

**Gender Reality in the Chinese Terms and Expressions
Observed on Websites in Current China**

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From the sociolinguistic perspective, language is a commanding medium that reflects, reserves, and shapes the social reality (Green, 2000; Ochs, 1993). For example, the reality of the “male-above-female” gender hierarchy in patriarchal societies is well registered in the linguistic form across many languages. The generic use of unmarked, inclusive male terms in contrast to the marked, included female terms is not exceptional but prototypical, seen in English (Lei, 2006; Pu, 2010), the Norwegian language (Blakar, 1975), German (Shue, 2000), and Chinese (Shu, 2001), just to name a few. The study on the correspondence between gender-related linguistic forms and gender equality in 134 countries (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laaks, 2012) discovered that grammatically gendered languages (e.g., each noun has a grammatical form that indicates its gender category) were associated with lower gender equality in those language-speaking countries in comparison with the countries where people used natural gender or genderless languages (i.e., without grammatical gender). Furthermore, linguistic asymmetry exists, for example, Takemaru (2005) reported many dehumanizing terms solely for women, without parallel terms for men, among the words spontaneously generated by his Japanese female interviewees.

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This referential function of language to link linguistic expressions to non-linguistic social reality (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001) means that sociocultural changes can reciprocally alter language to reflect the changed reality, which implacably affects language users' psychosocial cognition, attitudes, and behavior. Kim's 2008 study detailed this intricate interplay of social reality, language, and people's gender attitudes by systematically recording the gradual semantic changes of some female-specific terms toward negative valence in correspondence to the gradual changes in the sociocultural contexts in three countries (Korea, China, and Japan), as well as the parallel changes in the language users' attitudes toward the women addressed by those terms.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Hellinger and Bußmann proposed a project of gender across languages to answer the question of how language represents gender in linguistic structure and semantics when language serves its referential and psychosocial functions to contribute to "the construction and communication of gender" (2001, p. 16). Their project included Mandarin Chinese, a language absent of grammatical gender and spoken by a very large population. Most information in the literature, however, is focused on the links between the Chinese language and the traditional gender norms related to women-devaluing Confucius doctrines (e.g., Ettner, 2001; Fan, 1996; Soo, 2012; Zhang, 2001). Almost all reviews of gender-related linguistic changes in response to social changes covered the time *before* the very important era of modernization and economic reform that started in 1978 (e.g., Attané, 2012; Barlow, 1993; Ettner, 2001). There is an urgent need to examine the status of Chinese women as reflected in the contemporary language in the *current* period of modernization.

Nowadays, social practices are no longer limited to the actuarial forms. They are in cyberspace, too. In that virtual world, people's meaning making of the real world, including the gender reality, is psychologically valid. Researchers should include websites to study how

gender is presented, discussed, and negotiated through the language women and men use online. In this regard, little literature exists about how Chinese women are being treated in the *cyberspace* at the sociolinguistic level.

Seeing these two voids in the literature of women and language, the author was motivated to conduct an exploratory study of the gender reality reflected in the gender-related terms, expressions, and sayings in Mandarin Chinese accessible on websites in China to answer the following questions:

1. What women's status, relative to men's, is conveyed in the most basic linguistic structure (the female radical, word position) of Chinese?
2. What do Chinese idiomatic expressions say about the most valuable capital for women vs. for men?
3. Is there linguistic asymmetry in Chinese terms and expressions, and if there is, in favor of which gender?
4. How are Chinese women of the 21st century being addressed and described in the current era of modernization and economic reform?

Method

Three very popular mega-websites with powerful search engines were first identified using Alexa's ranking (2013): 百度 (one hundred degrees), 搜狐 (searching fox), and 搜搜 (search search), each with a bunch of sub-sites. Guided by the questions listed above, the author, a Chinese-born American competent with Mandarin Chinese and familiar with the Chinese society and culture, used the following gender-balanced search phrases: “女/男字旁的字” (words with the female/male radical), “形容女人/男人/女性/男性/容貌/才华的词语” (expressions describing women/men/femininity/masculinity/appearance/intellectual talents); and “汉语中的性别” (gender

in Chinese). Searching on other websites, including Google, typically displayed links to those three sites, especially the first one. Word etiology and interpretation were consulted using online dictionaries: 象形字典 (pictographs dictionary), 词典王 (dictionary king), and 中教网成语词典 (dictionary of Chinese idioms at the secondary school teachers' net).

Results and Discussion

Due to the exploratory nature of this qualitative study and absence of a valid coding system, the method of “qualitative content analysis” was employed to “extract the relevant information from the original text and process only this information” (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). This was a critical step to link raw data to research questions in content analysis, highly valuable to an exploratory, qualitative study like the present one. “Qualitative content analysis” is particularly suitable to analyze gender-relevant expressions in Mandarin Chinese, an ideographic, genderless language in which gender is referenced or implied at the semantic and pragmatic levels (Ettner, 2001). For the purpose of the current study, gender-relevant information was extracted at the lexical and semantic levels from the terms, expressions, and sayings observed on the websites in current China and was processed according to the research questions listed above to facilitate thematic pattern identification. Results and discussion were put together into one section for ease of comprehension.

Women’s Status in the Most Basic Linguistic Structure of Chinese

For many years in the past, Chinese women were valued primarily for their reproductive functions and service roles in the domestic sphere and men primarily for their intellectual talents for their productive functions and governing roles in the public sphere. Women were subordinate to men (Brownell & Wasserstom, 2002; Fan, 1996). This “male-above-female” gender hierarchy was registered in the Chinese basic linguistic structure (also refer to Ettner, 2001).

Disparaged Female Status in Radical 女. In oracle bone inscriptions (甲骨文), 女 (female) looked like a person on knees with the arms circling before the bosom in a yielding position. Table 1 lists some of the Chinese characters composed with this female radical and other parts, all denoting and connoting women being demeaned. According to Ma (2009), among the 100 out of 257 words with the radical 女 that could be judged in valence, 35 percent were negative. Of the 47 percent that were positive, many only described the desirable feminine physical attributes such as 娇 (being delicate, charming); 婷 (graceful); and 嫩 (young, tender, inexperienced). The male radical 男, rarely used in word formation in Chinese, was found in only a few: 鬻 (unhappy, angry) – but still, with the female radical 女 in the middle; 舅 (mother's brother); and 甥 (a sister's child [on the mother's side]).

Table 1

Meaning of the Female Radical and the Words Created from It

Female Radical	Ancient Origin	Meaning
女 (female)		Looking like a person on knees with the arms circling before the bosom in a yielding position
奴 (slave)	女 (female) + 又 () a symbol resembling a hand to grasp/capture)	During frequent wars in the ancient times, defeated men were killed and their women taken in as slaves
妾 (concubine)	 a combination of  (shackles and instruments for torture) and  (female)	Encoding a woman's meek, submissive status in a sexual relationship
奸	女+干 ( , weapon, invasion)	Wicked, evil, treacherous; rape, adultery
妖	女+夭 ( , a dancing person)	Evil, seductive; demon
嫖	女+票 () waving flame, unstable)	To frequent brothels
娼	女+昌 ( , persuading/proposing with arms raised/excitement)	Prostitute
婢	女+卑 ( , a servant holding a round fan)	Maid
婪	林 ( , many)+女	Greedy – possession of many female slaves

Privileged Male Status in Word Position. People interpret what at the first position as primary, important, and superior. The primary typically dominates and leads (Soo, 2012). What at the second position is secondary, supplementary, subordinate, and inferior. “Male first and female second” is the dominant word order in many Chinese terms and idiomatic expressions: 夫 婦/夫妻 (husband-wife); 公婆 (husband-wife or father-in-law and mother-in-law); 祖/父母 (grand/father-mother); 子女/儿女 (son-daughter/children); 兄弟姐妹 (brothers-sisters/siblings); 叔叔 婶婶 (uncle-aunt); 龙凤胎 (twins with one boy [male dragon] and one girl [female phoenix]); 男男 女女 (men and women [people in general]); 少男少女 (young boys-young girls); 男尊女卑 (men superior, women inferior); 男欢女爱 (man in joy, woman in love); 男女有别 (men and women [be] differentiated or separated); 男耕女织 (man plowing, woman weaving); 牛郎织女 (the cowboy-the

female weaver [in a popular Chinese fairytale]; 金童玉女 (a gold-like boy, a jade-like girl); 郎才女貌 (a man with talent, a woman with beauty); 才子佳人 (talented male scholar, beautiful girl).

This male-female order is also extended to natural phenomena and personality traits: 天地合一 (union of the sky [male] and the land [female]); 雷公电母 (father thunder and mother lightning); 日月交替 (the sun [male]-moon [female] cycle); 刚柔并济 (both firm [masculine] and soft [feminine]).

Valued Capital for Her vs. for Him

The division of labor by gender in patriarchal China requires a woman to capitalize on her physical attractiveness to secure a good husband but a man to capitalize on his intellectual talents to excel in learning to be a government officer in old days (学而优则仕) and to secure a position with high yields in power and money nowadays.

Youthful Beauty/Sexual Appeal as Her Capital. The marketable capital of women desired by the male world used to be (and still is) their youthful beauty and sexual appeal, evidenced in numerous phrases and idioms. Don't be mistaken that the following examples are outdated. They are not. A lot of online visitors ask/search for such expressions and they pop up everywhere on the Web. They are still in heavy use, particularly in poems, stories, songs, movies, and dramas. Here are some prototypical examples:

Highly desired girls should have faces as pretty as peach blossoms (面若桃花), eyebrows as curved willow leaves (弯弯柳叶), little mouths like cherries (樱桃小口), muscles like ice and skin like jade (冰肌玉肤), bones as flexible as water (柔骨似水), jade-like hands with slender fingers (纤纤玉手), fingers like green onion sprouts (指如青葱), a slender waist that can be taken by just one hand (盈盈一握/不盈一握, 纤纤细腰), and 3-inch golden-lotus feet (三寸金莲 [although banned now, women's feet should still be small and cutely pretty – 小巧玲珑]). They should stand

straight to look slender (亭亭玉立), walk like willow trees in a breeze (风摆杨柳), sing like a lark and talk like a swallow (莺歌燕语), speak in a voice like a silver bell ringing (银铃般的声音), with words like pearls flowing onto a jade tray (珠落玉盘), and smile without showing the teeth (笑不露齿). In a word, they have an appearance that lets the moon and flowers feel too shy to appear (闭月羞花), that makes fish hide at the bottom and wild geese fall from the sky (沉鱼落雁之貌), or that causes countries and cities to collapse (倾国倾城). They are so pretty that their beauty is “edible” (秀色可餐) [of course devoured by men].

A girl’s sexual appeal and virginity are essential. Virgins during teen ages (豆蔻年华) are most valued and they are yellow flowers in blossom (黄花闺女). Those who have lost virginity are faded flowers and withered willows (残花败柳).

Age of course is women’s woe. With probably only one exception about middle-aged women, provided their good figure still remains – 徐娘半老, 风韵犹存 (in her middle age her grace still remains), other expressions associated with aging women are negative because aging for women equals to capital loss: 红颜易老 (easy for a girl’s look to age), 人老珠黄, 年老色衰/人老珠黄不值钱 (an old woman, like a yellowish pearl, loses beauty/is worthless), or 黄脸婆 (yellow-faced [ugly, old] woman).

Surely, looking good is much valued for a girl. However, looking good is not insurance for respectful treatment or a good life. Good-looking girls are likely to die young or live a miserable life (红颜薄命).

Intellectual Talents as His Capital. In old times, only men could run the government, so, formal education was given to men only. Intellectual talents deemed to be men’s most important capital and those with scholarly achievements were highly appreciated. Look at the following idioms (*applicable to men only then*): 学富五车, 才高八斗 (with knowledge that can fill

five carts and talents that can fill eight *dou* [a measuring instrument]); 藏龙卧虎 (a hidden dragon, a crouching tiger); 栋梁之材 (the parlor of his country); 雄才大略 (ambitious talents and great strategies); 满腹经纶 (bosom full of famous books); 通今博古, 学贯中西 (mastering all the knowledge current and past, domestic and abroad); 巨儒硕学 (a master-level Confucius scholar); 济世之才 (a talented man who can save the world); 经天纬地 (capable of weaving the sky and the earth); 出将入相 (a man who can be a general [out on the battlefield] and the primary minister [inside the royal court]); 三个臭皮匠, 抵个诸葛亮 (when three ill-skilled cobblers [typically male] work together, they can be as smart as Zhu Geliang [an extremely intelligent man in history]).

With social progress, outstanding female scholars can now be described with some of these expressions originally meant for men solely (e.g., 通今博古, 学贯中西). But notice, the direction is moving the female upward by applying male-specific phrases to women, a principle that does not violate the “male-above-female” order. This principle will be discussed further later.

When women were collectively kept outside the educated circle by denying them access to formal education, there weren't many expressions to exclusively describe women's intellectual talents. In the few expressions as such, physical attractiveness overrides intellectual ability as it occupies the first place, like 秀外慧中 (outwardly pretty, inwardly smart). Some mark the female as an included sub-category of the male, e.g., 扫眉才子 (eyebrow-drawing scholar [man with intellectual talents]), or compare the outstanding woman to a terrific man, e.g., 女中尧舜 (a wise, capable female ruler who is like 尧舜 [two most outstanding emperors in the Chinese history]).

Women Ridiculed for Lack of Brains. When excluded from formal education and deprived of roles in the public sphere, women were inevitably portrayed as ignorant, weak,

indecisive, illogical, and stupid. Many popular phrases evidence low opinions of and contemptuous attitudes toward women (*and women only*): 头发长, 见识短 (long-haired, short-sighted); 妇人之见 (worthless, stupid opinions of a woman); 妇人之仁 (womanly soft-heartedness [weakness/indecisiveness in being blind to its strategic cost or failure]); 一介女流/女流之辈/妇道人家 (being only a woman or belonging to the category of women [implying being incapable of accomplishing anything grand and having no valuable ideas]); 长舌妇 (a woman with a long tongue [she's so senseless that she gossips with no good judgment, spreading rumors and stories only to create confusion, disputes, and mistrust]); and 三个女人一台戏 (when three women come together, the outcome is a hysteric, fussy drama). One way to strongly ridicule a man is to use a woman as his reference in comparison: 还不如一个女人 (you cannot measure up even to a woman [one cannot be worse than that, so shame on you]). To men, women do not qualify for competition: 好男不与女斗 (a good man won't debate/fight/compete with a woman [as she is so low, ignorant, or weak that she doesn't count]). These phrases have been used for thousands of years, and are still alive in contemporary communications.

Devalued Women and Femininity

In a patriarchal society, it is masculinity that counts (Feinman, 1981; Ridgeway, 2001). The strongest linguistic evidence for masculine superiority comes from two phenomena: a) linguistic asymmetry in gender-related expressions (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001), i.e., some negative terms exist exclusively for women without parallels for men (Kim, 2008; Takemaru, 2005); some positive terms exist exclusively for men without parallels for women; and b) gender-differentiated valence change in opposite directions, i.e., when positive/neutral male-specific terms and masculine expressions apply to women, such women rise in status and enjoy

positive valence; when positive/neutral female-specific terms and feminine expressions apply to men, such men slide miserably toward the bottom of the valence scale.

Linguistic Asymmetry. Linguistic asymmetry exists in Mandarin Chinese, evidenced in the negative women-exclusive expressions to ridicule their lack of brains and the positive men-exclusive expressions for their remarkable intellectual talents (described above). In addition, for any setback, failure, defeat, or disaster, it is the female to be the scapegoat: Women are trouble waters (女人是祸水/红颜祸水). Women are grouped with the despicable persons as being the most difficult to handle (唯女子与小人难养也). Women are even worse than the despicable (小人), so, rather upset a despicable person but never a woman (宁可得罪小人, 不可得罪女人). Women have the most malicious heart (最毒妇人心).

Gender-Differentiated Valence Change. Table 2 illustrates the second phenomenon. Notice the opposite directional change in the semantic valence of the directives obtained from female-specific vs. male-specific terms when they are applied to the other sex.

Table 2
Valence of Female/Feminine and Male/Masculine Terms/Expressions and Derivatives

Male/Masculine Terms/Derivatives	Valence When Applied to Women	Female/Feminine Terms/Derivatives	Valence When Applied to Men
<i>Addressing terms/nouns/derivatives</i>			
爷 (a respectful title to address husband, male master): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 爷们 (like a man) [decisive, firm, assertive, loyal, generous, trustworthy, courageous] 哥 (elder brother): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 哥们 (like closely connected brothers) [loyal, 	Positive: 她是个爷/爷们/够哥们。 She is like a man/she is brotherly. [She possesses all the good qualities of masculinity, respected and accepted by men.]	娘 (mother): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 娘们 (like a woman) [being womanly, indecisive, sissy] 娘娘 (a very respectful term reserved to address the empress or grandma on the father's side in some regions in China): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 娘娘腔 (being sissy) 	Negative: 他很娘/娘娘腔/像个娘们。 He is womanly, sissy. [stigmatized for being homosexual; lacking masculinity]

trustworthy, dependable] [All are positive .]		[Original terms are positive but their derivatives become negative .]	
男人(man) 须眉 (the male) 丈夫 (husband) 男子汉(man) • 男子汉大丈夫 (a great man) [a courageous, admirable man, who can shoulder the sky and stand firmly on the ground or 顶天立地] 豪杰 (a hero like Robin Hood) 英雄(hero) [All are positive .]	Positive: 巾帼不让须眉。 她象个男人。 她是个女中丈夫/女中豪杰/巾帼英雄。 She is as good as a man/is like a great man or hero among women. [being courageous, heroic, capable of taking responsibility and achieving big success]	婆 (a term to address mother-in-law or an older woman with respect) 妈 (mother) 姑 (husband's sister) 婆娘 (wife) • 三姑六婆 (three sisters and six women) [fond of gossiping and good for nothing] • 婆婆妈妈 (irresolute, indecisive, talkative) [Original terms are positive or neutral but their derivatives become negative .]	Negative: 他老是婆婆妈妈的, 象个婆娘。 He is indecisive, like a woman. [talkative or being slow; irresolute, lacking assertiveness]
先生 (Mister) [a respectful male-specific addressing term] [Positive .]	Positive: If addressed as 先生, she is respected and acknowledged for her intellectual qualities in scholarly circles.	凤凰 (phoenix) • [山窝窝飞出的] 金凤凰 [She is] a golden phoenix [from a mountain village]. [a successful girl from a low, poor class/region but now with high achievements through hard work] [Positive .]	Negative: 他是个凤凰男。 He is a male phoenix. [a hardworking man from a low, poor class but with such negative traits as “having low self-esteem” and “showing emotional instability,” i.e., conceited if successful and helpless if defeated]
老板 (boss) [a respectful addressing term for a star actor in Beijing opera; a business owner/supervisor] [Positive .]	Positive: If addressed as 老板, the actress is respected and recognized for her excellent performance. Or, she is a successful business		

owner/supervisor.	
Male/Masculine Terms/Derivatives	Valence When Applied to Women
<i>Masculine traits</i>	
阳 (masculine sun) 飒爽英姿 (handsome) [healthy, bright, courageous, and handsome] 胸怀宽广 (liberal-minded) 大气 (generous, able to forgive) [Positive.]	Positive: 她很阳光。 She is happy/bright/ authentic as the sunshine. 她真是飒爽英姿。 She looks handsome and courageous [with masculine beauty and without signs of feminine weakness]. 女人中难得有她那样胸怀宽广/大气的。 A woman like her, who is liberal-minded and generous, is a rarity in the female class.
<i>Masculine core – icons for leadership and power</i>	
东方之狮 (the lion in the East) [the symbol of China and leadership] 吼狮 (a roaring lion) [shaking the world, demanding sovereignty and respect with defiance and strength] [Positive.]	Negative: 河东狮吼 A roaring lioness on the eastern river bank [a ferocious wife, unduly domineering over her husband]
雄鸡一唱天下白 (a cock crows to announce the daybreak) [declaring the darkness is over] [Positive.]	Negative: 牝鸡司晨 A hen announces the morning [an omen for disasters].
老虎 (tiger) [a masculine symbol of status of a king/an emperor or a remarkable hero] [Positive.]	Negative: 母/雌老虎 Tigress [a woman who is very ferocious, bullying, and unreasonable]

The “male-above-female” status is obvious in Table 2. Positive or neutral male terms make positive derivatives and no negative ones. Positive or neutral female terms may generate negative derivatives. Women go upward when receiving male titles or perceived masculine *as long as they don't violate the masculine core of leadership and power*. Application of positive/neutral female terms/expressions to men drags them down to the stigmatized end.

Female-Specific Addressing Terms and Sayings Found on Websites in Current China

Embedded in sociocultural systems, gender relationships will be affected by sociocultural changes and language has to respond to be functional. For example, when the May-Fourth Movement in 1919 introduced concepts of freedom and democracy to China, women were encouraged to take on new social roles (Schwarcz, 1986; Tao, Zheng, & Mow, 2004). Those who accepted new liberal ideas, received formal education, rebelled against traditional ethics for women, and achieved independence through career were known as 新女性 (new women) or 摩登女子 (modern women [many wore Western-style clothes]).

The nationwide Women's Emancipation Movement shortly after the establishment of New China (1949) empowered women through education and career pursuit (Li, 2000; Tao et al., 2004; Zheng, 1997; Author, year). The raised status of women was reflected in a most popular saying then: 妇女能顶半边天 (women capable of holding up half the sky) [remember that the husband used to be referred to as the "sky" and the death of the man meant "天塌了" to the widow [the sky has collapsed]. This saying was so popular that 半边天 (half the sky) became a categorical label for the female class. In the subsequent series of political campaigns, many expressions conveyed what was desired of women: 不爱红装爱武装 (preferring the military look over wearing make-up); 飒爽英姿 (manly handsome); 女子不让须眉 (women being no inferior to men).

All those expressions, however, are unidirectional in that it is masculinity that is applied to women to reduce femininity, not vice versa. Women need to be more like men to get social recognition and praise. Regardless of the bettered conditions for women, the "male-above-female" gender hierarchy is still the same as it used to be.

To know how well women are being treated, what terms are used to address them can be a good indicator as they are sensitive to sociopolitical realities. The female addressing term 小姐

(Miss) vividly illustrates this point. In China before 1949, 小姐 was used to address an unmarried young girl from a family with a decent social status (of positive valence in the social sense due to the socioeconomic status reality). In all revolutionary campaigns during the Mao era (1949-1976), 小姐 became a political label for girls from bourgeois families who were excluded from the revolutionary camp and demanded to go through mandatory soul-digging ideological reform (of negative valence in the political sense due to the political reality then). At the beginning of the economic reform era (1978), 小姐 restored its original meaning as a respectful and pleasant addressing term for young women, especially when their names were unknown (of positive valence in the social sense although deprived of its original association with a higher social class status). But soon, with the economic development came the corruption and sexual exploitation. Young, beautiful, educated girls are hired to sexually attract and entertain important male business partners, investors, powerful government officers, and, to serve male bosses. Thus, 小姐 has gradually acquired negative valence in the moral sense under the current condition (also refer to Kim, 2008).

Now China is in a new stage. Modernization and the economic reform since 1978 have surely opened up even more opportunities for Chinese women than ever before. And indeed, they have achieved remarkably. Then Chinese women of the 21st century should be treated with a lot of due respect. On the other hand, modernization, especially during its early stage, may induce stronger sexism because of intensified competition (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). If so, current Chinese women will suffer from sexism. Survey statistics shows that Chinese women are not on the par with their male counterparts yet; it is still the sex, not the credential, that counts in recruitment, promotion, or leader selection, regardless of women's improved status from 2000-2010 (for details, refer to The Survey Team of the Third Survey on the Status of Chinese

Women, 2013). The author decided to search online for new addressing terms for contemporary women as an indicator of women's status in current China under modernization.

Addressing Terms for Contemporary Chinese Women. The search phrase of “当今社会对女人的称呼” (terms to address women in current society) found a list at 开心网 (happy net) that had been circulated around many other patronized websites. Here is this list, with each term's literal meaning explained in the double quotation marks and its categorical label provided by the list author explained in the parentheses: 美女 “a pretty lady” (妖的, the seductive), 才女 “a talented lady” (刁的, the tricky/cunning), 淑女 “a lady with good manners” (木的, the dumb), 温柔 “a gentle girl” (蔫的, the listless/drooped/ spiritless), 泼辣 “a bold and vigorous girl” (凶的, the ferocious), 阳光 “a girl like the sunshine” (傻的, the silly/idiotic), 冷艳 “a cold beauty” (狠的, the heartless), 传统 “a traditional girl” (土的, the obsolete/outdated), 潇洒 “a natural, unrestrained girl” (洋的, the foreign style fads), 另类 “an unconventional girl” (匪的, the defying outlaws), 风流 “a loose girl” (骚的, the sexually unrestrained), 青春靓丽 “a pretty young lady” (嫩的, the inexperienced), 风韵犹存 “remaining grace” (老的, the old), 众星捧月 “the moon with all stars around” (浪的, the sex seeker), 傲雪凌风 “the unyielding snow against wind” (牛的, the arrogant), 感情专一 “the fidelity” (闲的, the idling [with no pursuers, no sexual appeal]), 追求自我 “for self-actualization” (忙的, the busily occupied), 有女人味 “the feminine” (弱不禁风的, the physically weak), 超女 “super women” (长得不象女人的, those who don't look womanly [lack of femininity]). The literal terms seem to be euphuisms and the interpretive meanings of their categorical referents disparage women.

In current China it is still the male who dominates in both political and financial power structures. Defying the monogamy system specified in the Marriage Law and banned prostitution, financially and politically powerful men have developed a lifestyle to keep

mistresses and/or entertain sexual services without bearing legal consequences (Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China, 2003). Their women are being called 二奶/三奶 (second/third mistress/concubine), 小蜜 (little honey [female secretary who may have sexual relationship with her male boss]), 小三 (little third party [to a married couple]), 金丝鸟 (the lark [mistress]), 三陪小姐 (miss companion who gives trio services: to drink/eat, to converse/play, and to dance with male guests in business-entertainment settings, and sometimes, to provide sex service). The old term 花瓶 (vase on display) is updated to a modern title of 公关小姐 (Miss Public Relation) – the intention to hire good-looking young women to attract and seduce the key male decision-makers in business and government is retained.

Tenacity of Gendered Values. Beauty continues to be perceived as the most important asset for contemporary Chinese women. A current popular saying manifests the tenacity of the traditional gender-differentiated values: 男人四十一枝花 (如日中天), 女人三十/四十豆腐渣 (a man in his forties is a flower or like the sun at noon [at his peak because intellectual assets accumulate with age]; a woman in her thirties/forties is tofu rubbish [a type of food for pigs only because youthful beauty fades with age]). Although there are online voices arguing that older women can have inner beauty as long as they have self-respect and develop wisdom from experiences, quite many claim that 女人越老越不值钱/女人越老越招人烦 (the older a woman is, the less valuable or more annoying she becomes). Even among the protesting voices, some quickly take a turn toward providing beauty secrets for women to keep youthful look and escape from becoming 豆腐渣. A statement that 漂亮/长相就是资本 (pretty look/appearance is the capital) is circulating online and the message to young girls is to 吃青春饭 (make money while young). The following saying from a speech by a successful male entrepreneur has been selected into an online collection of “classic quotes” for women: “20 岁女人比脸蛋, 30 岁女人比身段, 40 岁女人比韵味, 50

岁女人比健康, 60岁女人比财富” (women in the 20s compete with face, in the 30s with figure, in the 40s with gracefulness, in the 50s with health, in the 60s with wealth).

The traditional cultural value that downplays women's intellectual development persists, if not getting worse. Seemingly, it is illogical for men to dislike women with brains since they criticize women for ignorance. In the deep core, there's no contradiction because intellectually capable women not only violate the cultural gender norm/value but also threaten men's privileged position above women's in the intensified competition due to modernization. There are people who do not want women to be smart. Some even go this far to preach “女人之美, 在于蠢得无怨无悔” (a woman's beauty is her complete idiocy with no resentment or regret). Highly educated and successful women are terribly backlashed because they are too agentic to be 小鸟依人 (like a little birdie resting upon a man); they are too old to be 青春丽人 (beauty of youth); and they have too many of their own ideas and are too work-bound to be 贤妻良母, 相夫教子 (dutiful wives and loving mothers to assist husband and raise children). These women are disliked for violating the feminine gender role norms (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006; Author, year).

A substantial number of contemporary Chinese men, like their forerunners, want beautiful young women, with some but not too much education. They do not want women who are older than age 27 (CBS, 2012) or have advanced degrees that threaten their male ego. They love terms like 美眉 (beautiful eyebrows) or 美女 (beautiful lady) that have a focal point on her physical beauty but divert attention from the woman's intellectual ability. At conferences or media shows, it is becoming popular to introduce male guests by their academic titles (as “Professor Zhang, Dr. Li, or Expert Wang”) but female guests (writers and scholars) as “beautiful ladies” (Fang, 2010).

Insulting Terms for Highly Educated, Successful Women. Many women in China have made remarkable advances, but paradoxically, they have to pay a high price for their intellectual and career achievements. Many online postings by men are lashing highly educated, successful women (Chen, 2011; Gai, 2012), although there is a possibility that many gender-egalitarian men may not visit or post on websites. If not married yet, she is 剩女 (a left-over woman), 灭绝师太 (a female kungfu master capable of destroying all), or 圣女 (a holy woman [in a sarcastic sense, so don't woo her]). If successful in career, she is 白骨精 (white-collar, backbone, and elite) [but 白骨精, a skeleton evil, is a notorious female evil figure in a Chinese legendary story] or 三高女 (a woman who is older than 28, has a degree higher than a bachelor's, and earns more than ¥8,000 a month [implying void of love as no man wants her]). If both, she is 败犬 (a loser dog). If critical of male chauvinism and not emotionally affected by her single, unmarried status, she is the Queen of the loser dogs (败犬之王). The reality that educated, successful women have to pay such high social prices has made many start to re-embrace the traditional gender roles that 男人应该以社会为主, 女人应该以家庭为主 (men should primarily focus on society and women on family) and to conclude that for women, 干得好不如嫁得好 (being successful in career is not as worthy as securing a good husband). This belief has become so popular that even high school students say that it is cost effective for girls to marry well; otherwise, they may become "leftover women" (剩女), unwanted by men ([BBS.YingJieShen, 2011](#)).

This goes even farther – a new classification is now circulating on the Web: There are only three kinds of people in the world, i.e., the male, the female, and the female Ph.D. (世界上只有三种人, 就是男人, 女人, 和女博士). The first two connote commonsense normality, referring to normal men and women, and they end up in marriage. The third connotes absence of normality,

referring to the group of women with advanced academic degree who are abnormally “peculiar, rigid, unwanted by men for marriage.” Associated with this third group of female doctorates is an evil message known as 女博士的潜规则 (hidden rules of the female Ph.D.). The online medium spread a story about a “slip” from a vice president of a prestigious university in China that 70 percent of female doctoral students had been 潜规则 (secretly regulated [being sexually taken advantage of]) by their male academic advisors. Here, it is not that crucial whether this story itself is real or a rumor, or the percentage is accurate or not; what important is that this “slip” immediately got circulated across all major Chinese websites and that the majority on the websites believed the existence of 女博士的潜规则 – if a woman is a high achiever (with an advanced degree, promoted to a high position, or famed), she must have exchanged for that with her body. “女博士” is not just a simple title. It has become a linguistic categorical classifier to single out a specific subgroup of women with high intellectual abilities and to press a stamp of sexual stigma on them. It is very upsetting to see that such a respectful academic title is now stuck with such a dirty sexist interpretation.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper cites gender-related linguistic examples in Mandarin Chinese obtained from websites in China to demonstrate how women in China have been presented and described in Chinese words, expressions, and sayings over time, and most importantly, in present China where modernization and economic reform are going on. Despite that sociopolitical changes have benefited Chinese women with expanded opportunities, the fundamental gender inequality in the “male-above-female” gender hierarchy sustains. The cultural values that underscore youthful beauty in women but scorn women’s intellectual development are still very strong as evidenced in the continued use of the traditional gendered terms/expressions and the existence of

linguistic asymmetry. It is extremely disturbing to see Chinese women in the 21st century, those with high education and career success in particular, being relentlessly disparaged, and even sexually assaulted, by the female-specific terms that have recently emerged. Their ready availability in the cyberspace as well as their fast and vast dissemination across websites in China should call for our immediate attention.

The bright side is that positive postings about successful women are increasing on the websites. For example, the summarization of the commons among successful women did not highlight youthful beauty by underscores cultivating good qualities at multiple levels of knowledge and talents, emotional intelligence, positive personality traits, and interpersonal skills (2010, 360doc.com). Some are courageous enough to challenge the radical and/or modern benevolent sexist views and behaviors in the speeches and behaviors by highly wealthy, influential men (Huang, 2015).

While it is of course necessary to have social reforms to achieve true gender equality in China, it will help if we take action at the linguistic level to abolish sexist language (Fan, 1996; Hillinger & Bußmann, 2001; Jung-Palandri, 1991, Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012) in both face-to-face and online communications. We should make a conscious effort to use gender-neutral addressing terms and be mindful of the semantic implications when choosing words to talk gender. Women, in particular, should stop using women-demeaning phrases themselves. Stop circulating on the Internet insulting gendered sayings and lists, like those cited in the paper. Instead, protest and educate. Government-sponsored websites should model sexism-free language. Powerful mega-sites should take social responsibility to educate users on gender equality and encourage/remind users to communicate with due respect for both genders.

The current study is limited to the popular websites where people go to look for information. It does not include the digital communities where people interact at a more personal level, such as blogs and WeChat. A suggestion for interested researchers is to create accounts to become members of the most popular social networks – analogically to use the ethnographic approach in the post-modern sense. I believe that along with the “fans,” researchers can obtain real-time rich data that are authentic and dynamic. The dynamics of gender and language may be more intense and broader than what is discerned at less personal, more public websites.

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