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Changes in Women's Social Status and Eating-related Interactions in Metropolitan China

Abstract: The aim of this article is to discuss the problem of social role of women in contemporary China from eating and drinking behaviour perspective. The article has been written on the base of long term empirical study conducted in contemporary Beijing. The author is focusing on two issues he has noticed during his research: the growing number of young Chinese men behaving courteously towards women, and the growing participation of women in interactions which have been taking place in public (in Beijing restaurants). The author is trying to find out if those phenomena can be considered as important indicators and catalysts of the women's social position advancement or they are just manifestations of insignificant and short-lived fashion.

Keywords: China studies; gender; social role, sociology of food; interactional sociology; interaction rituals.

According to the western European stereotype Chinese women (or more generally, women from the Far East) are compliant and submissive and have very low social status. This stereotype was largely propagated by Chinese writers of the May Fourth Movement[1] such as Lu Xun or Chen Dongyuan (Ko 1994: 2) and later accentuated and condemned by the Chinese Communists including those who were active during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (Ibid.: 3). Women's position in imperial China has even been called enslavement. Interestingly, the echoes of these ideas can still be found both in western literature, mainly of feminist inclination (e.g. Mohanty 1991: 74), and Chinese texts (Ko 1994: 3).

It seems to me, however, that this conceptualization of women's social role in Far Eastern tradition is oversimplified.[2] Although women's status was subordinated to Confucian patriarchal regulations it was not in fact as low as that. Above all, women were the Ladies of the House, responsible for running the house and often making important decisions concerning the whole family in the privacy of their home. Besides, although a newly-wed woman's status was not high, it increased the moment she gave birth to an heir and she earned further "points" when she reached an elderly age. It is worth bearing in mind that although, traditionally, a women's position

[1] Also known as the New Culture Movement—a modernist-reform movement in China which can be dated 1915–1927 although its actual duration has been variously interpreted.

[2] A similar Eurocentric simplification can also be found in some publications on the role of women in Islamic societies.

is governed by the Confucian *sancong* (three dependencies[3]) rule, her relationship with men, particularly her son, is one of affiliation rather than obedience (Ko 1994: 4–5). One must remember that sons are obliged to cultivate the principle of *xiao* (sonly reverence) which involves significant appreciation of motherly social status. A woman's position can become particularly prominent, both normatively and legally, if she is widowed. For example, in the 18th century, from the legal point of view, a widow was responsible for management of the family assets (usually on behalf of her juvenile children). She was also free to decide whether to remarry and whom to chose for her second husband. The purpose of this legal regulation was to protect the widow and her family from any designs of her deceased husband's relatives (Paderini 1999: 262). Also, women in imperial China apparently constituted a separate dimension or social world with a hierarchy of its own (ibid.: 7). Women constituted a separate social class based on men's position: working women and slaves, wives of peasants and tradesmen, wives of the educated and the officials, wives of aristocrats and rulers (Chung 1981: 88–89). Their social position was lower than that of their husbands but certainly no lower than the status of men en tout. Also, women, especially women of gentry origins, often achieved very high social status and were very educationally and intellectually active, if only indirectly and inconspicuously.

On the other hand, many legal and normative regulations clearly emphasized women's inferior position. For example, in his analysis of sex-related legislation in Late Imperial China Matthew Sommer mentions that sexual coercion by one's husband is not viewed as rape and rape itself is perceived in terms of loss of purity and threat to the women's family rather than the women herself and her personal freedom (Sommer 2000: 66–116).

Also, the already mentioned intellectual activity of educated women had often to be conducted indirectly because women were not allowed to be too intellectually conspicuous and therefore had to apply various masking tricks (Ko 1994). Hence formally women's status seems to be lower than men's, at least in public.

It is therefore difficult to say for sure what women's real status in Imperial China was, how it evolved and whether it changed significantly. It would probably be safe to conclude, however, that it was lower than men's status in the normative and ceremonial domain and that the public sphere was a man's domain.

This observation corresponds with the goal I set myself when writing this article. I would like to discuss the social role of women in contemporary China against the backdrop of eating and drinking behaviour. Several reasons induced me to choose this topic.

First, as I said before, women's position in the domain of ceremonial and ritual behaviour definitely seems to be inferior to men's. Second, ritualized, interactive behaviour at the table is an "external" domain. It is easy to observe and relatively easy to identify. Third, the decision to take a closer look at such a seemingly prosaic topic can be theoretically justified by extending Peter Berger's (1967) classical social legitimisation theory. Social legitimisation leads to the creation of a "basis" which

[3] Dependency on her father, her husband, and later her son.

Berger calls "plausibility structure." If this structure is to be homogeneous, "objective" and orderly it is necessary to "maintenance reality at both the objective and the subjective level." "Reminding" is necessary if this reality is to be maintained.

Berger focuses in his discussion on more formalized, religious rituals whereas I try to extend his conclusions to behaviours which Erving Goffman calls "interaction rituals" (Goffman 1972). I assume that interaction rituals affect the construction, reconstruction and maintenance of the plausibility structure, or to put it more simply, social order within the community, to at least an equal extent. Hence the analysis of seemingly banal, repetitive gestures, etiquettes etc. may lead to extremely important insights into society and its vicissitudes (all the more so that it applies to a universal human domain—eating and drinking behaviours) and may also catalyze change.

This article is empirically rooted in the results of several years of research into patterns of interactive behaviours (their diversity and transformations) relating to eating and drinking which I conducted in contemporary China. Most of the data were observational and I gathered them in contemporary Beijing eateries. The material which I collected allowed me to write my doctoral dissertation on the role of ritualized eating and drinking behaviours in the maintenance and change of group bonds and hierarchies.

Among the phenomena I observed were the evident differences in interactive behaviours presented by women and toward women depending on where I conducted my observations and how old the interaction partners were. Generally, when young people interacted it was more likely that women would participate in the meal and that women would be "served" by men. Also, interactions with a larger number of female participants and ones where the women were "served" by the men were much more likely to take place in the more "modern" parts of the city, in fashionable, "hip" eateries.

In both cases the factor which differentiated the patterns of interactive behaviour most was the age of the social actors. I concluded that if I were to analyze these differences more thoroughly I might gain lots of interesting insights into the form of social relations in contemporary Chinese society and into changes in these relations (assuming that the different patterns of interaction depending on the age of the interacting social actors was a sign of generation change). In this case, despite the lack of sufficient diachronic perspective, it may be possible to analyze social change from a synchronic perspective. Assuming that this was a legitimate assumption, one can view the behaviour patterns of the younger Beijing population as a sign of new cultural patterns and the behaviour patterns of the older participants as a sign of more traditional behaviour patterns.

Women's Role and Status and Traditional Chinese Etiquette

Before I begin to analyze the empirical data it would be advisable to pay some attention to women's position in the sphere of ceremonial and ritual behaviour in Imperial China. In traditional China men did not serve women, especially in public—it simply was not done. It was the women, at least officially, who were lower down

in the social hierarchy and it was their job to "please" men. In China, as opposed to Europe, no distinct forms of courteous behaviour toward women (based solely on their sex) developed.

In Europe, argues Norbert Elias in his "Civilizing process" (Elias 1939 [1980]), the origins of romantic love and the consolidation of courteous behaviours toward women can be directly traced to the emergence of love poetry and the works of the mediaeval troubadours.

> The court singer … could only elevate himself above the wandering gamester when the prince or princess took him into service. The love songs which he addresses to the chatelaine of the distant castle which he has not yet visited are but an expression of his willingness and desire to enter the addressee's service (p. 346).

> After all … it is not the mutual relation between husband and wife that is the form of interpersonal relations which find their expression in the lyrics of the troubadours and the minnesang but the relation between the man of inferior social status and the woman of superior social status (p. 352).

> It is also because in the warrior society it was the relationship of the man of inferior and subordinate social status with the woman of higher status which forced this man to develop self-control and self-sacrifice, to curb his instincts and transform them (p. 353).

As far as Europe is concerned, if we can trust Elias's argumentation, patterns of romantic love and courteous behaviour were initiated by men who were well educated but lower down in the social hierarchy than the women to whom they declared their love. At the same time the social stratum which enjoyed greater prestige mainly consisted of warrior knights who did not express their feelings very romantically. Meanwhile, the man who propagated patterns of romantic love expressed due respect to the object of his devotion—the woman standing higher than he in the social hierarchy. Hence, when expressing his feelings, he also made gestures signifying subordination, awe and respect.

Initially only men of inferior social status (troubadours) manifested such behaviours but due to later developments "a very stable convention of social form evolved at the grand knightly feudal courts, a certain tempering of emotional reactions and behaviour becomes regulated" (Elias 1939 [1980]: 356).

Because "courteous" behaviour originated in the customs and poetry of the troubadours, it had to underscore the same features as the troubadours underscored—paying tribute and respect to the Lady of the House and—and the norm was generalized to all women.

On the other hand, the woman who stood higher in the social hierarchy than the troubadour "is a dependent and socially inferior being … with respect to the man who is externally of equal status" (p. 353).

We now have an interesting situation. Chivalrous behaviour, which was initially typical of troubadours who were situated lower down in the social hierarchy, is now the generally accepted norm, also among men who enjoy greater prestige. They too now treat women in a "courtly" manner, showing them tribute and respect, as if women had a higher position in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, however, women's public status was still lower.[4]

[4] Of course this does not mean, and here I fully agree with Elias, that thanks to the development of chivalrous behavior women's role did not improve compared with the early feudal period. No doubt women

We now have a rather paradoxical situation. People higher in the hierarchy behave toward people lower in the hierarchy as if the roles had been reversed. These behaviours, whether we call them courtly or courteous, are now obligatory in relations with women, for example when courting.

Like in Europe (albeit much earlier), we have in the history of Chinese civilization a period when well educated men situated at lower positions in the social hierarchy entered the service of feudal masters.[5] But, as Elias argues, when in Europe these men mainly depended on the will of the Lady of the House, in China the situation was rather different. Educated men became personal advisors or ministers at the princes' courts.[6] Most of them depended directly on the feudal master, not on the Lady of the House. Their responsibilities were quite different. Their job was to advise, tell fortunes (geoman) and ensure correct performance of the rituals which were to bring good fortune to the ruler.[7] Therefore, in Europe the minnesang times led to the development of courteousness, chivalry, respect of women whereas in China a similar historical period probably led to reinforcement and elevation of behaviour conveying respect for the head of the family and maintaining traditional social order.[8]

This is probably why Chinese society did not develop any elaborate forms of behaviour which would elevate women's status. It is also probably the reason why ceremonial forms of male behaviour toward the fairer sex seem to correspond with, and be consistent with, women's lower social position (at least in public).

Of course this does not mean that there were no patterns of behaviour aimed at securing a woman's favours. Their repertoire was very limited, however, especially in the public domain. In nearly all strata of Chinese society marriage and engagement were based on an agreement between the two families. They were arranged and facilitated by matchmakers. "According to the ritual books it is the norm that the boy should not set eyes on his fiancé before the wedding ceremony" (Granet 1936 [1972]: 323). It is worth adding that these rules still oblige in part of Chinese society, although not so strictly of course. They mainly persist in rural areas but not only.[9] On the whole, however, a woman entering the sphere of sexual relations or, more broadly speaking, masculine-feminine relations, did so as *her husband's wife*, leaving no room to develop courting behaviour patterns.

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also gained socially thanks to courtly behavior. The French court during the Enlightenment may serve as an example. Yet men's position (at least their official and public position) continued to be superior to that of women.

[5] I am talking about the period of the eastern Zhou dynasty (770–221 B.C.), or to be more precise, the late Spring and Autumn sub-period (722–481 B.C.).

[6] Confucius himself is a typical example. Probably of menial origins, he was self-taught and spent much of his youth doing physical labour. Cf. Mieczysław Künstler, (1982: 62–80).

[7] I am not saying that there were no such people in Europe (a typical example being astrologists and alchemists). I am saying, however, that their social function was less significant. I think that their role was more marginal in Europe.

[8] Of course this does not mean that there were no such norms in Europe but simply that they were much more elaborate and significant in China.

[9] An extremely interesting account of contemporary customs relating to marriage arrangement in northern rural China can be found in Xin Liu (2000). In one's own shadow. An ethnographic account of the condition of post-reform rural China, University of California Press, Berkley. Los Angeles and London, pp. 58–81.

True, behaviours elevating a woman's status were not unknown in Chinese tradition but they usually had different situational referents:

"Pray take a prominent seat," said Si-men when he saw her, "so that your humble servant can pay his due respect" (Plum tree flowers in a golden vase [2001]: 642).

Here we have an example of behaviour emphasizing respect for a woman of high status, Mrs Lin, shown by the main protagonist of Ximen Qing's novel. Homage is not being paid to the lady simply because she is a woman, however, but because she is the Lady of the House. Similar rules of behaviour would have obliged were Mr Lin to have hosted Ximen Qing.

Courteous Behaviour at Mealtime—when Men "Serve" Women

In many places, especially in restaurants situated near university campuses, one could observe a man (boy) trying to win a girl's favours in various ways. This usually involved rather direct transfer of traditional behaviour patterns, albeit with reversal of traditional roles. With older pairs, it was the woman who "served" the man: she poured his tea and (or) alcohol into a little cup, made sure the utensils were clean (if they were at a restaurant she checked their cleanliness and if necessary scalded them with boiling water) and offered the man the most tasty morsels whereas in many cases the situation was reversed when young people were out eating. Now it was the man or boy who encouraged the girl to eat, offered her tasty morsels and made sure she was comfortable and happy.

It is worth drawing attention to the different situational contexts of interactions between older men and women and representatives of the younger generation of Chinese men and women. In the former case, the men and women were likely to be married and their interaction patterns largely adhered to the traditional order and hierarchy of the Chinese family, at least the official, public ones. In the latter case, we usually have an invitation to a meal (qingke). In China (and not only), the host usually presents courteous behaviours accentuating his inferior social position and appreciation for his guest. Of course this depreciation of the host's status is transitory, not permanent. Also, leaving aside the role of women in contemporary China, we can say that people who invite others frequently (when there is a sequence of interactions) usually elevate their social status vis-à-vis their guest. However, in the traditional repertory of ceremonial behaviours in Chinese culture, this situational context was usually reserved for male-to-male interactions (or, less frequently, female-to-female ones), if only because the courtship institution was unknown in China. Hence emergence of new behaviour patterns could be a sign of change of pattern or it could be a sign of change in women's status in contemporary China.

As I said before, courteous and courting behaviours towards women in the context of eating and drinking in public[10] are something new. Considering how widespread

[10] Of course this phenomenon is not limited to eating and drinking. For a more thorough discussion of the development of courteous and courting behavior see James Farrer, 2000. Opening up. Youth sex culture and market reform in Shanghai. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.

they are among young people, however, we can easily trace the appearance of these novel behaviours to the patterns of western culture which are now becoming available to Chinese people mainly via the mass media (which have largely been adopted by city youth).

But are these behaviours going to be the norm? In Europe, such conduct has recently aroused the resistance of feminists and movements for sexual equality. Opening the door to let the woman through is not interpreted as a sign of respect and granting of equal rights with men but as an attempt to put her down. This interpretation may be rooted in the historical incompatibility between courteous behaviour as a sign of appreciation of women's position and their actual social position. In other words, opening the door to let a woman through is interpreted as an attempt to maintain the old social order where women's social status was lower than men's despite "ostensible" signs of respect.

Such connotations are missing in China. In the all the cases of courteous behaviour toward women I observed, the response was positive or at least permissive. What is more, young girls often expected boys to behave this way.

It therefore seems quite probable that the behaviour will spread, at least in such metropolises as Beijing, all the more so that parents' role in the choice of their offspring's future sexual or life partner is gradually diminishing.[11] Consequently, men will possibly need to devote more time to conquering Chinese girls' "hearts." Since Chinese girls are positively disposed toward courteous and appreciative behaviour toward women, including eating and drinking behaviour, men who want to win their favours, like it or not, will have to adopt the new "romantic" patterns.

But will the popularization of courteous behaviour toward women have a more major social impact? Will it, for example, lead to change in status of Chinese women? This is a complex question and it needs to be analyzed more deeply.

The first factor which we should consider is potential increased universality of such behaviour. Will Chinese people begin to treat them as the norm in male-female relations or will they be viewed as an exotic game at romantic courtship for the elite, the norm continuing to be existing dominant pattern of interaction based on lack of expression of affection or appreciation for one's partner (at least as far as men are concerned)?[12]

The next matter which needs to be resolved is whether such behaviour will continue in a specific interactive relationship. Even assuming that, in at least part of the population, courteous behaviour emphasizing women's position will become the rule at the stage of looking for a partner, initial contact and engagement, will it be continued later on in the relationship (mainly during the marriage)? In other words, will such behaviour only be a means of finding a partner or will it become a manifestation of more permanent change, appreciation of the woman's position in the public context?

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[11] More on this subject in James Farrer (2002) on Shanghai and Yan Yunxiang (2003) on Chinese rural populations.

[12] Please bear in mind that I am referring to interactions in public.

We should also consider whether—were these rules to become more widespread—they would only apply to public behaviour or also to behaviour in the more private, domestic interactive context.

The fourth and most important problem is concerned with whether the emergence of interactive behaviour patterns appreciating women's position on the public arena will translate into real change in women's social position. Or perhaps it will transmute into strictly ritualized, empty gestures which may often be at odds with the woman's actual social position (as probably happened when such behaviour was sanctioned in Europe).

It is hard to give a straightforward answer to these questions. The existing research findings merely lend themselves to a number of conjectures.

Certainly, the young inhabitants of Beijing are showing a clear tendency to present behaviour appreciating the woman's position in public. Since young Chinese women living in the metropolises are clearly sympathetically disposed towards this behaviour, it may well become consolidated in Chinese cities. Hence it is highly probable that such interactive patterns will become more universal. James Farrer's work on Shanghai youth's approach to sex in the broad sense seems to support this view (cf. e.g. Farrer 2002: 202–208).

It seems, however, that most public efforts to win one's partner's favours subside once the young couple has married. "For many young people marriage signified the end of the period of romance and the joys of courtship" (Farrer 2002: 184).

Although this statement applies to the attitude of the young population of Shanghai toward social reality, to the normative sphere rather than to reality, we may say quite confidently that similar beliefs developed on the basis of certain, intersubjectively verified self-observation of social reality. Therefore, it is very likely that courteous gestures described above are a game, a form of courtship or "chasing the prey" rather than a sign of genuine re-evaluation of Chinese women's social position.

On the other hand, the emergence and consolidation of courteous behaviours toward women should probably lead to the gradual increase in women's status (little by little does the trick) but still, I would not be inclined to view these behaviours as having any major effect on the development and re-evaluation of the social hierarchy. Rather, I would see them as a determinant of the diminishing empowerment of unmarried women in male-female relations.

Women in "Public" Settings

The next problem I would like to discuss more thoroughly is the increasing participation of women (mainly young women) in eating and drinking related interactions in public eateries. In traditional China women were not free to visit public places, including restaurants (at least not if they were unaccompanied by a man). Most of the early restaurants during the Tang dynasty (Schafer 1997: 137) catered mainly to men and were a combination of an eatery, inn and a more or less refined brothel where men could avail themselves of the services of courtesans. Anyway, only women

practicing the oldest profession in the world were allowed to drink alcohol in public and visit such places "unaccompanied." "Decent" women seldom went to restaurants. They also rarely travelled. Travelling was a man's business.[13] Women spent part of their life at home where they kept house efficiently and had every comfort they could wish.[14] The role of the first restaurants is aptly conveyed by of the names for eating establishments which, incidentally, has survived to this day: "jiudian," i.e., shop, winery.

The customs respected in rural communities departed from these norms. Here, women participated and still participate in ceremonial receptions although they used to eat separately in strictly feminine company (Has Vera & Francis 1977: 304).

The situation is less clear and homogeneous in the interactions I analyzed in contemporary Beijing. When mainly older people (over 50) interacted, most of them were still male. If women were also present during the meal, it was impossible to find a situation when only women were present. Most of these meetings took place in mixed groups, male and female (often in the family) and women very rarely drank alcohol.[15]

When mostly young people participated in the meeting the proportion of women in the interaction increased. The proportion of women also depended on where the meeting was taking place: the more modern the district and the restaurant, the more women were present. When the actors were young or the interactions took place in modern districts, usually inhabited by young people, it was possible to observe more situations in which only women were present. Women living in "huttongs"[16] (and also in small towns) still very seldom go out in purely feminine company.[17] For "modern" women, on the other hand, it is no longer unusual to go to a bar or restaurant just with other women and such practices no longer seem to be associated with indecency or "misconduct." Also, not only do young women visit restaurants in the company of their own sex more often but they can also be more frequently seen drinking alcohol during such meetings. When I observed such behaviour, still relatively rare, it was exclusively among extravagant young students or young Chinese business women but we must remember that until recently this was a domain strictly reserved for men.

Nowadays more and more women in large Chinese cities are owning and/or managing firms. In several cases I had the opportunity to observe women in Beijing presenting a very "masculine" style of behaviour when socializing at restaurants. I am talking about long parties during which alcohol (including Chinese vodka, "baijiu") was liberally consumed. We may wonder, of course, whether such sporadic behaviour can be interpreted as a sign of social transformation. We could of course wave off such

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[13] Although on the other hand a considerable number of women accompanied officials on their way to new outposts—cf. e.g. Dorothy Ko 1994. Teachers of the inner chambers: Women and culture in seventeenth-century China. Stanford, Stanford University Press, pp. 219–221.

[14] This observation should be treated as a generalization, however, and a description of the typical state of affairs. Although women were rather isolated in their "inner chambers," there were several exceptions to this rule connected with a woman's social status (women belonging to the upper classes were more isolated but here too there were exceptions) or occasional holidays. Cf. e.g. Francesca Bray, Technology and gender: fabrics of power in late Imperial China. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

[15] I exclude from this analysis receptions in hired private rooms in restaurants where the context is not entirely "public."

[16] Traditional, "low rise" districts.

[17] This also applied to young women to a certain extent.

cases as statistically and socially insignificant exceptions but I think that the very fact that such behaviours are beginning to appear and that they are socially accepted signifies change in the direction of equal status for men and women in contemporary China.

It is worth mentioning still another issue relating to women's participation in strictly feminine meetings in public. These meetings often take place in fast food bars, mainly American ones or ones modelled after American ones. Two factors seem to be involved.

First, fast food bars are a relative novelty in chinese social reality

Hence they are not yet fully assimilated culturally. It is quite likely that the rules and regulations obliging in normal restaurants, associated with "jiudian," may not function in social consciousness as far as fast food bars are concerned. Women who frequent the latter may feel freer than at traditional restaurants. In spite of increasing equality and more and more frequent cases of women visiting traditional Chinese restaurants unaccompanied by a man, part of the female Chinese population may still be asking "is it done?" Such doubts probably do not arise in the case of McDonald's restaurants, all the more so that alcohol is not served there and so these eateries do not resemble the aforementioned "wine shops."

Second, fast food bars are definitely associated with western culture (Yan 1997: 40–53). A culture which the Chinese associate with greater permissiveness and sexual equality. I think that these factors also have an additional effect on women's attitudes because women want to reduce the customary restrictions imposed by traditional Chinese culture.

I therefore think that choosing to go to McDonalds may be a conscious or unconscious ideological manifesto among part of the young female population of China. It is hard not to get the impression that young Chinese girls and women are much more pro-modernist and more inclined and willing to adopt novelties than their male peers.

These observations seem to suggest that at least some Chinese women want to have equal status with men in public. Sometimes they try to achieve this gradually by "borrowing" patterns of consumption which may help them to overcome internal and external resistance more easily.

Increased female participation in interactions which take place in public may be an indication of changes leading to the gradual improvement of women's official, public role in the social life of contemporary China and as such may be viewed as more significant (at least in the short run) than the earlier forms of courteous behaviour with women.

Concluding Remarks

One of the most important objectives of this article was to demonstrate how, by analyzing seemingly prosaic behaviour, one can gain better insight into the current

state of social relations (and their vicissitudes) in Chinese society, so interesting and exotic for Polish people. Unfortunately it is not easy to conduct such an analysis or, as I said before, to reach unambiguous conclusions. When interpreting the data, drawing conclusions and making predictions one must take many factors into consideration, not all of which are obvious. However, there seems to be a way to conduct a micro-diagnosis of social phenomena taking place at the macro level—phenomena of which people are not always aware nor need to be aware and which cannot therefore be diagnosed using other methods, namely the survey method.

In this article I have tried to present two phenomena which I observed in contemporary metropolitan China—the increasing participation of women in public interactions in eateries and the emergence of courteous behaviour towards women. In a way, both of these phenomena elevate women's public role and status although, as I tried to argue, increased female participation in outings to restaurants, particularly in strictly female company, is apparently the more important factor.

It is worth adding that although I concentrated on analyzing the two phenomena in my article, treating them as signs of specific social transformation, I must emphasize that—in accordance with the holistic theoretical assumptions adopted in this whole project, emergence of these new behaviour patterns is both an indicator of discrete processes and a catalyst of these processes.

To conclude, let me focus on one issue once again. When analyzing Chinese women's increasing participation in public life I initially made references to the Confucian tradition of women's almost complete absence in public life. The giant leap from complete isolation to what we observe today in the metropolises is not just the result of the transformations of the last three decades. Communist party rule had a lot to do with it when it passed appropriate legislation granting equal rights to men and women. In the early years of the People's Republic of China new family law was passed (forbidding arranged marriages, for example) and women were given access to the working class and hence pushed into the public sphere. However, women's position was still inferior to men's as attested to, for example, by the structure of China's governing elite where, until recently, there were no women.[18] We may risk the argument that communist China's practices as far as recruitment to public offices and maintenance of some moral norms are concerned were a continuation of the patriarchal customs of traditional imperial China where men usually ruled the country and headed the offices, dynasties etc.[19]

The present change seems to be much more profound—the change wherein women are entering public life more and more bravely, not only as their man's companion or loyal party comrades and party leaders' lieutenants, but as legitimate rivals to public offices. This transformation seems to be taking place at much deeper levels, at the very nucleus of Chinese tradition, its mores and customs, and may therefore

[18] This does not mean that women could not have great "backbench" influence. Mao Zedong's third wife, Jiang Qing, leader of the "Gang of Four," is a good example.

[19] Of course all the time we are referring to the public sphere. This was often the case as, for example, with Cixi, the mother empress, one of the last significant figures of the Qing dynasty who really ruled China in the second half of the 19th century despite the fact that her son was the formal emperor.

have much more impact than the superficial ideological and legal changes initiated by the People's Republic of China and continued by the Chinese Communist Party.

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