fact, twice in the recent history of China has it evinced truly emancipatory energy. These two periods occurred after the fall of the last dynasty (1911–1949) and during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

Secondly, no dominant discourse is ever so completely totalising as to eclipse all alternatives and counter-responses. As Thakur (1997, 61) argues, a great many latent positions in potential resistance to hegemony have yet to be articulated into some kind of institutional legitimacy. Bourdieu (1977, 164–165) uses the terms “orthodox” and “heterodox” discourse (much like Lacan's master and rebel [hysterical] discourses) for these mainstream and subversive discourses respectively, and so they will also be used in this contribution. Importantly, heterodox discourses on any issue always appear in both the Left and Right of the political spectrum at any given time. According to Bourdieu (1977), these might end up “in doxa” (inside [intellectual] public discourse) and then remain there until socio-political upheaval forces them into the open to disturb our beliefs “in habitus [sic]” (our ideological comfort zone or “ordinary”). This last observation is also found in Habermas's famous work on the so-called “life world” (Lebenswelt), a term first coined by Husserl.

In this regard, it is worth noting that examining orthodox gender discourse may improve our understanding of the heterodox discourses it spawns. With China's history stretching back at least five millennia, we should limit our scope to either one period or one topic. As marriage is often seen by women, both East and West, as an “ideological trap” (particularly as few Chinese women are able to escape), I briefly consider the evolution of marriage over five periods of Chinese history. It is to this over 150 years of development in Chinese gender discourse, and particularly its impact on marriage, that I now turn.

Five Periods in the Modern Evolution of Chinese Gender Discourse

Pre-revolutionary China

Married women's low social position in traditional Chinese society is well documented (Thakur 1997, 35). Female passivity and modesty (read: sexual stunting) were highly valued (Chow 2005, 599).

The Chinese extended family has generally been the very hierarchical centre of socio-economic life, wherein men enjoy precedence over women, and the old over the young (Cohen 1970, 434). Women's sexual satisfaction was not considered, and both polygamy and the keeping of concubines (a sort of unofficial wife—mostly for sexual ends) flourished among the rich (Thakur 1997, 36). Regulation of female sexuality, as noted above, was and remains strict and may have been the hinge (as men desire heirs) on which her continual subjugation hung.

Women had no intrinsic value in themselves, except as a source of labour for her husband and mother-in-law (Cohen, 1970, 436–437). Yes, a woman had to become a mother-in-law to gain some power. Polygamy (like in traditional African custom), arranged marriages and female sexual slavery were widespread and socially accepted. Matters improved considerably as China entered the twentieth century, a move prompted by the First Opium War.

Democratic China (1911–1949)

The devastating conclusion of the First Opium War (1839–1842) rapidly weakened the Qing Dynasty. Additionally, the Treaty of Nanjing, signed in August 1842, opened up Chinese markets and culture to Western influence, propelling China “with drugs and violence” (Lovell 2012, 11) into the modern world.

After the Opium Wars, the Chinese heartland was dramatically introduced to Western schools, churches, and new ideas like individualism and scepticism (Jaschok and Miers 1994, 19), ideas the Chinese state attempted to keep out at all costs. The result of such socio-political chaos was that many ideas formerly “*in doxa*” entered public discourse. Orthodox ideas were questioned and had, therefore, to be rationalised and subsequently either rejected or accommodated into heterodox or orthodox discourse.

Such times of political upheaval are conducive to radical questioning of normality, notably heteropatriarchal relations, otherwise considered natural and innate (Bourdieu 1977; Goffman 1971, 166, 199).

By the turn of the century, questions of gender, particularly the abolition of marriage and women's education, became burning issues (Cohen 1970, 439–40). The humanitarian need for women's autonomy was often stressed. Anti-Confucianism, anti-imperialism, nationalism and the women's movement operated side-by-side and cross-pollinated.

Dissident literature also drove social change during this time. Notable are Ibsen's plays, and notoriously *A Doll's House*, translated into Chinese early in 1918 (Jayawardena 1986, 184). Just this play caused many Chinese Noras to abandon both husband and children (Jayawardena 1986, 184–185; Thakur 1997, 41). Clearly, Chinese women increasingly engaged in more emancipatory gender discourse.

By 1927, the ideological clashes between Communists and Nationalists (the latter led by Chiang Kai-shek 蔣中正 蔣介石), and supported by the Old Guard and the new mercantile middle class) highlighted disparities in the day's gender discourse (Cohen 1970, 441–443; Thakur 1997, 42–43). While Communists advocated for total revolution (divorce upon demand, emancipation of all women [a lofty goal!] and restructuring of the family), Nationalists clung to old Confucianist, authoritarian gender roles (polygamy, arranged marriages, female sexual slavery). Although the Communists were far more progressive than the Nationalists, the former nonetheless wanted the institution of marriage to regulate gendered relations, as we shall see.

Today South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), professes a largely Marxist approach to the government of post-apartheid South Africa (Johnson 2015, 14, 78, 108), just like the PRC's Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, the egalitarian intent behind both states' policies of exclusive (and China's exclusively heterosexual) monogamy is understandable, even though South Africa exempts cultures and religions and allows these traditions to continue as a constitutional right. This anti-polygamy principle is embedded in Article 3 of both the 1980 and 2001 Marriage Laws of China (PRC 1980; 2001). Incidentally, former South African president Jacob Zuma's having married no less than six wives (while the taxpayer foots the bill) is certainly questionable (*pace* consenting adults?) from a feminist perspective. While there are several local arguments against this practice in South Africa, these objections are often accused of Western-centrism. This non-Western Chinese perspective is, therefore, valuable for the receptor approach's prioritisation of "home-grown remedies" (Zwart 2012, 546–7). This having been said, there are signs that the new business and political (male) black elites are shifting away from the kind of polygamy evinced by former President Jacob Zuma. A single wife and formalised/paid "girlfriend" arrangement would appear to be gaining in popularity as opposed to older invoked traditional forms of relationship attachments, such as polygyny. Class formation and accumulation of wealth in post-apartheid South Africa have led to well-publicised cases of "conspicuous consumption" (where money has literally been burned [König 2015, 90–92, 162, 165]) and the notorious phenomenon of "sugar daddies" and "sugar babies" (Evans 2015; Fleming 2019), not only in the Global North, in countries such as Australia, the UK and the United States, but certainly also in advanced African economies exemplified by Nigeria and South Africa (Ajayi and Mwoka 2019; Tade 2019). Judith Evans (2015) argues that:

Ideas around a woman's agency and choice to earn money from her body and sexual capital in the context of financial constraints need to be balanced against the impact that practices

such as this, which perpetuate the idea that women’s bodies can be bought, could have on gender relations and equality in society.

In the context of so-called “sugar dating,” it should come as no surprise that Evans (2015) suggests that there are 15 times more sugar daddies than sugar mommies.

By the same token, accumulation of wealth and class formation in China have impacted the “master discourse” on marriage. Concubinage is, of course, a very old tradition in China, as I note above in the section on pre-revolutionary China, but I was unable to find any tangible evidence of its continued existence in modern China in the form of the international trend known as “sugar dating.” However, just as a black hole can be observed indirectly, with reference to its impact on its immediate environment, judging by the ongoing activities and resilience of the #MeToo movement in China (Editors 2021a; Feng 2020a), “sugar dating” is almost certainly widespread in modern Chinese societies on the mainland. The recent disappearance of the Chinese tennis star Péng Shuài 彭帅, whose whereabouts is unknown amidst concerns for her safety and well-being, and who has made headlines in the West after she accused a former vice premier of China of sexual assault (Editors 2021b),² is a good example of the pervasive violence and exploitation of women in this harsh heteropatriarchal society.

Putting this in perspective, as a violent backlash against these new attitudes, during the timeframe known as Democratic China (1911–1949), Nationalists amputated the noses and breasts of thousands of progressive young women, before killing them (Cohen 1970, 442–443; Thakur 1997, 43). Understandably, “liberated” Chinese women in the twentieth century’s early decades gravitated towards the Communist Party. However, as Cohen (1970, 445–6) points out, even among Communists—both before and after 1949, when the “new China” was declared—changing gender roles led to dissatisfaction among both men and women—a phenomenon not unfamiliar to the Western women’s feminism movement.

In general, although the Party questioned traditional gender roles, it would not remove all patriarchal institutions. An overview of the regulation of gendered roles after the formation of the PRC in 1949 will demonstrate this point.

People’s Republic of China (1949–1966)

The Communists then enforced restrictive gender discourse by all possible means (Thakur 1997, 188). It is accordingly easy to find orthodox discourse in mid-twentieth century China, as Thakur (1997, 188.) observes.

Although the newly-minted Marriage Act of 1950 (PRC 1950), for example, allowed many women to divorce their spouses upon demand, the state nevertheless maintained the

2 Note the fine write-up in *The New Yorker* on this matter by Louisa Thomas (2021) to the point of her interviewing and quoting a Chinese feminist for her perspective.

heteropatriarchal family. Its legitimacy and feasibility were never in dispute (Thakur 1997, 48). Women were also burdened with additional productive labour as a prerequisite for liberation (Cohen 1970, 454–455). Gender roles were, therefore, not abolished but merely complicated.

By the 1960s, this new orthodoxy had crystallised. Divorce acquired a social stigma and the family a renewed glorification (Cohen 1970, 461). The Chinese had also added to their traditional duties of wife and mother the role of worker and communist cadre—the latter in order to maintain her revolutionary loyalty (Sheridan as cited in Thakur 1997, 51–52). What of the immense time and energy required to juggle these diverse roles?

The ubiquity of crèches and communal eating halls, for example, did not make housework any less women’s work (Cohen 1970, 455–456). Even the workforce, of great beneficial value for women, was still delineated along gendered lines (Thakur 1997, 50–51). Interestingly enough, this reality was instructive of why, because patriarchy turns the home into a space of exploitation, feminists say that “the personal is political” (Steinem as quoted in Duplessis and Snitow 1998, 13; Winslow 1998, 240, 242).

In this way, orthodox gender discourse’s misogynistic division of labour won the day within two decades of the Communists coming to power. This trend then took a more “left-wing” turn during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution.

Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)

Mao Zedong’s 毛泽东 Cultural Revolution reined in reactionary elements (Cohen 1970, 465) in violent interrogation of authority and drastic re-evaluation of Chinese values. Untold misery visited hundreds upon thousands of people, while historically significant cultural treasures were destroyed by youngsters styling themselves as Red Guards (Thubron 1988, 80; Wickert 1984, 32–33) so that revolutionary vigour was chosen over forbearance (Schurman as cited in Thakur 1997, 52). This development did, however, initiate greater questioning of women’s matrimonial alienation.

Said problematisation was spearheaded by Mao’s fourth wife, Jiang Qing 江青 (Cohen 1970, 469; Thakur 1997, 52–3), also equally feared and widely known as Madame Mao. Men were publicly chastised for not fairly sharing chores, and the anti-Confucian campaigns of 1972 (also coinciding with the height of Western feminism) attacked feudal ideas regarding marriage and family. According to Article 13 of the Chinese Marriage Act of 2001, “[h]usband and wife shall have equal status in the family.” In contrast, even though the ANC famously claims commitment to achieving gender equality, post-apartheid South Africa is still a deeply patriarchal society. Accordingly, it is recommended that our mostly male political representatives should similarly facilitate the greater and more equitable distribution of power among all genders.

Men sharing chores obviously allows women to make more democratic contributions to society. This second articulation of gender discourse “*in habitus* [sic]” within one century

thus saw institutionalised gender discourse acquire much more significant emancipatory potential. This utopian experiment in gender equality was not to last, however, as post-Mao politics misappropriated the woman's issue for the sake of a certain mode of "nation-building."

The Post-Mao Era

Most Cultural Revolution gains on women's issues rolled back after Mao's death in 1976 (Thakur 1997, 53–60). Old-fashioned family values received official sanction (Thakur 1997, 53–54) as women again bore responsibility for all childcare and household tasks.

Yet, one development that we as South Africans should consider (despite objections from divorce lawyers), is Article 31 of the Marriage Law of 1980 (PRC 1980) that legalises divorce by agreement via the "marriage registration office" *without the need* for a decree of court—rather than the wasteful, often traumatic litigation of industrialised countries and many emerging economies (including South Africa). I reproduce below the English translation for comparison with existing South African divorce practice, as well as other African countries of the Commonwealth:

Article 31. Divorce shall be granted if husband and wife both desire it. *Both parties shall apply to the marriage registration office for divorce.* The marriage registration office, after clearly establishing that divorce is desired by both parties and that appropriate arrangements have been made for the care of any children and the disposition of property, *shall issue the divorce certificates.* (Own emphasis)

Chinese culture, unlike in America (or even South Africa), generally discourages undue litigation, as interpersonal discussion is preferred. Similarly, the South African Marriage Act should allow for divorce by administrative act. If both parties agree to the marriage's irretrievability, without dispute of either property or custody, spouses should be allowed divorce by agreement, either incorporating an agreement regarding outstanding issues or a divorce without a consent paper. Adults able to conclude a marriage should also arguably have the agency to terminate that arrangement. From a feminist perspective, divorce as an administrative action, without any unreasonable judicial coercion, will help liberate both men and women (but primarily the latter) from unhappy and/or oppressive marriages.³

A very recent amendment to the Civil Code on May 2020 (which is still being widely discussed in China) now requires a "cooling-off period for mutual consented divorce" or a *de facto* "cooling-off period for litigious divorce" of six months in divorce proceedings, to give the parties a further opportunity to reconsider, and perhaps also to settle their

3 Over the last decade and a half, the number of divorces has soared while marriages registered on the mainland have dropped significantly. Divorces were 1.8 per thousand in 2002 but increased to 3.2 per thousand in 2017, while marriages registered have declined from 9.9 per thousand in 2013 to a mere 7.7 per thousand in 2017 (*Global Times* 2018). This might not be good news for Xi Jinping's "China Dream" vision, but it is and remains a reality for China's demographic planning (Langfitt 2019, 186).

problems or issues, assuming this is still an alternative. This legislative innovation seems to stem from the perception of a tide of divorce proceedings, perhaps kowtowing to traditional mainstream Chinese notions of dispute mediation, as well as romanticised ideas of family unity. A further cooling-off period of 30 days is also required in undisputed divorce proceedings before the decree becomes final. Pursuant to the PRC Civil Procedure Law (CPL), “in divorce cases, where a judgment has been made dismissing divorce or where the parties have become reconciled after mediation, and in cases where a judgment has been made to maintain an adoptive relationship or an adoptive relationship is maintained upon mediation, a new action filed for the same case by the plaintiff within six months shall not be accepted without new development or grounds” (China Justice Observer 中国司法观察 2021). The commentators Guodong Du 杜国栋 and Yuan Yanchao 袁燕超 argue that these “divorce proceedings may not be the most beneficial arrangement for women or the vulnerable parties in a marriage” (*China Justice Observer* 中国司法观察 2021). I cannot agree more. As a result, first-time applications for divorce rarely succeed because of judges’ reluctance to allow the first attempt to stand, whereas it is meant to encourage reconciliation. These amendments to the Chinese divorce law are obviously not primarily aimed at enhancing the well-being of the woman (who is usually the vulnerable party). From a feminist perspective, this development is highly inappropriate, considering the pervasive problem of violence against women on the mainland (Feng 2020a).

Additionally, *The New York Times* (Fincher 2018) recently reported that because of demographic concerns, a dropping birth rate and an aging population, the Chinese government relaxed the draconian one-child-rule in 2015 by allowing all couples to have more than one child. But, partly as a result of tough economic times, Chinese women have scoffed at this intrusion into their private lives and many expressed the desire to postpone marriage, perhaps indefinitely (Feng 2020b; Fincher 2018).

These more recent developments in curtailing the freedoms of women, as embedded in dominant discourse on gender, may well be in line with Xi Jinping’s 习近平 ideological remoulding of the Chinese family for the purposes of streamlining his “Chinese Dream” 中国梦 metaphor, which implies a strong and wealthy China (Lötter 2020).

Yet, ideas that we should reject are China’s contemporary blend of feudal patriarchy (a woman’s role as mother/wife, preference of sons over daughters) and more progressive socialism (women in production and the revolution). Tani Barlow (2002, 150) aptly describes the predicament of Chinese women as the result of “complex, situated, revolutionary historical formations.” Ironically, perhaps reform (as was argued in South Africa’s post-apartheid discourse) of gender relations was not needed, but rather a deconstruction thereof.

Similarly, while the historic legislation introduced in May 2019, after the Taiwanese Supreme Court in April 2016 ordered parliament to enact the appropriate legislation, made Taiwan the first modern Asian country to legalise same-sex marriage (*World All News*

Adda 2019), Article 13 of China’s 2001 Marriage Act restricts marriage to one woman and one man. I surmise that this heteronormative approach reinforces marriage’s patriarchal underpinnings. As both Taiwan and China are Confucianist societies, common ancestry can clearly lead to divergent trajectories.⁴

Previously, I noted that during China’s “democratic period,” Communists were more gender egalitarian than Nationalists. Yet, their current positions on same-sex marriage clearly demonstrate the non-linear nature of historical progression, as well as China’s aversion to LGBTIAQ+ diversity. As Colleen Hall (1988, 77n44) notes in a different but similar context, “nature’s purpose ... need not be ours.” Perhaps this perceptive if cryptic remark demands some elucidation. As mammals with the unique ability to think critically and, perhaps even more to the point, think for ourselves, we need not blindly conform to a supposed “purpose” embedded in nature for our benefit and guidance. As the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1986) argues in his profoundly insightful book *The Blind Watchmaker*, the evidence for evolution demonstrates that there is no design in nature. Over time, small incremental changes can and have led to incredible variety. To rephrase, we are free to plan, live and design our own lives without fear of divine judgment, even if we disagree with Dawkins on the predictable conclusions which he draws from this line of argument. Against this brief incursion of neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, it is intriguing to consider the philosophical case (namely, emancipation) for a cross-cultural feminist analysis of historicising gender roles.

This philosophical infusion has, therefore, attempted to demonstrate the great utility of cross-cultural feminist analysis in historicising gender roles, such as various marital customs, to reap some emancipatory potential therefrom. I have also argued that the receptor approach, as a method for facilitating cultural hybridisation, can be very successful at faithfully transferring knowledge across different cultural contexts. Similarly, and interestingly enough, as Ferguson explains in his documentary *China: Triumph or Turmoil?* (2012), China was very fond of mimicking Western technology and culture in the recent past, but have subsequently become more innovative themselves. As this example shows, and according to Ferguson (2012a), the coordination of the “six killer apps” (modern medicine; industrial technology; the Protestant work ethic; market competition; private property rights; and consumerism) which have kept the West dominant over the past half millennium, are now steadily but increasingly beginning to benefit the “Resterners” (Terreblanche 2014). However, although the West does have

4 A poignant example of the differing trajectories of China and Taiwan is the fact that whereas same-sex marriages were legitimised in 2019 in the latter, censors on the mainland blocked access to Rela [热拉], China’s lesbian equivalent of Tinder, in 2017, despite the fact that homosexuality was also decriminalised in 1997 and declassified as a mental illness in 2001 (Zeng 2017). Even though China’s pink economy seems to be flourishing in recent years, officialdom is maintaining a decidedly ambiguous attitude towards homosexuality and lesbianism. The so-called “guardianship appointment” (*yiding jianhu*), for example, means that since 2019, same-sex couples have a measure of legal recognition outside the traditional Chinese marriage arrangement structure (Chen and Wang 2019).

formidable competitors (Ferguson 2010a, 2012b; Jacques 2012; Mações 2018, 1–2; Morris 2010), it also has to contend with its own (understandable) moral self-doubt. Yet the growth of more patriarchal non-Western nations like China (and India, among others) should only receive qualified approval since, as previously shown in this work, even socialist, albeit post-communist, countries may (and usually do) neglect women’s political interests. Cross-cultural feminist analysis, therefore, encourages great vigilance during the examination of any dominant discourse, as no amount of rhetorical veneer could ever succeed in legitimately redeeming either misogyny or patriarchy. Ideological critique, then, remains all too necessary for articulating the (past, present and future) conditions and challenges faced by the global project for the liberation of all women.

Conclusion

Herein have I tried to articulate potential lessons for South Africa from the “Chinese” via cultural hybridisation (and the receptor approach) regarding contemporary mainstream marriage practices. I then employed a feminist methodology in order to study said gender roles. From a brief overview of both progressive and reactionary changes in Chinese marriage, as manifested in master (Lacan) and dominant (Bourdieu) discourse over the past 150 years, I argue that South Africans can benefit from such experience.

I also note many disagreeable Chinese doctrines, such as a disapproval of same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, their dissolution of marriage by agreement through administrative means, their compulsory monogamy, and equal sharing of chores, are Chinese marriage practices we can adopt enthusiastically. I have also, in the spirit of postcolonial feminism, warned against a certain kind of stereotyping that all but discounts the agency of women who live in the Global South. Marriage does not only remain an ideological trap for women in a post-communist,⁵ though authoritarian, China, but this patriarchal institution is also increasingly pressed into service to further the objectives of the nation-state and certainly demonstrates that the developmental trajectory of an emancipatory social project, such as the liberation of women on the cusp of the twenty-first century, is anything but linear and may even see many reverses (as seen with the Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan after the very recent US troop withdrawal in August 2021 and the disturbing turning of the tide against abortion rights in the US as well as, incidentally, China). I argue that my utilisation of cross-cultural analysis as a methodology within a feminist theoretical framework has shown the value and relevance of transnational feminist theory in a century that is increasingly having to mediate Chinese concerns in a multi-polarised world. In this exercise, my efforts have benefited from the insights of scholars on the management of cross-cultural learning in China-Africa relations—notably that of Terry Jackson, Habermas’s valuable notion of emancipatory practices, and the work of Derek Sayer on the dialectic of empirical data and the experiential basis of consciousness.

5 There are increasing signs, however, that Xi Jinping’s rule is returning China to a more conservative, even pre-Deng, communist outlook (Langfitt 2019, 162).

Finally, as this contribution has attempted to demonstrate, dominant/master discourses are always resolutely shadowed by the many subversive/rebel discourses that threaten to draw off their bitterly-fought-for legitimacy. Herein I have not considered emancipatory marriage practices, as these are rebel discourses and thus require separate attention. Some examples are: Cantonese women's resistance to marriage during the early twentieth century (Jayawardena 1986, 174; Yanagisako and Delaney 1992, 21n4); the lifelong bond between married-women-as-sisters (*laotong*, as depicted in Wayne Wang's film, *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* [2011]); and the Miao people's allowance of multiple partners for women. Alas, proposed legislation in South Africa that would allow women to marry more than one partner, in following the example of polygamy set by men, was met with an outcry—and thereafter a deafening silence. These discourses have, however, been addressed in a separate contribution (Lötter 2021).

As will become increasingly unavoidable over the next few years, and most likely even decades, this hegemonic shift from West to East will necessitate much more intensive multicultural dialogue with peoples of other nations, most notably the Chinese. Yet, while feminism will still have to adapt to many great and unforeseen challenges, the liberation of all women is infinitely worth the height of every hurdle. Clearly, perhaps more than ever before, the political is and remains personal. Feminism depends upon it.

References

- Ajayi, A. I. and M. Mwoka 2019. "We Asked Nigerian Students about Transactional Sex on Campus." *The Conversation Africa*, December 23. Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/we-asked-nigerian-students-about-transactional-sex-on-campus-128331>.
- Allen, J., and I. M. Young. 1989. "Introduction." In *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, edited by J. Allan and I. M. Young, 1–17. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barlow, T. 2002. "Picture More at Variance: Of Desire and Development in the People's Republic of China." In *Feminist Post-development Thought*, edited by K. Saunders, 146–58. London: Zed Books.
- Boonzaier, F., and T. Shefer. 2006. "Gendered Research." In *The Gender of Psychology*, edited by F. Boonzaier, 3–11. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812507>.
- Brownmiller, S. 2000. *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*. London: Aurum Press.
- Buck, P. S. 1957. *Letter from Peking*. New York: John Day.
- Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

- Chen, X., and W. Y. Wang. 2019. "How China Is legally Recognising Same-sex Couples, but not Empowering them." *The Conversation Australia*, October 2. Accessed December 6, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/how-china-is-legally-recognising-same-sex-couples-but-not-empowering-them-122270>.
- China: Triumph or Turmoil?* 2012. [Film.] Directed by Adrian Pennink, written and narrated by Naill Ferguson. UK: Chimerica Media.
- China Justice Observer* 2021. "Why Chinese Courts Tend to Dismiss First-time Divorce Applications?" September 5. Accessed September 8, 2021. <https://www.chinajusticeobserver.com/a/why-chinese-courts-tend-to-dismiss-first-time-divorce-applications>.
- Chow, R. 2005. "Against the Lures of Diaspora: Minority Discourse, Chinese Women, and Intellectual Hegemony." In *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory*, edited by G. Desai and S. Nair, 589–607. Oxford: Berg.
- Cohen, C. B. 1970. "Experiment in Freedom: Women of China." In *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, edited by R. Morgan, 33–70. New York: Vintage.
- Cohen, L. 1992. [Music Record Album]. "Anthem." In *The Future*. Columbia Graphophone Company: United States.
- Crotty, A. 2015. "Getting Beijing in Step with Africa's Beat." *Sunday Times Business Times*, June 7, 3.
- Davis, A. Y. 1990. "Women in Egypt: A Personal View." In *Women, Culture, Politics*, 116–154. London: Women's Press.
- Dawkins, R. 1986. *The Blind Watchmaker*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Derrida, J. 1982. "Signature Event Context." In *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by A. Bass, 307–330. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Duplessis, R. B., and A. Snitow. 1998. "A Feminist Memoir Project." In *The Feminist Memoir: Project Voices from Women's Liberation*, edited by R. B. Duplessis and A. Snitow, 3–24. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Eco, U. 2008. "The Prospects for Europe." In *Turning back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism*, translated by A. McEwen, 37–43. New York: Vintage.
- Editors 2021a. "#MeToo Setback in Court for CCTV Intern: Q and A with Scholar Darius Longarino." *SupChina*, September 16. Accessed November 24, 2021. <https://supchina.com/2021/09/16/metoo-setback-in-court-for-cctv-intern-qa-with-scholar-darius-longarino/>.

- Editors 2021b. “Sports Stars Tweet Support for Disappeared Tennis Champion Peng Shuai after #MeToo Allegations against retired Party Official.” *SupChina*, November 18. Accessed November 24, 2021. <https://supchina.com/2021/11/18/sports-stars-tweet-support-for-disappeared-tennis-champion-peng-shuai-after-metoo-allegations-against-retired-party-official/>.
- Epstein, B. 1998. “Ambivalence about Feminism.” In *The Feminist Memoir: Project Voices from Women’s Liberation*, edited by R. B. Duplessis and A. Snitow, 124–148. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Evans, J. 2015. “Rise in ‘Sugar Babies’ Mirrors Increase in Student Sex Work.” *The Conversation UK*, July 16. Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/rise-in-sugar-babies-mirrors-increase-in-student-sex-work-44377>.
- Feng, J. 2020a. “Chinese Songs that Say ‘Me Too.’” *SupChina*, December 16. Accessed December 26, 2020. <https://supchina.com/2020/12/16/chinese-songs-that-say-me-too/>.
- Feng, J. 2020b. “Should Chinese Women have multiple Husbands?” *SupChina*, June 3. Accessed December 26, 2020. <https://supchina.com/2020/06/03/should-chinese-women-have-multiple-husbands/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CPolyandry%20has%20a%20long%20history>.
- Ferguson, N. 2012a. *Civilization: The Six Killer Apps of Western Power*. London: Penguin.
- Ferguson, N. 2012b. *The Great Degeneration*. London: Penguin.
- Fincher, L. H. 2018. “China Dropped its One-child Policy. So Why Aren’t Chinese Women Having more Babies?” *New York Times*, February 20. Accessed September 8, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/opinion/china-women-birthrate-rights.html>.
- Flax, J. 1996. *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fleming, P. 2019. “Sugar Daddy Capitalism: Even the World’s oldest Profession Is Being Uberised.” *The Conversation Australia*, January 14. Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/sugar-daddy-capitalism-even-the-worlds-oldest-profession-is-being-uberised-109426>.
- Foucault, M. 1973. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. [1963] Translated by A. M. S. Smith. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. 1991. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. [1975] Translated by A. Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.
- Gadamer, H. G. 1975. *Truth and Method*. [1960]. 1st edition. Translated by G. Barden and J. Cumming. New York: Seabury Press.

- George, R. 2006. "Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, edited by E. Rooney, 11–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521807069.011>.
- Global Times* 2018. "Divorces in China Rise for 16 Years, Marriages sharply fall Since 2014." August 12. Accessed December 6, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/201808/1114985.shtml>.
- Goffman, E. 1971. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.
- Grondin, J. 1994. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated by J. Weinsheimer. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Habermas, J. 1984[1987]. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. [1981] Translated by T. McCarthy. Two Volumes. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. 1990. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," translated by J. Bleicher. In *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, edited by G. I. Ormiston and A. D. Schrift, 245–272. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hall, C. 1988. "Rape: The Politics of Definition." *South African Law Journal*, no. 105: 67–82.
- Hamilton, C. M. 1981. *Marriage is a Trade*. [1909]. London: The Women's Press.
- Haraway, D. 1990. "'Gender' for a Marxist Dictionary: The Sexual Politics of a Word." In *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 127–148. London: Free Association Press.
- Haste, H. 1993. *The Sexual Metaphor*. New York: Harvester.
- Heldke, L. M. 2002. "Cross-cultural Analysis." In *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories*, edited by L. Code, 111–112. London: Routledge.
- Heritage, J. 2006. "Discourse Analysis." In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, edited by B. S. Turner, 145–146. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ibhawoh, B. 2000. "Between Culture and Constitution: Evaluating the Cultural Legitimacy of Human Rights in the African State." *Human Rights Quarterly* 22 (3): 838–856. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2000.0034>.
- Institute for Economics and Peace. 2018. *Global Peace Index*. Accessed September 16, 2021. <https://www.hsdl.org/c/from-the-institute-for-economics-and-peace-2018-global-peace-index/>.
- Jackson, T. 2012. "Cross-cultural Management and the Informal Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for Organization, Employment and Skills Development." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 23 (14): 2901–2916. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.671510>.

- Jacques, M. 2012. *When China Rules the World*, 2nd edition. London: Penguin.
- Jaschok, M., and S. Miers. 1994. "Women in the Chinese Patriarchal System: Submission, Servitude, Escape and Collusion." In *Women and Chinese Patriarchy: Submission, Servitude and Escape*, edited by M. Jaschok and S. Miers, 1–24. London: Zed Books.
- Jayawardena, K. 1986. "Feminism and Revolutionary Struggles in China." In *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 167–195. London: Zed Books.
- Johnson, R. W. 2015. *How Long will South Africa Survive? The Looming Crisis*, 1st edition. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.
- Kandiyoti, D. 1996. "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies." In *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*, edited by D. Kandiyoti, 1–27. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Kesselman, A. 1998. "Our Gang of Four: Friendship and Women's Liberation." In *The Feminist Memoir: Project Voices from Women's Liberation*, edited by R. B. Duplessis and A. Snitow, 25–53. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- König, I. 2015. "Whither South Africa: Neoliberalism or an Embodied Communitarian Indigenous Ethic?" Unpublished PhD thesis. Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Lacan, J. 2007. *The Other Side of Analysis: 1969–1970. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 17*, translated by R. Grigg. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Langfitt, F. 2019. *The Shanghai Free Taxi: Journeys with the Hustlers and Rebels of the New China*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Law, S., and P. Liu. 2008. "Suicide in China: Unique Demographic Patterns and Relationship to Depressive Disorder." *Current Psychiatry Reports*, no. 10: 80–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-008-0014-5>.
- Lerner, G. 1981. *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Liddell, C., L. Barrett, and M. Bydawell. 2005. "Indigenous Representations of Illness and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Social Science and Medicine* 60 (4): 691–700. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.06.020>.
- Liu, M. 2002. "Rebellion and Revenge: The Meaning of Suicide of Women in Rural China." *International Journal of Social Welfare*, no. 11: 300–309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2397.00239>.

- Lötter, C. 2020. "China's long, unfinished 20th Century and its Global Implications." *Mail & Guardian Thoughtleader*, October 28. Accessed September 8, 2021. <https://thoughtleader.co.za/chinas-long-unfinished-20th-century-and-its-global-implications/>.
- Lötter, C. 2021. "Rebel Discourse(s) on Gender as Demonstrated by Contemporary and Historical Chinese Marriage Practices." *Phronimon* 22 (September):20 pages. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/9177>.
- Lovell, J. 2012. *The Opium War*. London: Picador.
- Mackie, G. 1996. "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account." *American Sociological Review* 61 (6): 999–1017. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096305>.
- Mann, S. 1997. *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Maçães, B. 2018. *The Dawn of Eurasia: On the Trail of the New World Order*. London: Allen Lane.
- Martin, E. 1989. *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Martinez, E. B. 1998. "History Makes Us, We Make History." In *The Feminist Memoir: Project Voices from Women's Liberation*, edited by R. B. Duplessis and A. Snitow, 115–123. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- McLoughlin, A. B., M. S. Gould, and K. M. Malone. 2015. "Global Trends in Teenage Suicide: 2003–2014." *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine* 108 (10): 765–780. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qjmed/hcv026>.
- Mohanty, C. T. 2006. "Defining Genealogies: Feminist Reflections on Being South Asian in North America." In *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopaedia of Third-wave Feminism (volume 2): Primary Documents*, edited by L. L. Heywood, 46–54. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Morris, I. 2010. *Why the West Rules for now*. London: Penguin.
- Mullaney, T. S. 2011. *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.5586>.
- Murray, C. J. L., and A. D. Lopez. 1996. *The Global Burden of Disease: A Comprehensive Assessment of Mortality and Disability from Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors in 1990 and Projected to 2020*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nestle, J. 1998. "A Feminist History." In *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation*, edited by R. B. Duplessis and A. Snitow, 338–49. New York: Three Rivers Press.

- Nhlapo, T. 1997. *The African Customary Law of Marriage and the Rights Conundrum*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Olivier, B. 2005. "The contemporary Context of Relativity and Relativism." *Acta Academica Supplementum*, no. 2: 73–104.
- Olivier, B. 2012. "Lacan on the Discourse of Capitalism: Critical Prospects." In *Intersecting Philosophical Planes: Philosophical Essays*, 47–67. Bern: Peter Lang.
<https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0353-0322-3>.
- Olivier, B. 2013. "Modernism, Postmodernism and Poststructuralism, the Difference." *Mail and Guardian*, May 24. Accessed September 8, 2021.
<https://thoughtleader.co.za/bertolivier/2013/05/24/modernism-postmodernism-and-poststructuralism-the-difference/comment-page-3/>.
- People's Republic of China 1950. [Law]. *The Marriage Law*. Beijing: Government Printers. Accessed September 8, 2021.
[https://zh.m.wikisource.org/wiki/%E4%B8%AD%E8%8F%AF%E4%BA%BA%E6%B0%91%E5%85%B1%E5%92%8C%E5%9C%8B%E5%A9%9A%E5%A7%BB%E6%B3%95_\(1950%E5%B9%B4\)](https://zh.m.wikisource.org/wiki/%E4%B8%AD%E8%8F%AF%E4%BA%BA%E6%B0%91%E5%85%B1%E5%92%8C%E5%9C%8B%E5%A9%9A%E5%A7%BB%E6%B3%95_(1950%E5%B9%B4)).
- People's Republic of China 1980. [Law]. *The Marriage Law*. Beijing: Government Printers. Accessed September 8, 2021.
<http://wenku.baidu.com/view/e22aa04ce45c3b3567ec8b4e.html>.
- People's Republic of China 2001. [Law]. *The Marriage Law*. Beijing: Government Printers. Accessed September 8, 2021. <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/lqfw/flfg/china/t264345.html>.
- Phillips, M. R., X. Li, and Y. Zhang. 2002. "Suicide Rates in China, 1995–99." *Lancet*, no. 359: 835–840. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(02\)07954-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(02)07954-0).
- Phillips, M. R., G. Yang, Y. Zhang, L. Wang, H. Ji, and M. Zhou. 2002. "Risk Factors for Suicide in China: A National Case-control Psychological Autopsy Study." *Lancet*, no. 360: 1728–1736. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(02\)11681-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11681-3).
- Richards, J. R. 1991. *The Sceptical Feminist: A Philosophical Enquiry*, 1st edition. New York: Penguin.
- Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
- Sayer, D. 1979. *Marx's Method: Ideology, Science and Critique in Capital*. Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press.
- Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* 2011. [Film]. Directed by Wayne Wang. Chinese Mandarin and Korean with English subtitles. China: Big Feet Productions.

- Spelman, E. V. 1990. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. London: The Women's Press.
- Spivak, G. C. 1981. "French Feminism in an International Frame." *Yale French Studies*, no. 62: 154–184. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2929898>.
- Spivak, G. C. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271–313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19059-1_20.
- Suneja, K. 2002. "The Empowerment of Women through International Law." In *Women in Developing Countries: Assessing Strategies for Empowerment*, edited by R. Datta and J. Kornberg, 31–46. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Tade, O. 2019. "What Nigerian Students Told us about Transactional Sex on Campus." *The Conversation Africa*, May 12. Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/what-nigerian-students-told-us-about-transactional-sex-on-campus-116610>.
- Tang, C. S. K. 2010. "A Gender Perspective on Chinese Social Relationships and Behavior". In *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, edited by M. H. Bond, 533–553. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199541850.013.0032>.
- Terreblanche, S. 2014. *Western Powers*. London: Penguin.
- Thakur, R. 1997. *Rewriting Gender: Reading Contemporary Chinese Women*. London: Zed Books.
- Thomas, L. 2021. "Peng Shuai and the High Stakes of Business in China." *The New Yorker*, November 23. Accessed November 25, 2021. https://www.newyorker.com/sports/sporting-scene/peng-shuai-and-the-high-stakes-of-business-in-china?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=tny&utm_mailing=TNY_.
- Thubron, C. 1988. *Behind the Wall: A Journey through China*. New York: Penguin.
- Warhol, R. R., and D. P. Herndl. 1991. "About Feminisms." In *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, edited by R. R. Warhol and D. P. Herndl, ix–xviii. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-22098-4>.
- World Health Organisation 2009. "Women and Suicide in Rural China." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 87 (12): 885–964. <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/12/09-011209.pdf?ua=1>. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.09.101209>.
- Wickert, E. 1984. *The Middle Kingdom: Inside China Today*, Translated by J. Brownjohn. Sydney: Pan Books.

- Winslow, B. 1998. "Primary and Secondary Contradictions in Seattle: 1967–1969." In *The Feminist Memoir: Project Voices from Women's Liberation*, edited by R. B. Duplessis and A. Snitow, 225–248. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- World All News Adda 2019. "Taiwan Becomes first Country in Asia to Legalise Same-sex Marriage." *World All News Adda*, May 19. Accessed September 11, 2021. <https://worldallnewsadda.blogspot.com/2019/05/taiwan-becomes-first-country-in-asia-to.html>.
- Wreford, J. 2009. "The Pragmatics of Knowledge Transfer: An HIV/AIDS Intervention with Traditional Health Practitioners in South Africa." *Anthropology Southern Africa* 32 (1–2), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2009.11499977>.
- Yanagisako, S., and C. Delaney. 1992. "Naturalizing Power." In *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*, edited by S. Yanagisako and C. Delaney, 1–22. London: Routledge.
- Zakaria, F. 2011. *The Post-American World*. London: Penguin.
- Zeng, M. J. 2017. "LGBTQ Rights in Mainland China looking gloomy after Taiwan's new Ruling on Same-sex Marriage." *The Conversation Australia*, July 3. Accessed December 6, 2021. <https://theconversation.com/lgbtq-rights-in-mainland-china-looking-gloomy-after-taiwans-new-ruling-on-same-sex-marriage-78695>.
- Zwart, T. 2012. "Using Local Culture to Further the Implementation of International Human Rights: The Receptor Approach." *Human Rights Quarterly*, no. 34: 546–69. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2012.0020>.