

More than Half the Sky:
The Women's Virtue Movement in Contemporary China

Zhelun Zhou

Honor Defense Date:
May 6, 2020

Thesis Advisor:
Professor Brenton Sullivan

Thesis Defense Committee:
Professor Megan Abbas,
Professor Monica Liu
Professor Brenton Sullivan,

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
Introduction	1
1. Literature Review	9
2. The Women's Virtue Movement: Two Case Studies	19
3. Women's Virtue and Tradition/Ancestors/Sages	28
4. Women's Virtue and the Cosmic Order	43
5. Women's Virtue, Karma, and Moral Transformation	54
6. Women's Virtue and the Nation-State	70
Conclusion	90
<i>Appendix</i>	96
<i>Bibliography</i>	97

Preface

I used to be a lover of tradition. During my years of primary school between 2004 and 2010, every summer I had to recite *The Analects*, following my father's instruction. While it was a tough experience, as I did not fully understand the verses in the book, I remained persistent in my recitation. Back then, I thought the words of Confucius were really the words of wisdom. So, for me, reading and reciting *The Analects* could be a great way to achieve wisdom. I sincerely hoped that I could recite the complete *Analects* (twenty chapters in total) by the end of every summer vacation.

Things didn't work out. I never finished reciting the whole *Analects*. In fact, by the summer of 2009, I grew so tired of the sage that I procrastinated my reading and learning by rote. By the end of that summer, I hadn't recited the whole *Analects*, again. But I was relieved to be done. At the same time, I remained interested in exploring any sort of Chinese culture in my daily experiences and reflections.

This was not my last time encountering the classics. In my first summer break at Colgate in 2017, I went back home complaining that the philosophy department didn't study Chinese philosophy, namely, texts like *The Analects*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Dao de jing*. Then, my father offered me the idea of reading and studying the texts myself. There started my journey into anew. I spent my summer reading the *Dao de jing* and watching a national studies lecturer, Zhong Yongsheng 钟永圣, providing exegesis to a wider audience. A day of my study went like this: In the morning, I read the Chinese classics aloud several times. Then I added comments and notes on the text. Next, I listened to Zhong's lecture and took notes. Bottom line, my day was intense.

When listening to Zhong's lecture, I was also easily swayed by Zhong's nationalist rhetoric. Sounding innocuous and prescient, I fell for this rhetoric and sincerely believed that

China was on the verge of greatness and that the Chinese classics would solve everything for us. Thus, by the end of 2017 summer, I confidently believed that I now grasped the truth in my own hand.

My faith was, of course, quickly dashed away. In the beginning of the fall 2017 semester, I learned so much negative news about China from other friends, mostly about social inequalities and social injustice. It shook my certainty about the omnipotence of Chinese culture and Zhong's rhetoric. What was most horrifying for me was the news on the women's virtue lectures. I was flabbergasted and irritated by the lecturers' rhetoric. Furthermore, this news was nowhere being mentioned by Zhong in his lectures nor in his social media account. This absence of media discussion shattered my faith entirely. I was, in a sense, broken and disillusioned by the winter of 2017.

My sense of disillusionment coincided with my interest in religious studies. Since my first year at Colgate, I have been a member and a leader of the Colgate Buddhist Community. In the fall, while my faith in that particular "national learning" (Ch. *Guoxue* 国学) lecturer was fading away, I was also taking Professor Sullivan's RELG 207 "Chinese Way of Thought." It also gave me a chance to examine the notes and understandings I gained from my summer studies. By comparison, I found my summer studies incomplete and misguided. It dawned on me that I was being trapped in a lie.

By the end of my sophomore year, I switched my second major from Philosophy to Philosophy and Religion Joint Major (P&R) with Professor Sullivan. This time, I genuinely wanted to study Chinese culture and Chinese religion in a more serious sense as an academic topic, rather than as culture-cum-nationalism project. In the meantime, I never forgot the women's virtue lectures I found online. They haunted me, for I recognized that I was part of the national studies movement.

Even though I have declared a double major in History and P&R, I know I have not

entirely broken away from my past. I am conscious of the classics I read back in my primary school days and the study I did in the summer. I saw myself as a part of the larger movement in China. What was this movement? Why does it draw people, young and old, men and female, grassroots and officials, into it? And how? My research in religion thus became this quest to understand a collective past, yet also a journey to understand myself. Therefore, the Women's Virtue Movement became the channel for me to conduct academic time-travel to examine Chinese society.

As I kept researching, reading and writing on the Women's Virtue Movement and the religious question in modern China, along with my studies in history and religion at Colgate, I found myself again and again pondering: will Chinese society become better? Can our world become better? Does our humanity have a future? I hope my work on the Women's Virtue Movement can become a tentative answer to those questions. I also realize that we have to keep our heads high, in times of crises and to imagine the different possibilities we can undertake and strive for those possibilities.

I no longer listen to or participate in any of the national studies lectures and movements. Yet I feel no regret. I feel refreshed and ready to explore more about Chinese religions and myself. Ultimately, "the unexamined life is not worth living." This not only applies to Socrates, but it also applies to everyone who wants to understand the world better and fight for a better future.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of a five-to-six month of researching and writing, though it was largely written during the spring of 2020. During the process, part of the research was accepted by the Eastern International Region of the American Academy of Religion conference, regrettably canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nonetheless, I am still grateful for this opportunity.

It goes without saying that this research was not a one-man journey. Over time, I have received much generous help and support from my cohorts at Colgate and beyond. I am particularly grateful to Professor Brenton Sullivan, my academic adviser and my thesis first reader, whose comments, knowledge, encouragement and support have inspired and motivated me to pursue my project passionately. I thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed the discussions we have had together since our first class in the fall of 2017. His painstaking attention to the details have helped me to greatly improve my thesis draft during revision. I want to thank my other thesis readers, Professor Megan Abbas and Professor Monica (Haiyan) Liu, for their thoughtful comments and suggestions that have assisted me in the revision. I also want to express my gratitude to Professor Angela Rudert, chair of the 2020 Honors Thesis Committees and Professor of the Senior Seminar in Religion in the fall of 2019. Her encouragement, support and supervision have laid the foundation for this thesis to come into shape. I am equally grateful for her drawing my attention to the opportunity of presenting my research at the Eastern International Region of the American Academy of Religion.

I want to offer special thanks to both Professor Megan Varney of the Writing and Speaking Center and Professor Ray Douglas of the History Department. I appreciate the efforts they took to review parts of my draft and provide me with thoughtful comments for my revision. I extend my appreciation to my history academic adviser Professor Heather

Roller; my two Core Distinction Seminar Professors, Professor Krista Ingram and Professor Ferdinand von Muench; Professor Jenna Reinbold; Professor Christopher Vecsey; Professor Georgia Frank; Professor Jeffrey (Jeff) Spires; Professor Benjamin Stahlberg; Professor Telisha (Dionne) Bailey; and Professor Robert Nemes. I am grateful for their encouragement, insights, and support throughout my studies at Colgate. Similarly, my heartfelt thanks to both the History and Religion Departments, for they are my “home away home” at Colgate.

My appreciation also goes to the staff at the circulation desk staff in the Colgate Case-Geyer Library and the staff at the Buddhism Branch of the Hangzhou Library for their kind assistance in locating and retrieving sources related to the Women’s Virtue Movement, Master Yinguang and Wang Fengyi. I especially want to thank the student staff at the circulation desk in the Colgate Case-Geyer Library. During my laborious process of writing my thesis and my long nights of wandering around the library for support, they generously encouraged me throughout. In return, I offer my heartfelt thanks to them.

I want to express my gratitude to my friends from the 2019 Fall Senior Seminar in Religion. It was a wonderful experience taking class with you and it has been a great opportunity for me to learn from each of you. I am grateful for the friendship and joy that we have experienced together. I appreciate all the support you have given to me and the faith you had in me to complete this project. In particular, I thank Cornelius (Neil) van Cott, Sonia Ost, and Margaret Pulte for your meticulous comments on my draft in the process, and Shannon Moran for your energetic conversation and brainstorming in the process. I look forward to the day when we can meet face to face again.

In the end, my research could not have been completed without the support and care from my Colgate friends and beyond. I want to thank the Office of International Students Services for their unfailing help. My Colgate friends Zhang Yuexi, Wu Sihan, Sahil Lalwani, Joakim Jakolveski, Sophie Coulter, Hannah Ritchey, Elaina Alzaibak, Margo Werner, Morgan

Johnson, Kate Bundy, Tatyana Anand, and many others are always in my heart. I want to thank the staff of Chobani at the Hieber Café, specifically Michael and James, for their love and support. I am grateful for the support and encouragement from my class of 2019 friends Emily Kahn and Denise Larson. I extend my thanks to my friend Zhu Yanjin for our engaging conversation about women's virtue. I thank my friend Yang Kaicheng for our ten-year friendship since junior high school, and our continuous conversation on topics ranging like culture, philosophy, history, religion and politics. Similarly, my sincere thanks to my friend Shelley, Colgate class of 2017, who now works in California. I appreciate her recommendation of the Chinese talk show *Table π*, which I was able to consult for this thesis. I am also grateful for her encouragement to be a better feminist during my research process. Ultimately, our passion for Victor Hugo and Romanticism, our shared ideals, our ongoing, animated and thought-provoking conversations on current affairs, and most importantly, her kind support, have helped me endure my own uncertainty, anxiety and stress during my research.

As this research examines the question of women in modern China, I want to express my appreciation again to the courageous, strong and beautiful women and feminists I have met in my life. Many of them, acknowledged above, continued to serve as inspirations for me.

Lastly, my greatest thanks to my parents and my family back in China. Without their unconditional love and support, I could not have achieved what I have today. I owe a great debt of gratitude to them.

Introduction

The Cosmos is divided into Heaven and Earth. The Human World is divided into male and female. The male symbolizes Heaven, and the female symbolizes Earth. Heaven is high, Earth is low. Heaven covers Earth from above, while Earth supports Heaven from beneath. There is a Principle of Nature that can never change: that is, Earth will never overturn and overthrow Heaven! (Ding Xuan 2015)¹

A round of applause immediately followed these words from Ding Xuan 丁璇, who presented a lecture on “women’s virtue” (*nüde* 女德) in Shanghai in November 2015. Ding acknowledged the applause with a joyful bow from the podium and continued with her teaching that women should be constantly respectful of, supportive of and obedient to their husbands in everyday life.² This scene offers but one example from Ding Xuan’s many sermons, which are given to audiences most of whom are middle-aged women, in an attempt to inspire them to be well-behaved and submissive to their husbands and the patriarchy. By the end of her 2015 lecture, Ding Xuan, referring to her audience, both men and women, as kinfolk (*jiaren* 家人), reminded them that the nation’s future lay on their shoulders; that the nation’s offspring required their care, and their households’ harmony also needed their management. Ding called upon her audience to study and promote women’s virtue education, hoping to establish a better future for the nation and its people.³ Ding Xuan thus linked the women’s virtue with nationhood and nation-building. As Ding Xuan’s eight-hour lecture ended, narrative began to emerge. This is the story of what I call the Women’s Virtue

¹ Quotations from Ding Xuan’s 2015 Shanghai Women’s Virtue Lecture. Bilibili, Part I, 113:59-115:00 Minutes. The complete lecture can be found in Chinese at Bilibili, a popular video-sharing website that circulates animation, comics, and games in China; and at Tencent Video, a Chinese video-streaming website owned by Tencent, a multinational internet giant company in China. In this paper I cite my source as “(Website), (Part I or Part II), minutes based on the runtime shown at website provider.” All translations are mine.

² Bilibili, Part I, 113:59-115:00.

³ Tencent, Part II, 245:30.

Movement (WVM) in contemporary Chinese society.⁴ Starting in 2006, the WVM has since become a nationwide social movement.⁵ It operates under the umbrella term of “traditional Chinese culture” (*Zhonghua chuantong wenhua* 中华传统文化) The Chinese state has been promoting the Chinese Cultural Renaissance/the Rejuvenation of Chinese Civilization (*Zhonghua wenhua fuxing* 中华文化复兴) since the early 2000s. One of the key features of this promotion is the creation of new categorical official terms by the Chinese state that classify phenomena pertaining to religious spheres. For example, “cultural heritage” (*wenhua yichan* 文化遗产) is one of the recently coined terms.⁶

The WVM has a range of lecturers teaching women’s virtue.⁷ Its teachings cover a diversity of topics. It includes an emphasis on the stark contrast between men and women; a strong anti-feminist stance, a firm anti-abortion position, a call for women to be obedient and submissive to men, a valorization of female virginity, chastity, and motherhood, and an understanding that women are innately tolerant, forgiving and considerate. It also teaches household skills and management for women to keep the kitchen and bathroom clean. It cautions women to avoid their husbands while menstruating, thereby not bringing bad fortune to the men.⁸ The WVM’s continuing existence, in face of scathing online criticism, invites us to raise several questions: What exactly is the nature of the WVM? Why does it continue to

⁴ I use the English term “Women’s Virtue Movement” (WVM) in recognizing the diffuse nature of the activities that promotes “women’s virtue.” Those activities include Women’s Virtue lectures, Women’s Virtue Schools, summer camps, and Public Forum Conference (*luntandahui* 论坛大会).

⁵ One recent Women’s Virtue lecture was held in Central China Normal University (*Huazhong shifan daxue*, 华中师范大学) on April 18, 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. See He Liquan (何利权), Zhu Yueming (朱月萌), Wu Wenzhen (吴文珍), “Xuesheng zhi ruxuezhuanjia jiangshou nüde、weiguoxue, huazhongshifandaxue: jiang guifan jiangzuoguanli,” (学生指儒学专家讲授女德、伪国学, 华中师范大学: 将规范讲座管理), *The Paper* (澎湃新闻), April 20, 2019. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_3324439. A more extensive report on this event can be found at https://www.360kuai.com/pc/9ef973f9bff634c02?cota=4&tj_url=so_rec&sign=360_7bc3b157

⁶ See Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 320, 342-343.

⁷ Apart from Ma Yiling, other lecturers on Women’s Virtue include Ding Xuan, Chen Jingyu (陈静瑜), Zhong Maosen (钟茂森), and Liu Fang (刘芳). There is strong inter-textuality and referencing between those lecturers.

⁸ Those features appear in many of the WVM’s lectures, which will be analyzed below. Both Chinese and Western media (Anglo-American outlets in this case) left out the anti-abortion stances in their reports.

exist? What can the WVM reveal about contemporary Chinese society?

The WVM reflects a larger shift in Chinese society since the 2000s. Chinese society has witnessed a push from grassroots groups and activists, correlated with the existing official propaganda, to return to China's glorious past. This tendency has been seen in the cases of popular Confucian revival, the rise of neo-Maoist groups online and on the ground, the promotion of the Han Clothing Movement, the fervor of traditional Chinese medicine, and now the Women's Virtue Movement.⁹ Concurrently, the Chinese state has implicitly and explicitly exacerbated structural gender inequalities and gender discrimination in Chinese society. This includes the official rhetoric of calling upon women to return to the household; the stigmatization of women who are over twenty-seven and unmarried by employing the derogatory term "leftover women" (*shengnü* 剩女), and the suppressive measures the Chinese government has taken to repress feminist protests.¹⁰ These two tendencies in society—the impulse to return to China's glorious past and the state's contribution to greater gender discrimination—coalesce to form an ideal environment for the Women's Virtue Movement to flourish.

Although there is no existing scholarship that explores the Women's Virtue Movement, there are certain semi-scholarly analyses of the Women's Virtue Movement by public

⁹ See Anna Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Sebastien Billioud and Joel Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Also see "The National Learning Revival," Arif Dirlik, ed., in *China Perspectives*, 2011/1, 2-54. This special feature includes six essays on the topic of "national learning/*guoxue* (国学) fever." Jude D. Blanchette, *China's New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Kevin Carrico, *The Great Han: Race, Nationalism and Tradition in China Today* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017); Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing* (New York: Zone Books, 2012); and Paul U. Unschuld, *Traditional Chinese Medicine: Heritage and Adaptation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

¹⁰ Sophie Richardson, "China Tells Women to 'Go Home and Live Well.'" URL: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/28/china-tells-women-go-home-and-live-well#>; on China's "leftover women," see Leta Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (New York: Zed Books, 2012); on Chinese government's suppression on feminist activists, especially the "Feminist Five," and feminist movements in China, see Leta Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China* (New York: Verso Books, 2018).

intellectuals. They refer to the WVM's "evil cult/heretical teaching" (*xiejiao* 邪教), a term used traditionally by imperial Chinese officials and today by the contemporary Chinese state, to denote heterodox teachings and dissident religious and spiritual groups.¹¹ Many bloggers and commentators have called the Women's Virtue Movement and its teachings "brainwashing" and its lecturers' actions "bad preaching."¹² Although the semi-scholarly analyses employ the normative language of the Chinese emperors, most of these criticisms are secular in nature and portray the WVM simply as a fringe group of individuals who reject modernity. Most criticism focuses on the gender issues behind the WVM, while others adopt a market-based economic analysis. Thus, they downplay and brush aside the religiosity of the Women's Virtue Movement.¹³ While it is important to criticize the anti-feminist and misogynist contents in the Women's Virtue Movement as its lecturers disapprove of feminist causes and criticizes women in the workplace, it is equally crucial to pay attention to and study its religious aspects. The references that participants in and lecturers of the Women's Virtue Movement make to religious masters, Chinese classics, and popular morality teaching-books (*shanshu* 善书), indicate that religion remains an important feature in the Chinese social landscape. Examining the WVM thus provides an analytical lens to comprehend the role of religion in contemporary China. Studying the WVM from a religious-studies perspective allows us to better appreciate the appeal and staying power of the movement. More importantly, it allows us to situate the WVM within the millennia-long history of church-state relations in China and the unique role women's bodies have been asked to fill within that history.

Ding Xuan links the fate of the Chinese nation and that of the Chinese state to women's

¹¹ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Questions in Modern China*, 29, 316, 320, 339-342.

¹² "Guangdong dongguan nüdeban bei zeling tingban," (广东东莞"女德班"被责令停办), *China News*, September 25, 2014.

¹³ Equally noticeable is the diction used by blogposts that sometimes exhibit religiosity. For example, in one blogpost, the writer describes the participants of the lecture as "pious."

virtue. The purpose of teaching women's virtue is to preserve the nation, its purity and its moral superiority. The nation-state, according to Ding Xuan's rhetoric, is sacred, and it is women's duty to uphold it. Although it may be ironic that the People's Republic of China (PRC), governed as it is by the formally atheist Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is sacralized in such a manner, in fact the Chinese state and the figure that sits at its apex have been regarded as both religious and political entities for millennia, dating back to the Shang Dynasty (1540-1100 BCE), when the king was the sole link between the natural and ancestral powers that governed the cosmos and the state over whom he ruled. The WVM persists in part due to the manner in which it dovetails with the interest of the Chinese state, notwithstanding the movement's "reactionary" palette of religious and moral inclinations.

This paper studies the Women's Virtue Movement with one eye to its religiosity and another to its nationalism. The WVM is in effect a popular religious movement that fulfills the civilizing mission of the Chinese nation. Its lectures emphasize tradition, cosmic order, karma and vegetarianism, all the while paying homage to the Chinese state by evoking President Xi Jinping's and the Chinese Communist Party's words. Women's virtues in particular, such as chastity, domesticity, and submission, are singled out as fundamental to the harmony, moral superiority, and strength of the Chinese nation. The Women's Virtue Movement is synthetic in nature. It combines elements from religions such as Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism in its appeal to the popular public. Therefore, the Women's Virtue Movement is a popular religious movement for a particular audience, the Han Chinese people.

The Chinese state, for its part, is complicit in the formation of the WVM and its religious nationalism.¹⁴ State organs tacitly sanction and approve of the movement's publications and

¹⁴ Cheng-tian Kuo, "Religion, State and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*. Edited by Cheng-tian Kuo (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 16.

activities. Local officials and ex-officials sponsor and host the WVM events and publications. Upwardly mobile businessmen and businesswomen, along with some women party members, also join its ranks. The Chinese state countenances such loyal religious movements because, by so doing, the Chinese state and the CCP are in turn sacralized, so that their political legitimacy remains unquestioned.

Women and their bodies are caught between these religious and political forces. An entire cosmology is built around the idea that protecting the homeland means protecting the household and the family, and protecting the household and the family means securing women's bodies. Mao Zedong in the early days of the People's Republic of China popularized the catchphrase "Women hold up half the sky," seemingly underscoring the value of women in new China yet ignoring the burden that women had to bear both in the home and in the workplace, Xi Jinping of today's China tells women to embrace their roles in sustaining and fostering the family.¹⁵ Elsewhere in time and space this deployment of state and anti-feminist rhetoric is more often found serving conservative and right-wing agendas.¹⁶ In the case of the WVM, it is the Chinese Communist Party that does so, which shows just how

¹⁵ Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 229-247; Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 124, 165-171.

¹⁶ For example, see Debali Mookerjee-Leonard, "To Be Pure Or Not To Be: Gandhi, Women and the Partition of India," *Feminist Review* 94 (2010), 38-54; Sealing Cheng, "Popularizing Purity: Gender, Sexuality and Nationalism in HIV/AIDS Prevention for South Korean Youths," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 46:1 (April 2005), 7-20; Susanne M. Klausen, "'Reclaiming the White Daughter's Purity': Afrikaner Nationalism, Racialized Sexuality, and the 1975 Abortion and Sterilization Act in Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 39-63; Yamashita Yeong-ae, "Nationalism in Korean Women's Studies: Addressing the Nationalist Discourses Surrounding the 'Comfort Women' Issue," trans by Sarah Kovner, *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal, English Supplement*, no. 15 (1998), 52-77; Sikata Banerjee, "Women, Muscular Nationalism and Hinduism in India: Roop Kanwar and the Fire Protests," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 11, nos. 3-4, (September-December 2010), 271-287; Barbie Latza Nadeau, "Femme Fascista: How Giorgia Meloni Became the Star of Italy's Far Right," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 35, no.2, (Summer 2018), 14-21; Anderson Rouse, "'If Our Women Remain Pure': Bob Jones and the Construction of Gender in the New South, 1900-1925," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, (2016), 21-33; Leslie Durrrough Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Randall Balmer, "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 47-62; Helen Hardcore, "Japanese New Religions: Profiles in Gender," *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 111-133; Partha Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, no. 4 (November, 1989), 622-633; and Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, "Hindu Nationalism and the Political Role of Hindu Women: Ideology as a Factor," *South Asian Studies*, 28:1, (January—June 2013), 39-54.

many different roles women are asked to serve.

It is not that surprising, however, that women in contemporary China are asked to remain in the household and obedient. During the imperial epoch, women were asked to be both virgin daughters and chaste, virtuous mothers and wives so that they could maintain the harmony of the household, thereby sustaining the harmony of the nation. During the Republican era, women were imagined as both independent and self-sacrificial: they would achieve full autonomy in society, yet were equally willing to sacrifice themselves for the well-being of the nation. Chinese women thus are consistently forced to serve the essential link between the state and “social harmony.”¹⁷

Several caveats have to be made. This paper does not aim to make a new argument on whether Confucianism and feminism can be compatible and complementary with each other.¹⁸ Nor do I seek to engage with any theoretical debates on the subject of *The Confucian Four Books on Women*.¹⁹ Discussion on the compatibility and complementarity of philosophical Confucianism with feminism is fascinating, yet risks not being in touch with everyday life discourses, as is in the case with the Women’s Virtue Movement in the current Chinese milieu.

The paper’s main body is divided into three parts. In the first, I provide a brief literature review regarding the Women’s Virtue Movement. This includes a concise summary of media reports and semi-scholarly sources (by semi-scholarly sources, I mean the discussions on the WVM that are made by public intellectuals for the consumption of the public), as well as a

¹⁷ See Hershatter, *Women and China’s Revolutions*; Kang Xiaofei (康笑菲), “Women and the Religious Question in Modern China,” in *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-2015* (2 vols), edited by Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerway, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 489-559.

¹⁸ Scholarly works addressing this issue are abundant. Several notable works include Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee’s *Confucianism and Women* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006); Chenyang Li, ed., *The Sage and the Second Sex* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000); Matthew Foust and Sor-hoon Tan, eds., *Feminist Encounter with Confucius* (Danvers, MA: Brill, 2016).

¹⁹ For a recent translation of the *Confucian Four Books for Women* see Ann A. Pang-White, trans. *The Confucian Four Books For Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

comparative study of scholarship regarding women and nationalism/fundamentalism in other cultural contexts, and a short overview of literature that addresses both women and religion in modern China. In the second part, I provide illustrative examples of how the Women's Virtue Movement organizes activities such as lectures and summer camps. In the third part, I organize my discussion and analysis in a thematic manner, in which I discuss the primary motifs—both explicit and implicit—of the Women's Virtue Movement.²⁰ This unique approach, combining literary, historical and even some ethnographical analysis, allows me to answer the questions posed at the outset. As we shall see, the past is not dead in China but rather is reclaimed to legitimize new movements and regimes, even the most modern and revolutionary among them. In addition, religion is also not dead in China, but continues to be adapted by the Chinese state to embolden itself today. As for women, far less has changed for them than might have been imagined by the modernizers and revolutionaries of the past century in China.

²⁰ This is inspired by Goossart and Palmer's approach, see Goossart and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 12-13.

Part I

Chapter I: Literature Review

Media Reports and Semi-Scholarly Discussion on the WMV

There is a fair number of media reports on the Women's Virtue Movement in both Chinese and English. Most of the Chinese reports appeared after 2014, when one of the Women's Virtue Schools was closed by the local government.²¹ More media reports followed after 2017, when one of Ding Xuan's lectures in Jiujiang (九江), Jiangxi Province, was recorded and criticized online. Overall, most Chinese media reports take a critical stance vis-a-vis the Women's Virtue Movement, calling them "feudalistic" and "backward." Most reports promote the values of "self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement" (*zizun* 自尊, *zixin* 自信, *zili* 自立, *ziquang* 自强) to further the cause of gender equality. Only a few reports endorse the Women's Virtue Movement, suggesting that girls should be taught to be obedient and soft/submissive (*roushun* 柔顺), and they call people to respect the market demand for women's virtue education. Lastly, most reports recognize that the Women's Virtue Movement spread from Beijing to many provinces like Shandong, Hebei, Shanxi, Guangdong and Hainan. The Women's Virtue Movement is indeed "blossoming everywhere."²²

²¹ For this research, I used the CNKI, Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (zhongguozhiwang 中国知网), by using the word "nüdeban" (女德班), the common word employed in the media, to find the newspaper sources. I do not suppose the journalists' reports I found fully represent the overall views on Women's Virtue Schools, but their discussion should be included to comprehend how Chinese media addresses the issue. See "Guangdong dongwan nüdeban beizeling tingban," (广东东莞“女德班”被责令停办), *China News*, December 2014.

²² Shanyaodanzhimeiyoupai (山药蛋之没有派), "Kneeling Women's Virtue, What Do You Want (Guizhe de nüde, ni daodi yao nayang 跪着的女德, 你到底要哪样)," *Companion* (伴侣), no. 1 (2018), 34; Guihui Zhang (张桂辉), "Thinking Women's Virtue Schools (nüdeban lianxiang 女德班“联想”)," *Zawen Xuankan* (杂文选刊), no. 2 (2018), 16; Ligang Wang (王立刚), "“Why There Is Market for “Women's Virtue Schools”," (nüdeban yuanhe you shichang “女德班”缘何有市场), *Gaozhongsheng Xuexi* (高中生学习(阅读与写作)), 2018 (Z1), 14; "Guangdongdongwannvdebanbeizelingtingban," (广东东莞“女德班”被责令停办), *China News*, Dec. 2014; Chuanyan Wang (王传言), "Don't Overcorrect “Women's Virtue Schools”," (“女德班”切勿矫枉过正), *Modern Youth* (现代青年), (October 13, 2014), 8; Wen Zong (综文), "“Women's Virtue Schools’ Should Not Stop at Its [sic] Closure,” (nüdeban bingfei guanting zheme jiandan “女德班”并非关停这么简单), *Guangxi Journal of Light Industry* (广西教育), (2018.1), 36-37. See the China map in appendix for an overview

There are also some English-language reports on the Women’s Virtue Movement. Those English reports come from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America, the Associated Press, the Chinese official newspaper *Global Times*, and *Sixth Tone*, a non-official news outlet in Shanghai that reports news for a Western audience.²³ The Anglophone reports mostly consist of the presentation of fact and avoid overtly editorializing. They compile interviews from Chinese experts in women’s studies, without adding much analysis or commentary. The reports quote these experts to the effect that the Women’s Virtue Movement, due to its backwardness, should not be treated seriously and that we had better “give it a laugh and forget it.”²⁴ Some English reports connect the Women’s Virtue Movement with China’s new two-child policy and the #MeToo” movements in China, along with some brief historical context in the early Maoist era.²⁵

In short, both Chinese and English-language reports on the Women’s Virtue Movement are quite superficial. They all employ words such as “archaic” and “feudalistic” to describe the Women’s Virtue Movement (the Western reports do so indirectly insofar as they quote Chinese experts). These pejoratives reveal the secular outlook of reporters and commentators on the Women’s Virtue Movement. None associates the movement with religion or pays attention to its spiritual overtones. They mostly focus on a single, specific lecture or summer

of the extent of the spread of Women’s Virtue Movement in China.

²³ The *New York Post* and *Christian Science Monitor* also report the Women’s Virtue Movement. Yet their reports are mostly based on a summary from the BBC or the AP.

²⁴ “Inside China’s ‘Virtue Schools’ for Women,” *BBC News*, December 13, 2017.

²⁵ Han Wang, “Why do Virtue Schools for Chinese Women Still Operate?” *Global Times*, December 10, 2018 <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1131167.shtml>; “Inside China’s ‘Virtue Schools’ for Women,” *BBC News*, December 10, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-42305137>; “‘Morality Schools’ for Chinese Women Spark Outcry,” *VOA News*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/morality-schools-chinese-women-spark-outcry>; Chenyu Liang, “Patriarchy 101: School Espouses Sexist ‘Feminine Virtues’,” *Sixth Tone*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001275/patriarchy-101-school-espouses-sexist-feminine-virtues>; WHIMN, “Chinese ‘Virtue Schools’ Teach Women To Be Obedient Housewives,” *New York Post*, December 13, 2017, <https://nypost.com/2017/12/13/chinese-virtue-schools-teach-women-to-be-obedient-housewives/>; Yi-ling Liu, “Rise of ‘Morality Schools’ for Chinese Women Sparks Outcry,” *Associated Press*, February 1, 2018, <https://apnews.com/877193b3121c4c4a988ba7aad66f8283/Rise-of-morality-schools-for-Chinese-women-sparks-outcry>; also see the same report at <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2018/0202/Chinese-activists-decry-so-called-female-morality-schools> *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 2, 2018.

camp, neglecting the consistency of discourses and practices across the country. Both Chinese and English reports show a tendency to explain the Women's Virtue Movement in terms of market demand, revealing the economic orientation and secular view on the issue. While some reports treat this movement seriously, others consider it a more frivolous matter.

If the analyses of and conclusions drawn by media reports on the Women's Virtue Movement are superficial, the semi-scholarly discussions on Women's Virtue Movement aren't much better.²⁶ I used three semi-scholarly discussions during my research. The first one appeared in Season 2, Episode 6 of Table π (*yuanzhuopai* 圆桌派), a talk show hosted by Dou Wentao 窦文涛. with guest speakers such as literary critic Leung Man-tao 梁文道, Chinese literature professor Xu Zidong 许子东 and columnist Ma Ka Fai 马家辉. The episode lasts thirty-six minutes. The second source is a WeChat commentary by Li Tianfei 李天飞, a philologist. The third piece is written by political scientist Ren Jiantao 任剑涛 in his book *Dang jing chengwei jingdian* 当经成为经典. Ren attached his discussion of the women's virtue education as an appendix to his book.

Like the media accounts, these also ignore the actual and complete lectures delivered by the speakers of the Women's Virtue Movement. In addition, none of them realizes that Ding Xuan's eight-hour lecture in Shanghai in 2015 took place with the approval of and at the invitation of local Shanghai Communist Party officials.²⁷ In other words, these source overlook the connection between this nationwide movement and the Chinese Communist Party. While Li Tianfei was able to describe the Women's Virtue Movement as an "evil cult"

²⁶ Table π (圆桌派), "S2E6: Women's Virtue," YouTube, June 20, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAIEm39TNNU>; Li Tianfei, "You Misunderstood Women's Virtue Schools, They Are Not Feudal Dregs," (你们错怪女德班了, 它根本就不是封建糟粕), WeChat, December 7, 2017; Ren Jiantao (任剑涛), *Dang jing chengwei jingdian* (当经成为经典) (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2018), Appendix III, 408-417.

²⁷ Also, to rebut the statement made by Wang Han in *Global Times*, Shanghai is still a city leaning in the direction of male chauvinism. See Lan Yang, "Fighting for Fairness," *Global Times*, February 18, 2016.

and the influence of Chinese folk religion on its preaching, but he didn't identify those aspects of the WVM teachings that are actually orthodox, as approved by the Chinese state.²⁸ Lastly, most of the reports and the semi-scholarly sources simply assume that the WVM teachings are related to Confucianism, and do not delve further into its actual discourses.²⁹ As a result, they see the WVM as merely feudal residues, without appreciating the complex religious character of the WVM. All commentaries fail to realize that the Women's Virtue Movement is not a recent phenomenon starting in 2015, but rather a phenomenon that can be dated back further to 2006.³⁰ Both the media reports and the semi-scholarly sources only reveal the tip of the iceberg of the Women's Virtue Movement.

Nonetheless, there are some merits in the semi-scholarly sources. I take up Li's description of the Women's Virtue Schools as an evil cult to explore further the religious nature of the Women's Virtue Movement. Meanwhile, I attempt to answer a question that Li does not ask in his WeChat post: What does he mean by the expression "orthodox teachings" and "heterodox teachings/evil cult"? By using this rhetoric, Li follows the same practices of the dynastic Chinese state and its latter-day counterparts: identifying dissident religious and spiritual groups.³¹ What does this imply about the continuing relevance of China's past and Chinese religious ideologies to Chinese identity and nationalism today?

²⁸ Li Tianfei, "You Misunderstood Women's Virtue Schools, They Are Not Feudal Dregs."

²⁹ Though in Table π, the speakers did draw some parallels between Women's Virtue Movement with conservative Christians' and National Socialism's treatment of women.

³⁰ Mentioned by one of the lecturers herself. See Ma Yiling, *Zuo ziji de huanghou 做自己的皇后 (Becoming Your own Empress)*, (Beijing, China: Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe, 2016), 89. Later in citing these similar textbooks in the footnotes, I will follow the format of "(Author's Name), (Page number)." The full reference of those textbooks can be found in the bibliography.

³¹ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Questions in Modern China*, 29, 316, 320, 339-342

Women and the Religious Question in Modern China

Although no scholarship directly addresses the Women's Virtue Movement, there is abundant work on both the history of women in China and on Chinese religions.³² Yet as historian Kang Xiaofei contends in her essay, seldom do those two genres of scholarship interact with each other.³³ Kang argues for the importance of approaching women's studies within the framework of the religious question, and, likewise, of addressing religion in tandem with the question of women in China. She believes that this intellectual engagement can "help us see better the mutual transformation of women and religion in the 20th century and contemporary China."³⁴ This paper hopes to shed light on the interplay between those two fields.³⁵ By doing so, we will be able to better understand how women and women's bodies have been asked to serve as the essential linchpins for the formation of the Chinese state and of Chinese nationalism. We will also be able to observe and understand the application of religion and ideology in Chinese society.

While the work of Kang and others like hers are admirable, they are not without weaknesses. Due to the time at which they appeared, these works do not address the Women's Virtue Movement. Furthermore, these works focus primarily on the organized and structured forms of religion, such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Rarely do they address the relationship of women to popular religion or folk religions that defy the traditional categories of religions in China.

³² For recent scholarship on China's women history and the woman question, again see Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolution*; Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women*; Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*. For recent scholarship on China's religious history and the religious question, see Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*; Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2017); *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*, edited by Cheng-tian Kuo.

³³ See Kang, "Women and Religious Question in Modern China," 489-490.

³⁴ Kang, "Women and Religious Question in Modern China," 559.

³⁵ On some of the scholarship that address both women and religion together in their works, see Kang, "Women and Religious Question in Modern China," 489-559; Tak-ling Terry Woo, "Women in Contemporary Chinese Religions," in *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies*, edited by James Miller (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 207-234; Fan-long Shih, "Women, Religions, and Feminists," in *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Bryan S. Turner (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 221-243.

Hence, this paper aims to demonstrate that the WVM incorporates a religiosity that evokes the religious tradition of popular moral teachings in late imperial China and the Chinese cosmic order requiring women to be obedient and submissive to men. This religiosity, for the WVM lecturers, reinstates and underscores the importance of family values and the family order. By establishing a parallel between women's bodies and the nation-state, the WVM thus simultaneously restricts and heightens women's role in securing a morally superior, upright nation. In this process, the Chinese nation is sacralized as an unquestionable, essential, and transcendent entity. Therefore, the Women's Virtue Movement also operates as a religion that serves the interest of the Chinese nation and the CCP.

Comparative Scholarship

The literature on the issues of women and fundamentalism/nationalism is robust.³⁶ Similar patterns emerge therefrom which can help us more readily to identify certain features of the WVM in China, including some that may be unique. Broadly, in terms of gender, fundamentalism can be defined as “the religion of the stressed and disoriented”: it is a process that rejects modernism and at the same time tries to maintain control and certainty. In this process, the female body becomes the crux of the matter as it symbolizes human corporality.³⁷ Also typical of fundamentalist rhetoric is: the treatment women as the “others” in contrast to men and as possessing a sexuality in need of control; a sense of “nostalgia” for a return to a untainted past by directing moral tenets at women; a display of “religious machismo” through controlling women so as to reassert male activists' own manliness and masculinity.³⁸ Nationalism, on the other hand, emphasizes the purity of the female body as

³⁶ See footnote 16 for a general reference.

³⁷ See John S. Hawley and Wayne Proudfoot, “Introduction,” in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11-20.

³⁸ See Hawley and Proudfoot, “Introduction,” in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 11-35; Karen McCarthy Brown, “Fundamentalism and the Control of Women,” in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 175-176.

representative of the purity of the nation-state.³⁹

Nationalism and fundamentalism, although conceptually distinct from each other, can help us to comprehend the characteristics of the WVM fully, as it conflates elements of both ideologies in its discourses. The first common feature that fundamentalism and nationalism share is their emphasis on women's purity. This sense of purity is in many cases connected with a sense of otherness. When feeling vulnerable to outside threats such as diseases and foreign values, nationalists and fundamentalists stress the purity of women's body.⁴⁰ When speaking of women, the exponents of fundamentalism and nationalism alike see women as the moral guardians of the family and the foundation of an orderly universe.⁴¹ Overall, both features in fundamentalism and nationalism originate from a male-centered perspective. They try to maintain the prominence of patriarchy. To achieve this goal, both parties use their discourse to police women. In these discourses, the women become the "other" who are most suppressed.

The first cross-cultural case that helps to illuminate the WVM in China is historical and contemporary American Christian fundamentalism. U.S. fundamentalists have consistently underscored the need for and importance of women's purity and promoted an anti-abortion campaign during the 1970s and 1980s in response to the radical feminists at that time. American fundamentalists, starting in the early twentieth century in the southern US, viewed women as the moral guardians of the family, and they called for a return to the Victorian spirituality understood to uphold women's superior moral virtues. This was their response to the challenges of industrial revolution and the shrinking plantation economy in the American South.⁴² For example, televangelist preacher Jerry Falwell, Jr., recognized by scholars as a

³⁹ Again, see footnote 16 for a general reference.

⁴⁰ Klausen, "Reclaiming the White Daughter's Purity,"; Rouse, "If Our Women Remain Pure." Also see Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 5-6; Nadeau, "Femme Fascista," 18; Cheng, "Popularising purity."

⁴¹ See Rouse, "If Our Women Remain Pure," 22-23; Balmer, "American Fundamentalism," 58-59.

⁴² Balmer, "American Fundamentalist," 54-60; Rouse, "If Our Women Remain Pure," 24-29; Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 11-15.

fundamentalist, conveyed his understanding of femininity by taking a pro-life stance in the abortion issue in response to the *Roe v. Wade* decision.⁴³ Similarly, the Concerned Women for America (CWA), a conservative Christian organization in the U.S., employs “chaos rhetoric,” a hyperbolic form of speech that attacks feminism, gay marriages and abortion alike as the leading cause of abortion, spread of disease, poverty, child abuse and the destruction of the traditional family structure.⁴⁴ The CWA relies on this rhetoric, along with their conservative Protestant Christian ethics, to paint an imagery of an imminent threat that would wreak havoc on the nation once this threat finishes going after family.⁴⁵ Engaging deeply with a conservative Christian rhetoric, the American fundamentalists hence advocate for the traditional values of family and purity of women’s bodies in the public, in a chain of logic, to preserve the nation’s well-being and purity.

The case of South Korea is worth exploring due to that country’s own fraught history of women’s status in society. Much discourse on women in South Korea, especially regarding the issue of “comfort women” during the Japanese occupation of Korea, is deeply nationalistic. Forced into sex slavery by the Imperial Japanese army during World War II, many Korean women suffered. The postwar South Korean government spared no effort demanding a public apology from the Japanese government. Yet the rhetoric surrounding comfort women came from a male perspective and it insisted upon a parallel between the women’s suffering with the nation’s suffering.⁴⁶ The suffering of Korean comfort women was erased and overwhelmed by the male-run geopolitics in East Asia. The rhetorical emphasis on Korean’s selfhood and womanhood becomes much more vivid when one major Korean NGO started a “Purity Campaign” against the spread of HIV/AIDS, calling upon Korean girls to be steadfast in maintaining the purity of their bodies, symbolizing the moral

⁴³ Balmer, “American Fundamentalist,” 56.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 5.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Righteous Rhetoric*, 11-18, 127-168.

⁴⁶ Yamashita, “Nationalism in Korean Women’s Studies,” 61-67.

order and national health. The purity of Korean youths' bodies is essential because it creates a dichotomy between the self (Korea) and foreign dangers and invaders (the HIV/AIDS diseases).⁴⁷ Although the Korean nationalists come from a different historical and cultural background compared to the U.S. fundamentalists, they both place emphasis on women's purity and women's bodies. The discourse of Korean nationalists also takes a male-centered orientation in recreating the link between women's suffering and the national suffering.

Lastly, the case of India's Hindu Nationalism is in order. Hindu nationalism intensified during the 1980s, with the case of Roop Kanwar, a Rajput woman who was immolated based on the traditional *sati* ritual in 1987. Unlike the first two cases, Hindu nationalism is in general more militarized. Its founders and participants present a mix of images of the Indian women. Those images include the Indian woman as warrior goddess, as chaste, strong mother, and yet also as vulnerable virgin. Under the masculine and muscular narrative of Hindu nationalism, the participants again separate themselves (including the militarized women) from the foreign "others" over its historical course, and try to establish an essentialist view of India as a motherly figure, thus promoting a hostile stance against the Indian Muslims. Hindu nationalism thus again places its emphasis on women's purity and chaste bodies, while at the same time it consciously or unconsciously mobilized and militarized women's participation in the movement. Through those emphases, Hindu nationalism erects a new patriarchy and cultural hegemony.⁴⁸

Thus, the Women's Virtue Movement in China can be compared to nationalism and fundamentalism in the United States, South Korea and India. The case of the WVM reflects its participants' and the Chinese state's concerns with changing gender relationship that is most conspicuously similar with the case in the U.S. and South Korea. The WVM also

⁴⁷ Cheng, "Popularising Purity," 9-15.

⁴⁸ Chatterjee, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women," 622-633; Banerjee, "Women, Muscular Nationalism and Hinduism in India," 271-287.

reflects a yearning for an imagined past, just as American fundamentalists yearn for a return to an imagined Victorian set of moral norms and Hindu nationalists advocate for a return to Brahminical moral codes. The Women's Virtue Movement also similarly employs the rhetoric of women's purity, chastity and their role as moral guardians in the family linked to a cosmic order. Significantly, however, by building the parallel between women's bodies and the nation's well-being, the Women's Virtue Movement legitimizes and sacralizes the Chinese nation and the Chinese Communist Party further than the three above cases. As China remains an authoritarian regime, the ruling party, the CCP, has borrowed religion to increase its legitimacy in its public relations.⁴⁹ Therefore, studying the Women's Virtue Movement provides a lens for us to comprehend how the participants of the WVM under authoritarian regime use religion and nationalism to portray women's body and chastity.

⁴⁹ See Frank N. Pieke, "Party Spirit: Producing a Communist Civil Religion in Contemporary China," *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 24, no. 4 (2018), 709-729.

Part II

Chapter II: The Women's Virtue Movement: Two Case Studies

Numerous lectures and summer camps are conducted under the banner of the Women's Virtue Movement and traditional Chinese culture. I begin by setting the scene so that the readers might better envision what a women's virtue lecture and summer camp/week-long training session looks, sounds and feels like. Next, I will present and analyze the common themes of the Women's Virtue Movement that I have identified from the case studies and textbooks. The following chapters will put the WVM into conversation with other contemporary Chinese movements and the historical trajectory of China's modernization, shedding light on this movement.

Case Study 1: Haikou's Women's Virtue Lecture

On May 28, 2017, a small group of young volunteers from Nü Quan 女泉, a feminist NGO based in Guangzhou sneaked into a Women's Virtue lecture in Haikou 海口, the provincial capital of Hainan, China's island province.⁵⁰ This lecture was organized by the Haikou branch of the Ethics Forum (*Daode dajiangtang* 道德大讲堂), and was entitled "For the Harmonious Household and the Happy Person, Women's Virtue is the Most Fundamental" (*jia he ren le, nüde wei yao* 家人和乐, 女德为要).⁵¹ The lecture was delivered by Ma Yiling (马益玲), a famed specialist on the study of so-called "Women's Virtue" and a lecturer on traditional Chinese culture.⁵²

⁵⁰ The following account is based on Nü Quan's own WeChat (a Chinese multi-purpose social media app). See Nü Quan, "A Tale of Defying the Dojo: We Went in a Group to the Women's Virtue School visited by Ding Xuan" (踢馆记: 我们组团去了丁璇来过的女德班), WeChat, June 1, 2017. Accessed on October 10, 2019.

⁵¹ The original Ethics Forum started in Yunnan (云南) province in 2010. The Ethic Forum is generally organized by the provincial and municipal top officials.

⁵² Ma has lectured on Women's Virtue in numerous cases, both throughout China and in Europe during a 2011 visit. Her interpretation of *Teaching of the Inner Court* (*Nei xun*, 内训), one of the Confucian Four Books for Women (*Nü sishu*, 女四书), was published by the Chinese Overseas Publishing House (*Zhongguo Huaqiao Chubanshe*, 中国华侨出版社) in 2016. See Ma Yiling, *Zuo ziji de huanghou* 做自己的皇后 (*Becoming Your*

The summary and report of the entire lecture was posted in an online WeChat post, and the description of the lecture in this paper is based on this post. The lecture in Haikou was held in the conference room of one Haikou neighborhood. The room, with a maximum occupancy of one hundred people, appeared to be packed. Inside the conference room, the song “Chonghui Han Tang” 重回汉唐—“Let Us Return to the Han and Tang Dynasties” — was played loudly throughout.⁵³ In the background, the organizers hung a drawing of Confucius on the left, the cityscape of Haikou in the middle, and the portrait of Lei Feng (雷锋), a Communist soldier and legend, on the right.⁵⁴ Both sides of the room featured banners bearing calligraphy of “filial piety” (*xiao* 孝), “loyalty” (*zhong* 忠), “virtue” (*de* 德), and “righteousness” (*yi* 义). Once inside the room, a table in the corner displayed some “true words,” (*zhenyan* 真言) such as “I will help you,” “I have sinned,” and many others, meant to remind and instill vigor in attendees.⁵⁵ The wall across from the table was also decorated with confessional letters written by previous students of Women’s Virtue lectures and a public list of donors and their monetary donations.⁵⁶ The conference room also had a book shelf with a list of books available for borrowing. Those books included textbooks on women’s virtue by Ma’s counterparts such as Chen Jingyu 陈静瑜 and Zhong Maosen 钟茂森, books with an anti-abortion stance, *Dizigui* 弟子规 (*Rules for Disciples*), *Liaofan sixun* 了凡四训 (*Liao-Fan’s Four Lessons*), a book written by a filial police officer (on how to take care of one’s parents while doing one’s duty), and a book on how to treat elders well.⁵⁷ Lastly, the

own Empress). On the English translation of the Confucian Four Books on Women, again see Ann A. Pang-White, trans. *The Confucian Four Books For Women*.

⁵³ The song was created by participants of Han Clothing Movement (*hanfu yundong*, 汉服运动), a neo-traditional movement in China since the 2000s. For reference, again see Carrico, *The Great Han*.

⁵⁴ In other similar Women’s Virtue lecture sessions, the portrait of Wang Fengyi (王凤仪), a Republican peasant sage and a member of the Chinese Redemptive Society, is on display.

⁵⁵ “*Zhenyan*” also means *mantra*, that is, a concise but powerful utterance capable of bringing about both mundane and supernatural results.

⁵⁶ The Haikou Ethic Forums also once held a lecture similar with the Women’s Virtue one at Haikou’s The Great Hall of the People. Typically, the provincial Great Hall of the People can hold about 2000 people.

⁵⁷ Ma, including her volunteers, knows Ding Xuan and refers to Ding as “Teacher Ding Xuan” in private.

conference room had banners on the ceiling to reiterate the lecture topic.

The audience consisted mostly of middle-aged parents, some of whom had also brought their children. The youngest in the audience is a four-year-old, and the oldest eighty-two. The audience also came from a range of professional background: some worked in insurance, others in fields such as tourism, psychological counseling, cosmetics advertising, and medicine.⁵⁸ The volunteers, as part of the audience, were also diverse in their background. The volunteers were mostly female. Some of them served as ushers, wearing Tang Dynasty (618-907) dress. In their ushering, volunteers perform traditional Chinese rituals to the participants and greeted them with “Good morning, kinfolks!” Ma Yiling herself was introduced by the host of the Haikou Ethic Forum, Zhang Rouhe.⁵⁹ Ma sat on an antique chair to teach the lecture in front of the portraits of Confucius and Lei Feng.

The activists of Nü Quan provide additional insight into the arrangement of the event. Before joining this lecture, the activists had listened to Ma Yiling’s previous lectures and studied her work. They had identified her chain of reasoning: men and women are biologically different as women can bear children. By dedicating too much energy to their work, women will miss their opportunities for marriage, childbearing and being a mother and will hold less confidence in fulfilling their natural roles. This loss of confidence will cast doubts on the nation’s and people’s futures. Without acknowledging that men and women are biologically different, women cannot fulfill the creator’s (*zaowuzhu* 造物主) intention of making “men” and “women” and will lose their meaning of existence. Therefore, people should concentrate on women’s virtue education to reclaim this meaning of existence. The audience is encouraged to connect women’s virtue education seamlessly with the responsibility of taking care one’s family, nation, and “All-under-Heaven” (*Tianxia* 天下)

⁵⁸ In other similar women’s virtue lectures, the audience also come from a range of different backgrounds.

⁵⁹ Based on Nü Quan’s blogpost, Zhang used to work for the Haikou National Radio and Television Administration. It is possible that Zhang is also a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member as well.

seamlessly. Ma proposes that women should cultivate a sense of mission—one that embodies a long-term vision of service to the nation and the people. She sees that the household, the nation and All-under-Heaven are unified, and that woman is the origin of this cosmic order and rule. Thus, women’s virtue and the “teaching of motherhood” (*mujiao* 母教) are vital. At the same time, these activists recognize that the Haikou lecture was offered under the auspices of the Haikou TV & Radio Station and approved by the Haikou Department of Culture and Publicity Department.

The lecture now finally began. Ma displayed her lecture slides on the screen. The images included pictures of the Chinese national flag, Confucius, and the Yellow Emperor, the mythical and legendary god-king and founder of Chinese civilization. The participants sang the national anthem, and then Ma led them in bowing before the pictures of Confucius, the Yellow Emperor and the Chinese national flag (the feminist activists follow along). Ma told her audience that women are important to the household, and as President Xi Jinping has stressed the importance of family and home today, women should prepare themselves to assist their husbands and educate their children (*xiangfujiaozi* 相夫教子). She focused on women’s virtue by placing emphasis on traditional Chinese culture and urging the participants to inherit and maintain their ancestors’ bloodline and wisdom. She said that women’s paramount duty is to carry on the family lineage. She employed many emotionally loaded words to drive home the importance of motherhood. During pregnancy, Ma went on to warn, women should not be angry for any reason (even if their husbands provoke them), or their breast milk would become poisonous, impacting their baby’s well-being. Lastly, Ma employed hyperbolic tales (e.g. a husband chants *Dizigui* and the *Xiaojing* 孝经 (Classic of Filial Piety) during his wife’s second pregnancy, which leads her unborn son to become more humble, polite and filially pious son than their first daughter) and draws on Japanese pseudoscientist Masaru Emoto’s book to establish her point. Her claims pushed the Nü Quan

activists to the verge of anger.

Confrontation then ensued. The activists revealed themselves, and then criticized Ma and pointed out Masaru Emoto's lack of scientific credentials. They addressed their questions directly to Ma and prodded her to answer. Ma deflected their request and used the microphone to talk over her interrogation. At the same time, the audience stood up for Ma and called activists "disrespectful to the teacher and unconcerned for others." The participants attempted to drive these activists out of the conference room, deriding one of them as a "dog." The lecture session was curtailed and came to an abrupt end. During lunchtime, the activists distributed feminist flyers to the participants. Zhang Rouhe, the host of the Haikou Ethics Forum, immediately denounced the activists as "Western invaders," "national traitors," as well as "Hong Kong separatists and Taiwanese separatists." Attendees will later encourage a fifth-grade female student from the audience to write a letter accusing the activists of "betraying the nation" and reminding them that "we are always the Chinese people." Other participants told the activists that without the women's virtue lectures, they would have already committed suicide out of despair. They declared that traditional Chinese culture is promoted and supported by the Chinese government, so the activists should stop their complaints. The confrontation thus took on a hostile and hateful tone.

Some deep reflection on the part of the Nü Quan activists followed this experience. In their blogpost, they wrote that they understand that some people in the lecture hoped to find their spirituality and meaning of life through so-called "traditional Chinese culture." Living in a society that fetishes capitals and other disadvantages, the activists empathized with people wishing to use "feudalistic moral virtues" to heal their wounds. However, the activists concluded their blogpost with the hope that the confrontation would help attendees to doubt their naïve wishfulness, while they also lamented that it is not possible to find another alternative for debunking this wishfulness. On the other hand, the WeChat account of the

Ethics Forum updated its blogpost on Ma Yiling’s lecture, showering her with praise. Only later in its coverage does it address the interrupters, describing them as “rascals,” “materialists,” and “ignorant.” It explains that the lecture simply followed the instruction from President Xi Jinping and the Chinese central government to propagate the spirit of traditional Chinese culture. In the end, the blogpost calls for the further education of the younger generation with a sense of urgency. Thus the “tale of defying the dojo” (tiguanji 踢馆记) ends.⁶⁰

Case Study 2: The Summer Camp/ Training Course

Other activities of the Women’s Virtue Movement include summer camps for teenage girls as well as training courses for adult females. What follows is a composite example based on the existing Chinese reports.⁶¹

Groups of women, ranging in age from toddlers to adolescents, or to female staffs in commercial businesses, arrive at a remote building or manor. They are received at the entrance by ushers that are dressed in the same style as those at the Haikou lecture. On arrival, they become “students” under the supervision of lecturers and organizers. The doors of the premises are locked and “students” are required to turn in their belongings, including cellphones, wallets, and keys. They then are assigned rooms. This training course usually lasts a week. During the course, the “students” are not allowed to shower. The introductory lecture requires “students” to discard their previous religious beliefs and practice the art of silencing the word (zhiyu 止语).⁶² Lectures are held in a conference room, with portraits of Confucius and other religious figures such as Wang Fengyi 王凤仪, the influential healer,

⁶⁰ Nü Quan, “A Tale of Defying the Dojo.” The title is based on the Cantonese marital arts idiom, which means throwing the gauntlet at someone or something like trashing the establishment.

⁶¹ Li, “You Misunderstood Women’s Virtue Schools, They Are Not Feudal Dregs.” Following descriptions based on his blogpost summary.

⁶² “Zhiyu” is a popular Chinese Buddhist practice.

moralist, and preacher from early twentieth-century China, hung on in the walls.

Communications are only to be conducted in writing, as part of the *zhiyu* practice. Those written notes must not be thrown away or carelessly left somewhere; rather, they should be collected and incinerated. “Students” are required to go to bed at 9 pm and rise at 4:30 am. The “students” are called upon to clean the bathroom with their bare hands. While cleaning, they are forced to announce that “my heart is dirtier than this bathroom.” They have to finish every bite of their meals, otherwise their leftovers must be eaten by volunteers and lecturers.

Formal instruction consists of moral teachings. The idea of karmic causes is reiterated throughout the course, along with readings of those excerpts from the *Nü si shu* 女四书 (*The Confucian Four Books for Women*) that preach softness, obedience and submissiveness. Several key ideas stand out in these teachings: women should remain at the bottom of society; career women and professional women do not end up well in karmic cycles; women should always obey the orders of their fathers, husbands and sons; women should not fight back when their husbands beat them; women should not object when husbands scold them; women should not have sex with several men, for fear of catching sexual transmitted diseases during these activities from the male semen and subsequently dying; women should not divorce or remarry throughout their marriages nor when widowed to preserve their chastity; women’s sole purpose lies in the households; women are responsible for bearing and taking care of children and assisting their husbands; women should not have abortions. Those core teachings were propagated through videos, lectures and hyperbolic tales. One key message was reiterated: that traditional Chinese culture has the soteriological value of producing miracles and cleansing one’s sins. Furthermore, during the course, lecturers place huge emphasis on the merits of confession and invite the “students” to perform confession of their sins in front of a huge audience as the final product of the training course.

Not all “students,” however, are compliant. A few succeed in escaping the building at

night, disgusted by the teachings in the course. Yet in most cases, the participants stay and finish the training course in a week and depart at the due time.

The Haikou lecture and the training course provide many common themes for this paper to explore and explain. Both share a similar setting in their setting arrangement, alluding to figures such as Confucius, legendary sage kings, religious figures like Wang Fengyi, and role models such as Lei Feng. A set of common discourses are promoted in both cases: women's biological role dictates the natural law and determines a binary social order; women should assist their husbands and cultivate their children to be future sages (like Confucius who has moral superiority); women's work in the household contributes to the well-being of the nation and All-under-Heaven; women should keep their chastity and ensure the purity of their bodies; traditional Chinese culture possesses soteriological magic that can save people both physically from lethal disease and spiritually by exorcising evil; and women should be humble, compliant and obedient in their daily conduct. In both cases, the lecturers of the WVM advocate confessions, the act of cleaning, vegetarianism and anti-abortion. The participants come from various demographics and social backgrounds, covering Chinese women from every part of the social spectrum.

Yet there is something more that is visible in these cases, especially in the Haikou lecture. As both operate at the local level, they must receive approval from the local government officials and cadres. As the Haikou lecture reveals, municipal officials approved and served as the host of the event. In the confrontation scenario of the Haikou lecture, the host, the lecturer and audience publicly aligned themselves with state policy and President Xi Jinping's instruction to promote the spirit of traditional Chinese culture. More importantly, during the confrontation, participants referred to the activists as "traitors," "western invaders" and "Hong Kong and Taiwan separatists." Those pejoratives should not be dismissed as only randomly chosen; rather, they reveal deep connections between the Women's Virtue

Movement, the nation, the state and, most of all, the Chinese Communist Party.

In the following chapters I will examine the textbooks of the Women's Virtue Movement and Ding Xuan's 2015 Shanghai Lecture. I will analyze the Women's Virtue Movement by dividing it into several common themes and explaining them diachronically (targeting both China's historical and contemporary perspective) and comparatively across cultures (U.S., South Korea, and India). These themes include Women's Virtue and Tradition/Ancestors; Women's Virtue and the Cosmic Order; Women's Virtue, karma and moral transformation (*jiaohua* 教化); and Women's Virtue and the nation-state and religious nationalism. In the course of this, the thesis will also address two aspects the Women's Virtue Movement that deserve attention: the emphasis on vegetarianism and the discourse on eugenics and racial purity/superiority.

Part III: Themes and Variations

Chapter III: Women's Virtue and Tradition, Ancestors, and Sages

The textbooks indicated in this paper are the popularized, transcribed exegesis of the *Confucian Four Books for Women* by the lecturers of the WVM. Those textbooks are reserved for audiences to read and study. Throughout the lectures and textbooks of the Women's Virtue Movement, the connections between women's virtue education, Chinese ancestors, traditional Chinese culture and ancient Chinese sages like Confucius, Mencius and many others are constantly emphasized. Many traditional expressions regarding women are refurbished and reiterated by leading lecturers of the movement.

The Women's Virtue Movement authorities often begin by adopting the phrase from Confucius that their teaching and preaching is to “transmit rather than innovate.” (*shu er bu zuo* 述而不作)⁶³ They present themselves as torchbearers passing down knowledge and wisdom from Chinese sages to the public/the audience thereby keeping the flame alive.⁶⁴ Women's virtue education thus becomes important because it belongs to the genre of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese wisdom descended from the ancient sages and ancestors. Furthermore, since lecturers like Ding Xuan also underscore that teaching traditional Chinese culture can cultivate moral sages in society, women's virtue education is implicitly elevated to a higher status, for it too is a type of traditional Chinese culture.⁶⁵

Indeed, the lecturers in the Women's Virtue Movement do “transmit.” The lecturers offer interpretations of the traditional Chinese discourses that are typically misogynistic. For example, Ding Xuan, Zhong Maosen, Chen Jingyu and Ma Yiling all provide a revisionist interpretation of the Chinese proverb “a woman without talent is a woman of virtue” (*nüzi*

⁶³ Translation adopted from *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 20. But also see Zhong for quoting this phrase. Zhong, 33.

⁶⁴ Bilibili, Part I, 03:39. Zhong, 33.

⁶⁵ Bilibili, Part I, 06:10.

wucai bianshi de 女子无才便是德). The three lecturers attempt to provide a seemingly nuanced interpretation of the proverb to their audience, suggesting that women are not literally inhibited from pursuing their talents in the public sphere. Instead, women, even those with exceptional talents, ought only to value virtues such as humility, submissiveness and modesty. Excellent women do not show their cleverness and talents or take pride in them. They devote themselves fully to cultivating virtues and taking care of their families and kinsfolk through their talents, including helping their husbands and caring for their children.⁶⁶ These lecturers and textbooks solely promote the importance of studying women's virtue for women within the context of managing the family. They extend their logic of "a woman without talent is a woman of virtue" to their audience. By using tradition as a banner, these lecturers of the Women's Virtue Movement thus reinstate the teaching of women's virtue to their audience.

The lecturers also superficially refashion the definition of "fair lady" (*yaotiao shunü* 窈窕淑女) and dispute the popular understanding of this term. In their view, "fair lady" means a woman with supreme virtues and high morality such as purity, uprightness, honesty and peace of mind instead of a woman that embodies beauty, grace and even seduction.⁶⁷ This interpretation, to an audience so familiar with the latter meaning, sounds novel and nuanced, as it can be seen as underscoring the inner beauty of a woman. Yet this interpretation of "fair lady" simply reverts to the idea of women's virtue. Both interpretations of "a woman without talent is a woman of virtue" and "fair lady" employ proverbial expressions and superficially nuanced interpretations so as to attract an audience.

The WVM lecturers employ expressions of tradition, ancestors, and ancient sages to promote specific virtues and practices. Lecturers reference to ancient sages in an abstract

⁶⁶ Bilibili, Part I, 60:31; Zhong, 14; Chen, 3; Ma, 9.

⁶⁷ Bilibili, Part I, 110:26; Zhong, 3; Chen, 85; Ma, 8.

manner (without mentioning the sages' names) citing that “women are the key to keeping the family together and the origin of purifying the nation” (*nūzi shi qijiazhiben, qingguozhiyuan* 女子是齐家之本，清国之源), stressing the importance of holding fast to women’s virtues, specifically chastity and purity.⁶⁸ They cite the ancient sages in the abstract manner (again, without mentioning their names at all) by saying that “the sages prohibit women from committing adultery and promiscuity” as a warning to the audience.⁶⁹

The lecturers emphasize that being a mother is one of the best ways to practice women’s virtue. This is still crucial for Chinese society today, as there are few sagacious and virtuous mothers and women left.⁷⁰ To substantiate their claims, lecturers refer to Confucius’ mother and Mencius’ mother as exemplars of wisdom, as their sons are leading sages in Chinese history.⁷¹

In this process, the lecturers often sacralize traditional Chinese culture, ancestors and ancient Chinese sages in their rhetoric. The transcendence, authoritativeness and timelessness of traditional Chinese culture, ancestors and ancient Chinese sages are especially emphasized. Ding Xuan claims that “learning traditional Chinese culture [and women’s virtue] can grant people absolute truth.”⁷² Similarly, Chen Jingyu claims that “We are the disciples of the ancient sages.... Since ancient times, there is the saying that ‘An old man’s sayings are seldom untrue.’ Who is the old man? Our ancestor is this old man.... Our ancestor’s wisdom, his spiritual wealth, totally transcends across time and space. It is truly the case.”⁷³

On another occasion, Chen analogizes that

Our ancestor is not stupid. He is very wise. It is like facing an old man who lives more than three to five thousand years. Facing this elder, we are merely little children. If we don’t present ourselves with an attitude of sincere respect

⁶⁸ Bilibili, Part I, 07:34.

⁶⁹ Tencent, Part II, 3:15:40.

⁷⁰ Bilibili, Part I, 41:00-41:50, 79:36; Zhong, 5-6, 21; Ma, 2-3, 177.

⁷¹ Zhong, 61.

⁷² Tencent, Part II, 1:40:58.

⁷³ Chen, 11.

and listen to his teaching, how can we understand his intention? The ancestors originally had a profound intention behind designing those women's virtues.... Perhaps our ancestors already foresaw that women would be indulgent and presumptuous in their lives.... Thus, our ancestors set up a great example for us, and we are dwarfed when we are compared with them.⁷⁴

Chen asserts that the audience should follow and practice the teaching of women's virtue unconditionally. Furthermore, lecturers such as Ding Xuan and Zhong Maosen equally promote that "practicing the women's virtue can perform miracles when treating diseases" and that "the traditional Chinese culture can cure cancers."⁷⁵ They thus assign magical power to women's virtue through their discourses.

The lecturers' emphasis on ancestors and sages follows a long Chinese tradition. Within Chinese culture, there exists a long tradition of honoring, worshipping and sacrificing for the patriarchal ancestors. This dates back to the Shang Dynasty (1570/1554-1045/1040 BCE), when Shang kings used their oracle bones to call upon the spirit of their ancestors to divine the fortunes of the state. Through sacrifice and worship, the ancestors were endowed with the status of authority. In the Spring and Autumn Period (771-476 BCE), Confucius repeatedly emphasized the importance of rituals, including sacrifice to ancestors. The rituals during the ancestor ceremony were intended to enable the ancestral spirits to dwell with the living in the ritual space. Within the ritual space, the living pay tribute to the spirits as if they are present, domesticating them and cultivating a right disposition towards them.⁷⁶

The worship of sages was also an important element of imperial Chinese tradition. Shortly after the death of Confucius, his native state, Lu (魯), which was in contemporary Shandong Province, had already started to worship him.⁷⁷ By the time of the Han dynasty, everyone worshipped their ancestors, and the emperors incorporated ancestor-worship as a

⁷⁴ Chen, 173. Similar rhetoric can also be seen at Zhong, 63.

⁷⁵ Tencent, Part II, 3:31:00; Zhong, 313.

⁷⁶ See Michael Puett, "Critical Approaches to Religion in China," *Critical Research on Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2013), 95-101.

⁷⁷ Sun, *Confucianism as a World Religion*, 18-20.

state cult and practice. This was passed down to the remaining Chinese dynasties over the centuries.⁷⁸ Since then, the imperial worship of ancestors has been conflated with the cult of Confucius. This conflation can even be seen today in the annual Jikong Dadian (祭孔大典, Confucius Veneration Ceremony) in Confucius's hometown, Qufu, Shandong Province.⁷⁹

A brief history of the debates over Chinese women's "public talent" and "private virtue" is necessary for us to understand these lecturers' rhetoric. Throughout the dynastic history of China, the Chinese state set up the politicized Confucianism and the *yin-yang* concept as an ideological apparatus and political pillar to support the social system. Under this system, the *yin-yang* concept corresponds to the female-male dynamics, with female embodying the *yin* side associated with what is dark, low, passive and inferior, like "private virtues (de 德). Males, meanwhile, are associated with the *yang* side of brightness, loftiness, activeness, with what is exterior, and "public talents" (cai 才). Women's social mobility thus was largely restricted. Chinese women had to abide by the principle of "Three Obedience and Four Virtues," (*sancongside* 三从四德), which means that women should be obedient in their capacities as daughters to fathers, as wives to husbands, and as widowed mothers to sons; and, women should uphold the four private virtues of "moral discipline (*fude* 妇德), proper speech manner (*fuyan* 妇言), modest appearance (*furong* 妇容), and diligence (*fugong* 妇功)."⁸⁰ Those four virtues were first articulated in the canonical text *The Book of Rites* (Liji 礼记) during the Spring and Autumn Period. They require women to be faithful and loyal; to speak only in the appropriate occasions; to look politely and be reserved; and to be good at

⁷⁸ Anthony C. Yu, *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2005), 9-10, 19-20. For more, see chapter 3 of Yu's book.

⁷⁹ See Zhelun Zhou, "Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius," *UCLA Journal of Religion*, Vol. 3, (2019), 75, 77.

⁸⁰ Wong Yin Lee, "Women's Education in Traditional and Modern China," *Women's History Review*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (1995), 345-367. "Three obedience and four virtues" was perhaps first documented around the Han Dynasty.

knitting and weaving.⁸¹ Those four virtues were then reiterated by the Han-dynasty female historian Ban Chao 班超 in her work *Lessons for Women* (*Nüjie* 女诫) in 100 C.E.⁸²

Throughout the imperial dynasties, women's only purposes were marriage and childbearing. Women's education focused on preparation for marriage.⁸³ Chronologically, the *Confucian Four Books for Women* were composed by different female authors in the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties.⁸⁴ Hence, prior to the Qing dynasty, Chinese women's situation in society was thus mostly limited and suppressed.⁸⁵

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 CE), women's situation deteriorated further. Qing rulers retained the emphasis on female chastity and virginity from their dynastic predecessors. At this time, women who became widows before they were thirty and remained chaste until after the age of fifty would be rewarded with a memorial arch, commemorating their achievement and exempting their families from some forms of taxation.⁸⁶ The popular view that "a woman without talent is a woman of virtue" and the more widespread use of foot-binding among the elites were also Qing innovations.⁸⁷ The process of configuring ideal womanhood as a combination of motherhood and virginity became complete under the Qing.⁸⁸ The lecturers of the WVM follow this sacralization process in their rhetoric, and in

⁸¹ Lee, "Women's Education in Traditional and Modern China," 351.

⁸² See Pang-White, *The Confucian Four Books For Women*, 54-56.

⁸³ Lee, "Women's Education," 349-353.

⁸⁴ Lee, "Women's Education," 345-367.

⁸⁵ Recent scholarship from historians Patricia Ebrey, Susan Mann, Geil Hershatter and many others have pointed out that life for Chinese women in the Song and pre-Qing dynasties was not as oppressive and restrictive as people thought it to be. Joseph Adler in his essay also points out the distinction between prescriptive (the moral teachings and principles on women) and descriptive (women's actual situations) literature in regard with women's historical situations. See Adler, "Daughter/Wife/Mother or Sage/Immortal/Bodhisattva? Women in the Teaching of Chinese Religions," *ASIANetwork Exchange*, Vol. XIV, no. 2 (Winter 2006), 14-15.

⁸⁶ Adler, "Daughter/Wife/Mother," 15. The Memorial Arch was prevalent in both the Ming and Qing dynasties.

⁸⁷ Lee, "Women's Education in China," 353-354; Liu and Carpenter, "Trends and Issues of Women's Education in China," 277; Joan Judge, "Talent, Virtue and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century," in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 3 (Jun. 2001), p. 789. Recent scholarship from historian Dorothy Ko and anthropologist John Shepherd has tried to provide more nuanced and analytical study of foot-binding practices. For example, see John Shepherd's new work *Footbinding as Fashion: Ethnicity, Labor, and Status in Traditional China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2018).

⁸⁸ The equation of "ideal womanhood" as "women who combine motherhood and virginity" is in Fang-long Shih, "Women, Religions, and Feminisms," 237. Shih, though, also cautions to her readers of this claim's

their valorization of women's domesticity.

Apart from their emphasis on women's private virtues, the lecturers also strive hard to stave off any potential criticism as a way to uphold the power and authority of traditional Chinese culture. Zhong Maosen singles out one specific criticism: that "traditional virtue and morality consumes people" (*chiren de fengjian lijiao* 吃人的封建礼教). The phrase comes from the famous Chinese writer and modernizer Lu Xun's 1918 novella "A Madman's Diary" (*kuangren riji*, 狂人日记). Lu Xun's description of "traditional virtue and morality" was soon adopted by the May Fourth Movement participants during the late 1910s as a catchphrase to call for a new culture. Zhong refers to Lu Xun's motto only to bolster the importance of women's virtue. He states that people should not feel rebellious when they hear phrases such as "Three Obedience and Four Virtues" (*sancongside* 三从四德). Nor should they reject "traditional virtue and morality" based on Lu Xun's motto. Instead, he suggests that people should think the issue through: he points out that the women's virtue has lasted almost three thousand years. During all those millenia, no one objected to that set of traditions and teachings. Only in modern times have we (the May Fourth Movement and the audience) started to question those values, which for him is irrational, arrogant and presumptuous. Instead, he suggests that his audience should give women's virtue and traditional Chinese culture a chance rather than dismiss them outright.⁸⁹ He reiterates similar rhetoric later in his textbook as he bemoans the decline and loss of women's virtue teaching during the Republican era (1912-1949), another implied criticism of the May Fourth Movement.⁹⁰

After the grave defeat at the hands of the Japanese during the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895, Chinese elites, including Qing court officials, shifted their attention to Japan and

weakness and its potential ahistoricity.

⁸⁹ Zhong, 59.

⁹⁰ Zhong, 273.

proposed to emulate the victors in China's own modernization process. They invited Japanese educator Shimoda Utako to China to open schools for girls.⁹¹ Shimoda introduced many pioneering ideas about female education, along with a social Darwinism that equated female biology to the national well-being. Shimoda believed that a pure, healthy female body would guarantee the survival of a healthy Chinese people and the Chinese nation.⁹² Shimoda emphasized that the strength of Chinese women lies in their morality, and their weakness in their physicality. Her schools upheld the cultivation of women's domestic virtues, rather than their intellectual and public talents. Her vision shaped many schools for girl opened in China until 1910.

Simultaneously, Chinese society also witnessed the rise of "modernizing conservatives," who promoted technical advances but remained culturally conservative in their outlooks.⁹³ For them, female education should maintain the traditional virtue of women, training girls to be skillful and professional "household managers." They should possess a relatively "modern" knowledge of child hygiene, psychology and accountancy. Yet the women would still be inculcated with traditional virtues of deference, diligence and self-sacrifice in their personal conduct.⁹⁴ For modernizing conservatives, the order and harmony of society was built on the harmony of each individual household managed by women.⁹⁵ All this constituted the dominant paradigm female education in the last decade of the Qing dynasty and the early Republican period at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In this context, the clash between "domestic virtues" and "public talents" unfurled. Female students who received education at Shimoda's schools later went to Japan to further their studies. But students like Qiu Jin 秋瑾 later returned to China after their time in Japan

⁹¹ Judge, "Talent, Virtue and Nation," 772-775. The first girl school was already found during 1894-1895.

⁹² Judge, "Talent, Virtue, Nation," 772-779.

⁹³ Paul J. Bailey, "'Modernising Conservatism' in Early Twentieth-Century China: The Discourse and Practice of Women's Education," in *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (2004). 218-220.

⁹⁴ Bailey, "'Modernising Conservatism' in Early Twentieth-Century China," 219.

⁹⁵ Bailey, "'Modernising Conservatism' in Early Twentieth-Century China," 223.

pondering the question of national survival and participating in the nation-building project.⁹⁶ As “feminists,” they rebelled against Shimoda’s logic of female domesticity, private virtues and national survival.⁹⁷ Those Chinese feminists considered that only by expressing private virtue as public talent, through voting and participating in public affairs, could the Chinese nation survive in an age of colonialism.⁹⁸ Radical nationalists themselves, those Chinese feminists contended that women should take responsibility for serving the Chinese nation directly.⁹⁹ Thus they tried to weave patriotic, participatory female identity into the national survival-narratives. At the same time, the modernizing conservatives, relying on the idea of Shimoda, witnessed their views on women’s education gradually becoming passé. Female students at this time engaged in extroverted behavior such as varying their hairstyles, wearing fashionable clothing and glasses, acting unfemininely, and participating in street protests and strikes.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Shimoda’s schools and the education agenda set by the modernizing conservatives during the late imperial Qing and early Republican China alike failed to achieve their goals of preserving the traditional feminine virtues assigned to women.

The discussion of religious and women’s questions revived with the May Fourth Movement after 1919. Intense public discussion of Nora, the female protagonist in Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* prompted May Fourth-inspired intellectuals such as Hu Shi 胡适 and Lu Xun 鲁迅 to present visions of the “new woman” (*xin funu*, 新妇女).¹⁰¹ Different organizations, including the nascent Chinese Communist Party (CCP), started to address the issue of women in their approaches. Throughout this time, however, Chinese political and cultural elites envisioned the “new woman” as an

⁹⁶ Judge, “Talent, Virtue, and the Nation,” 783-785.

⁹⁷ Note that Judge describes those Chinese women as “feminists” as their activism “pertaining to women,” not exactly in the sense of modern Western feminism, see Judge, “Talent, Virtue and the Nation,” 773, note 25.

⁹⁸ Judge, “Talent, Virtue, and the Nation,” 785-790.

⁹⁹ Judge, “Talent, Virtue, and the Nation,” 790-801.

¹⁰⁰ Bailey, “‘Modernising Conservatism’ in Early Twentieth-Century China,” 233-238.

¹⁰¹ Kang, “Women and the Religious Question,” 500-510; Hershatter, *Women and China’s Revolution*, 93-104.

independent, secular actor while remaining a traditional, self-sacrificing wife or mother, who somehow bridges the contradiction between women's pursuit of modern education and a public role and their services to the cause of national salvation and modernization.¹⁰² In this sense, the question of public talent versus private virtue was awkwardly reconciled by shifting the emphasis to dedication to the nation.

This logic was further twisted under Communist rule after 1949. Typically, the Chinese Communist Party, from its leaders such as Mao Zedong on down, placed their emphasis on eliminating class divisions. For them, women's rights and feminism were at best a cause of secondary importance. They believed that once they dismantled the class structure, the women would be automatically liberated. While the new constitution of the People's Republic of China included a commitment to gender equality, this remained an abstract construct that did not reflect reality. Women were underrepresented in the leadership of the state. While being "liberated" and formally equal to men, Chinese women were asked to perform dual task in both public and private spheres: women had to engage in paid labor receiving less salary than men, and they also had to tend the children and bear more children for the nation. Under the Maoist discourse, women lived under a new form of inequality. They had to devote their loyalty fully to the new patriarchy: the socialist state, the Chinese Communist Party, and the Chinese nation. Thus, catchphrases like "women hold up half of the sky" were nothing but a romantic misnomer of women's reality.¹⁰³ In this sense, the logic of the new woman was perpetuated under the Chinese Communist Party, as women were simply left to balance their public talents and private virtue themselves.

During the Maoist era, religious activities were heavily suppressed, though women during this time helped to preserve altars, scriptures and other religious paraphernalia from

¹⁰² For a discussion of the "woman question" by different social groups (the Communist Party, the Nationalist Party and etc.) during the 1920s and the 1930s, see Kang, "Women and the Religious Question," 510-522; Hershatler, *Women and China's Revolution*, Ch. 4 and 5.

¹⁰³ Kang, "Women and the Religious Question," 523-529; Hershatler, *Women and China's Revolution*, 232-243.

the public view.¹⁰⁴ During the 1978 Opening-ups, there was a renewed public discussion of Chinese traditions, Confucian canons and culture. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests, the Chinese government, taking its cue from its leader Deng Xiaoping, began to lay more emphasis on students' patriotic education.¹⁰⁵ This was partly due to the government's concern over the appeal that concepts such as democracy and freedom had had among the student protesters in 1989. Another possible reason was the Fall of the Berlin Wall in the same year, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the transformations of Eastern European nations from communist regimes to nominal liberal democracies. The Chinese Communist Party was afraid of losing its own legitimacy in China. Thus, economic development and political stability, in the form of a patriotic and nationalistic education curriculum, were implemented from the top as the "hard truth."¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the Tiananmen Square Massacre on June 4, 1989 became the watershed event for the People's Republic of China in the past thirty years.

The escalating reports about moral decadence and internet revelations about scandals involving Chinese government officials starting in the 1990s also injected a new enthusiasm into Chinese people's yearning for tradition.¹⁰⁷ The popular revival of Confucianism was thus born, as the state and the people redirected their attention to Confucianism and its canons for guidance on the future of China. The Chinese state incorporated Confucianism, a doctrine people associate with traditional Chinese culture, into its propaganda to assert its legitimacy. On the other hand, since the 2000s, many grassroots organizations began to organize

¹⁰⁴ Kang, "Women and the Religious Question," 528-530, 532.

¹⁰⁵ For a complete and balanced account of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest, see Craig Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ For an account on the aftermath of June Fourth incident on the contemporary Chinese society in both potentially personal level and socio-collective level, see Louisa Lim, *People's Republic of Amnesia*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Paperback Edition 2015). See also Blanchette, *China's New Red Guards*, 38-61 on the development of China in 1990s after the June Fourth Massacre.

¹⁰⁷ For a brief overview of the moral crisis in China, see "The Moral Crisis in China Part I—Seven Areas that Showcase China's Moral Crisis," in *ChinaScope Analysis Series* (December 2011), 1-20.

traditional Confucian schools and launched a “reading the classics” movement.¹⁰⁸ Those movements are anti-modern and nationalistic, emphasizing the values of the Confucian classics. These, they believe, can instill a philosophy of life in the students, preparing them for society better than Western modern subjects like English and math.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, the state implicitly collaborated with these grassroots schools by lending its patronage to the revival of the former imperial Veneration of Confucius ceremony. Held annually in Qufu 曲阜, the hometown of Confucius, the ceremony is broadcasted nationwide on state-affiliated television. Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, he has made frequent visits to Qufu, consolidating the ceremony’s status as an educative project for Chinese citizens.¹¹⁰ Hence the popular Confucian revival, advocated by both the state and grassroots organizations, has made much headway in Chinese society.

Along with this, publishing houses began to reprint books on women’s virtues. One of the first was published in 1996, in which the series editor in the preface says that it is important to re-examine women’s virtues, reflecting more closely as it does traditional Chinese culture.¹¹¹ The first Women’s Virtue lecture appears to have been held in 2006, at exactly the same time as popular revival of Confucianism was approaching its peak.

This long detour provides us with better insight into the relationship between women’s virtue and the movement’s appropriation of traditional Chinese culture, ancestors, and ancient sages. The Women’s Virtue Movement follows the traditional Chinese dichotomy between public talent and the private virtue. It continues the debate over those two attributes that began during the late Qing dynasty and the early Republican era. WVM lecturers unambiguously assign weight to women’s private virtue. The emphasis feeds into an

¹⁰⁸ See Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*, 35-106.

¹⁰⁹ See Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*, 86-89.

¹¹⁰ See Zhelun Zhou, “Politics of Confucian Revival,” 62-82.

¹¹¹ *Nü Jie—Rensheng de jiasuo* (女诫—人生的枷锁), edited by Xu Zi (徐梓), annotated by Zhang Fuqing (张福清), (Beijing, China: Zhongyang Minzu Daxue Chubanshe, 1996), 1-3.

apotheosis of women's domesticity and household activities, as only those can women demonstrate their particular virtues such as faithfulness, loyalty, and proper manners. The Women's Virtue Movement thereby determines the work women should do: assisting their husbands and taking care of children. They praise the women who raised up their children as sages, as did the mothers of Confucius and Mencius. These two mothers became the exemplary figures that the movement's lecturers want their audience to emulate in their daily conduct.

It is also important to consider the way lecturers justify their teaching and preaching of women's virtue. To convince their audience of the relevance of women's virtues, these lecturers have assigned transcendental and authoritative status to traditional Chinese culture, ancestors and ancient Chinese sages such as Confucius. Ding Xuan has called traditional Chinese culture as the absolute Truth (*zhenli* 真理) and the absolute Wisdom (*zhihui* 智慧).¹¹² In their discourses, this absolute truth and wisdom are the superlative good that can be acquired through traditional Chinese culture and the teaching of women's virtue. By speaking traditional Chinese culture and women's virtue in such absolute terms, Ding Xuan and her colleagues invest both categories with a transcendent and authoritative weight. They understand that only the ancestors and the sages can occupy the essence of wisdom. They claiming that learning women's virtue is the way to achieve this transcendental Wisdom. This prescription is evoked by those lecturers to persuade their audience practicing women's virtue. Their discourse supports the transcendental status of women's virtue. Assigning authority, transcendence and absolute truth to both traditional Chinese culture and women's virtue, the lecturers of the WVM intensify the level of religiosity in their discourses.¹¹³

As the lecturers keep alluding to the ancestors and Chinese ancient sages in their

¹¹² Tencent, Part II, 1:40:58, 2:35:45.

¹¹³ Based on Bruce Lincoln's definition of religious discourses, see Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion After September 11* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

discourses, they also emphasize the notion of patrilineal tradition and culture, because ancestors and sages in ancient China are all males. These ancestors and sages function as an object of totemic belief. This binds the audience through their reverence to those ancestral figures, marking the audience's identity as the inheritors of Chinese traditions. For example, Ding Xuan says in the beginning of her lecture that "it is our ancestors' accumulated merits that bless us to gather here studying traditional Chinese culture and women's virtue. This proves that our ancestors' virtues were rewarded."¹¹⁴ She repeatedly calls upon women to properly worship the ancestors when they bear daughters so as to herald the good news to the spirit of ancestors.¹¹⁵ Ding's homage to ancestors serves to bind the audience.

The lecturers' religious discourse also works to keep the audience enchanted. This is achieved in two ways: first, they prescribe magic and supernatural ability to women's virtue and traditional Chinese culture; second, they dispel the disenchantment of modern, secular society. Zhong Maosen and Ding Xuan state that traditional Chinese culture and women's virtue could defeat insurmountable diseases such as cancer and perform miracles for the practitioners.¹¹⁶ The lecturers heavily criticize the May Fourth Movement in their defense of women's virtue and traditional Chinese culture. Zhong goes to great length to discredit the May Fourth Movement, convincing his audience the vitality of traditional Chinese culture and women's virtue. Their re-enchantment legitimizes their emphasis on teaching women's virtue, since it holds miraculous power in this world.

Therefore, the lecturers of the Women's Virtue Movement exploit tradition, ancestors and sages to valorize the importance of women's virtue and exhort their audience to learn and practice women's virtue. The lecturers insert a level of religiosity, in terms of transcendence and authority, into their discourse of women's virtue. Yet questions remain as what this level

¹¹⁴ Bilibili, Part I, 2:00, 2:07.

¹¹⁵ Bilibili, Part I, 80:27, 82:27.

¹¹⁶ Zhong, 313; Tencent, Part II, 3:31:00.

of religiosity in women's virtue entails in regard to its purpose. This leads us to the discussion of relationship between women's virtue and cosmic order.

Chapter IV: Women's Virtue and the Cosmic Order

From the connection between women's virtue and tradition/ancestors/sages, there is an extended connection to women's virtue and the cosmic order. This chapter will examine the lecturer's discourse to understand its effect on linking women's virtue to the cosmic order.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, proponents of the WVM maintain that women's virtue is part of traditional Chinese culture, and Ding Xuan and her counterparts back their visions of ideal womanhood with a transcendental, authoritative foundation. They define ideal womanhood as a woman with superior domestic virtue built on a superficial Confucian underpinning, as Confucius and other Confucians never defined womanhood explicitly in their works. This woman embodies modesty and humility. She is diligent, soft, submissive and obedient. She is orderly and comely. Yet most importantly and paradoxically, the ideal woman is both a virginal daughter and a chaste, sagacious mother. She is capable of both assisting her husband and taking care of her children to cultivate them into future sages. Ideal womanhood is rooted in the domestic sphere with an excessive emphasis on women's bodily purity.¹¹⁷ Moreover, all four lecturers, Zhong Maosen, Chen Jingyu, Ma Yiling and Ding Xuan, repeatedly remind women that the "highest good is like water (*shang shan ruo shui* 上善若水). Women should be soft like water, gentle like water, modest like water, and all-encompassing like water."¹¹⁸ In some cases, the lecturers also view ideal womanhood as an embodiment of mother/wife/daughter and sage/immortal/bodhisattva at the same time.¹¹⁹ Those lecturers make this claim based on the teaching of *Daodejing*, the Daoist canon, as they quote the phrase "highest good is like water." Those attributes that the lecturers assign to the woman thus complete their depiction of the ideal woman, who is a virgin and a mother, an

¹¹⁷ Bilibili, Part I, 64:34, 75:43; Tencent, Part II, 1:19:36, 3:13:39; Zhong, 45; Chen, 45, 85, 137-148; Ma, 44,53.

¹¹⁸ Bilibili, Part I, 65:56-78:50; Zhong, 204, 288; Chen, 125; Ma, 71, 101. Translation based on *Daodejing*, trans. by Robert Eno (2016), 12. Accessed on April 8, 2020.

¹¹⁹ Zhong, 104, 204; Chen, 125; Ma, 71, 101; Tencent, Part II, 1:05:56, 1:18:50.

exemplary human and an immortal at the same time.

This vision of the ideal woman can be understood in part as a reaction to feminist activities. The lecturers claim that “those women who go out to fight for equality with men abandon their mission of taking care of the households and teaching their children,” and that “women’s status is already higher than men’s, since they have a more important mission, which is to manage the households”; moreover, “women who fight for her status and power in the society are like the Chinese peonies that bloom in January instead of April. Though beautiful and magnificent in their ways, they will not leave any legacy and future for the next generation.”¹²⁰ In light of their anti-feminist tendency, the lecturers then criticize the so-called “career women” in their discourse, as these women usually do not endure difficulties well in their lives. To affirm their visions of the ideal woman, the lecturers also chide ideas such as sexual liberation and sexual freedom, regarding them as destructive to family harmony and social stability.¹²¹ By setting up those counterexamples, the lecturers re-emphasize their conception of ideal womanhood and invite their audience to follow this ideal.

The examples and foils established in the lecturers’ discourses are narrated to establish a cosmic order. This cosmic order is multi-faceted and complex. To unpack this cosmic order, we again should delve into the lecturers’ description of this cosmic order. The lecturers construct this cosmic order with a biological difference. They claim that women and men are biologically different: women can bear children, while men cannot. They view this difference as women’s heavenly vocation (*tianzhi* 天职).¹²² Ding Xuan and Zhong Maosen contend that this biological difference dictates a natural law: that women’s role is to bear children and to care for children, while men’s role is to support the family through work. With this definition of natural law, the lecturers argue that this law is eternal and transcendent as it can

¹²⁰ Chen, 3; Zhong, 5, 63.

¹²¹ Bilibili, Part I, 93:13, 138:24; Tencent, Part II, 28:44, 1:05:49, 2:54:06.

¹²² Zhong, 3, 256; Bilibili, Part I, 77:39, 80:19.

never be altered. They then direct this law towards the organization of family and society. They view family as the inner-space (*nei* 内) while viewing society as the outer-space (*wai* 外). They argue that following this natural law, women should stay in the household, while men should head out to explore society.¹²³ Their vision of cosmic order underscores the family role of men and women and gender difference, and the division of space between men and women. This order is dualistic.

With their emphasis on family and gender differences, the lecturers see a family or a household as the relationship between husband and wife. Based on this notion, they assign more attributes to both husband and wife. The husband, they believe, embodies the spirit of *yang*, indicating the virtue of masculinity and stamina; the wife, they contend, embodies the spirit of *yin*, indicating the virtue of femininity and softness. Thus, women are more suitable to manage the household (the inner-space), while men are more suitable to engage with the workplace (the outer-space).¹²⁴ The lecturers justify this statement by identifying that as women fulfill their biological function of bearing a child and stabilizing the household, they actually hold more responsibility and accountability than men, and that the criticism of ancestors' "valuing men and belittling women" (*zhong nan qing nü* 重男轻女) is unfounded and biased. They equally claim that the inner-space, like China's historical domestic development, is more important than the outer-space, analogous to China's historical foreign diplomacy.¹²⁵ By assigning *yin* and *yang* to women and men respectively, the lecturers build their cosmic order as a strict division between men (workplace, *yang*) and women (household, *yin*) in terms of social spaces and biological differences, perpetuating their notion of family roles.

Adopting phrases from the Chinese classic *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易经), the lecturers

¹²³ Bilibili, Part I, 39:55, 78:56, 79: 46. Zhong, 3, 50; Chen, 8, 113.

¹²⁴ Zhong, 3, 50; Chen, 110; Tencent, Part II, 46:09.

¹²⁵ Zhong, 3, 5, 29; Chen, 110.

regard husbands/men as Heaven and consider wives/women as Earth.¹²⁶ The lecturers next argue that men, like Heaven, should be especially tenacious in holding up the sky for women; they suggest that women, like Earth, should be especially tolerant and patient in maintaining the stability of household. They allege that women, as Earth, should always obey men and Heaven, with no intention of challenging and overthrowing men in the households. They think if women/Earth overthrow men/Heaven, its effect, like an earthquake, would be catastrophic and wreak havoc on social stability. Furthermore, as husbands/men are viewed as Heaven, and wives/women as Earth, the lecturers establish the higher status of men and lower status of women within the households. Chen Jingyu goes so far to say that within this framework, “male chauvinism” (*da nanzi zhuyi* 大男子主义) is preferable for women.¹²⁷ Similarly, Ding Xuan references the male sacrifice during the counter-Japanese War to justify this cosmic order, as men emblemize Heaven, and women Earth.¹²⁸ This categorization of women as Earth and men as Heaven further promotes this dualistic cosmic order.

The lecturers make two further points: 1. Women should not compete with men in the job market and act as career women/professional women. It is an act of rebellion against nature, which would be punished by Heaven through taking away women’s femininity, because women should obey natural law; 2. Women should always respect their mothers-in-law unconditionally, since the mothers-in-law bore their husbands. Under the analogy that the husband is Heaven and the wife is Earth, the mother-in-law is actually the “Heaven of Heaven” (*tian shang tian* 天上天). Hence the lecturers advise women to not overturn the “Heaven of Heaven” —the mothers-in-law—since it would bring punishment to them.¹²⁹ To drive this point home, the lecturers play the song “Popo yeshi ma 婆婆也是妈” (Mothers-in-

¹²⁶ Tencent, Part II, 44:09; Zhong, 169, 175-176, Chen, 8.

¹²⁷ Chen, 91, 92. Bilibili, Part I, 113:59, 124:37; Tencent, Part II, 49:00; Zhong, 80, 169-170, 175-176, 239; Ma, 179, 191-192.

¹²⁸ Bilibili, Part I, 78:31.

¹²⁹ Tencent, Part II, 1:17:00.

law are Mothers too) to substantiate their claim.¹³⁰ They think this song can strengthen their audience's will to respect their mothers-in-law after the lecture, subsequently buttressing the cosmic order.

Music is indeed a good tool for the lecturers to reinforce their cosmic order. Ding Xuan and Chen Jingyu employ other songs in their lectures. They both employ the song “Zhangfu ni xinkule 丈夫你辛苦了” (My Poor, Hardworking Husband) in their lectures to invite their female audience to appreciate their husbands and the responsibility they take upon themselves.¹³¹ Ding Xuan also plays the song “Fuqi qing 夫妻情” (The Love between Husband and Wife) to admire the harmonious relationship between husband and wife within a household.¹³² Both songs provide an important lens for us to understand their connection between the cosmic order and women's virtue. Both songs employ a female perspective to praise husbands' hardwork and dedication to the family. In “Fuqi qing,” Ding Xuan includes the clip of this song's live performance with an actor and an actress as the husband and wife, in which the husband wears a military uniform, while the wife is attentive to the husband. Those rhetoric and imagery have a powerful impact in the songs' rendering. By employing a woman's voice to acclaim the hardship of husband, the lecturers in their contexts consolidate their cosmic order, in which the husband holds the upper hand in the couple's dynamics. This legitimizes the necessity of masculinity. At the same time, as the male impersonator wears a military uniform on the stage, it further enhances the notion of masculinity through the husband's body. This outward, symbolic expression of masculinity restates the dualistic cosmic order between men (Heaven; masculinity; yang) and women (Earth; femininity; yin).

This dualistic cosmic order, with its painstaking details and contour above, is critical in promoting the women's virtue. Again, a historical background of China's established cosmic

¹³⁰ Chen, 223-229; Tencent, Part II, 3:51:26.

¹³¹ Chen, 126; Tencent, Part II, 55:31.

¹³² Tencent, Part II, 25:23.

order would be both an important detour and an entry into an analysis of the above lecturers' discourses. As the previous chapter details the virtues that women should uphold, it is crucial to trace the intellectual origin of those virtues.

The solid intellectual foundations of the feminine virtues we know today can be traced back to the Han Dynasty. During the Han Dynasty, Confucianism was promulgated as the official orthodoxy in 136 BCE. As an ideological basis, Confucianism was employed as a tool for the emperors to train government officials.¹³³ To consolidate Confucianism's ideological basis in the government, Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu composed his *magnum opus*, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露), which suggests that the spiritual world and the secular world are connected. Once claiming that both worlds are connected, Dong analogizes that Heaven, the place where the dead ancestors reside, is in connections with Earth and man. He envisions that the ideal "All-under-Heaven" as a holistic organism, in which every part of this organism is interrelated with the every other sphere.¹³⁴ He thus stresses the duty of Confucian rules and conduct in preserving the harmony and order of the "All-under-Heaven."¹³⁵ Furthermore, Dong acted as a pioneer by incorporating the *yin-yang* concept into his Confucian philosophy system. In this process, Dong unavoidably adopted the implicit hierarchy of *yin-yang* in terms of gender. In the *yin-yang* conceptual framework, both *yin* and *yang* are taken to be "functional modes of activity." They are supposedly complementary to each other in function. Theoretically, both genders could embody the elements of *yin* and *yang* in their conduct. Yet under Dong's framework, the concept of *yang* was essentialized and associated with men, the concept of *yin* with women.¹³⁶ Although an intellectual enterprise in nature, Dong's construction, once

¹³³ Bart Dessein, "Religion and the Nation: Confucian and New Confucian Religious Nationalism," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*. Edited by Cheng-tian Kuo, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 201; Joseph Adler, "Daughter/Wife/Mother," 13.

¹³⁴ Dessein, "Religion and the Nation," 202.

¹³⁵ Dessein, "Religion and the Nation," 202-203.

¹³⁶ Adler, "Daughter/Wife/Mother," 14.

politicized by the emperor as a normative political and social order apparatus, pervaded throughout imperial China in assigning gender relations.¹³⁷

Another important background detail is the analogical, parallel logic between the family and the nation. Prior to and during the Han dynasty, Confucian scholars had also viewed that the family has having a direct parallel relationship with the nation. This has its connection with ancestor worship. The emperors of the Han dynasty established ancestor worship as a ritual ideology/state religion to maintain social and political order. By emphasizing ancestor worship, its ritual practices and ideology, the state thus linked family with the nation, as a family's harmony and well-being can be seen as an indication of the prosperity and well-being of the nation.¹³⁸ Similar logic can also be found in the Confucian classic *The Great Learning* (Daxue 大学), traditionally attributed to Confucius, which provides an eight-stage process for a person to follow in order to become morally upright and capable. Among those steps, a person is required to first perfect his (since the text addresses men at that time) intention, then balance his mind and refine his personhood. From then on, he can align his own household in order to regulate the state, and eventually bring peace to the All-under-Heaven.¹³⁹ Thus, managing the households is essential to stabilizing and ordering the state. Furthermore, with this parallel emphasis between the household/family and the state, the rulers equally emphasized the importance of filial piety and loyalty of subjects, as the subjects' familial reverence is translated into political allegiance to the rulers.¹⁴⁰ Hence, imperial China's cosmic order built itself firmly with this emphasis of the parallel analogy between the household and the state.

The historical context above facilitates our comprehension of the lecturers' vision of

¹³⁷ For broad overview on gender education, women education and gender relationship in traditional, imperial, and modern China, see Lee, 345-367; Jane Liu and Marilyn Carpenter, "Trends and Issues of Women's Education in China," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 78, no. 6 (Jul. – Aug., 2005), 277-281.

¹³⁸ Yu, *State and Religion in China*, 37-42.

¹³⁹ *The Great Learning*, trans. by Robert Eno, (2016), 15. Accessed on Mar. 5, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Yu, *State and Religion in China*, 42-43.

cosmic order they promote in the Women's Virtue Movement. Their vision is a reenactment of China's historically-informed cosmic order. First, the lecturers establish a line of thought: family is the "cell of social organism."¹⁴¹ To correct society, one should correct the family/household; to manage the household, one ought to settle the husband-wife dynamics; to settle the husband-wife dynamics, one has to teach women's virtue. In other words, like their rhetoric on women's virtue and tradition/ancestors/sages, which consecrates and sacralizes the ancestors and sages, the lecturers establish a similarly parallel logic, which links family/household with society. In this case, "society" can be used interchangeably with "nation."¹⁴² Thus, the lecturers place their emphasis on the family in parallel with the nation. This is the backbone of their cosmic order. Within this backbone, women's role and the teaching of women's virtue become critical, because as this logic shows, this cosmic order entirely relies on women's own moral cultivation and virtues. To create a stable society, women thus bear most of the responsibility through their household management.

Second, teaching women's virtue is also imperative to the dualistic nature of the lecturers' cosmic order. The cosmic order carries its legacy from the influence of Dong Zhongshu's work on imperial China's state religion framework. By assigning the cosmic order of yin-yang and Earth-Heaven to women and men respectively, the lecturers then could push the importance of women's virtue further, since women's virtue teaches women to be soft, obedient, and submissive, and to complete their femininity fully. At the same time, with *yin* and *yang* assigned to women and men, the lecturers also demarcate the space and actions for women and men. Women are required to stay in the household and not challenge their husbands; in fact, they are even prohibited from getting into trouble with their mothers-in-law, since the mothers-in-law conceived their husbands, making them the "Heaven of

¹⁴¹ Chen, 3; Zhong, 40; Ma, 144.

¹⁴² Of course, the lecturers also extend this logic in their lectures to uphold that teaching women's virtue is equally critical for the harmony and peace of All-under-Heaven.

Heaven.” Songs these lecturers played in their lectures, as explained above, serve the purpose of perpetuating the notion of heaven and earth to the audience, defending the dualistic cosmic order. The division between men and women, with attributes and concepts such as *yin* and *yang*, heaven and earth, extends from the individual, to the household, to society, and ultimately to the nation. This fits well with the lecturers’ perspective of sustaining the cosmic order.

Another important feature of this cosmic order is its reliance on a biological view of the men and women. The lecturers view men and women as biologically different, since women can bear children, and they apply this superficial biological difference to their social and cosmic order.¹⁴³ Women’s ability of childbearing, combined with their imposed ascription of *yin* and earth, makes them more suitable to stay in the household and to take care of the household. The lecturers hence advocate a parallel relationship between nature and society: the biological is the social. By calling this biological difference between men and women a natural law, the lecturers put inviolable authority on the subsequent extended social and cosmic order. Their elevation of authority prevents the audience from raising doubts about the legitimacy of the cosmic order. The lecturers thus ask for the audience’s wholehearted support for this cosmic order, with the teaching and practicing of women’s virtue as the path to it. Lastly, with this established cosmic order and the emphasis of women’s virtue and femininity, Ding Xuan stresses that “it is women’s duty to maintain their chastity and purity... so that they can maintain the cleanliness of their household,” thus sustaining the cosmic order that weaves between women, households and society.¹⁴⁴

Understandably, the lecturers admonish their audience with numerous counterexamples. Those counterexamples, as illustrated above, include professional women, career women and

¹⁴³ Bilibili, Part I, 77:39, 79:46; Zhong, 169; Chen 113.

¹⁴⁴ Bilibili, Part I, 104:50; Tencent, Part II, 1:23:46, 1:31:46.

women who defy their mothers-in-law and husbands, as well as women who fight for feminist causes.¹⁴⁵ For these lecturers, those counterexamples all indicate rebellions against the carved-up cosmic order in their discourse. They pose a challenge to the teaching of women's virtue. A challenge to the teaching of women's virtue would mean a challenge to the stability of the household. A challenge to the household's stability would become a challenge to the harmony and stability of society. Therefore, those lecturers try to prevent their audience from mimicking those counterexamples in order to retain the cosmic order.

The above points can be illustrated through Ding Xuan's quote in the opening of this paper. Ding Xuan in her lecture states that "The male symbolizes Heaven, and the female symbolizes Earth. Heaven is high, Earth is low. ... There is a Principle of Nature that can never change: that is, Earth will never overturn and overthrow Heaven!"¹⁴⁶ Her words follow the same analogy and exemplify the cosmic order with the same trope. By presumptuously proclaiming that Earth can never and shall never overthrow Heaven, indicating the same condition for women and men, she received a warm round of applause from the audience. Ding Xuan's words thus showcase the WVM's cosmic order, as well as the appeal it achieved in the audience.

At this point, it is helpful to draw a parallel between the lecturers of the Women's Virtue Movement and Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. The lecturers and the fundamentalists are strikingly similar in their goals and rhetoric. Both strive to return to and restore a cosmic order in their own nations. The lecturers want to rebuild the parallel cosmic order between family and society/nation with women's virtue and women as its underpinnings. Christian fundamentalists, such as Bob Jones, try to recall women's "Victorian Morality" by requesting women to return back to the household and serve as the moral guardians of the family

¹⁴⁵ Zhong, 5, 63; Chen, 3; Bilibili, Part I, 93:13-95:59.

¹⁴⁶ Bilibili, Part I, 113:59-115:00.

again.¹⁴⁷ Although different in their cultural background, time, and space, the lecturers of the Women's Virtue Movement and the fundamentalists of the U.S. thus mirror each other in their agendas.

Overall, the lecturers use women's virtue to construct a cosmic order which is reminiscent of imperial China's historical cosmic order. They start from the biological difference between men and women and apply it to the ordering of society with their reference to the Chinese canons, which forges a dualistic division between men and women in terms of their space, their inclination, their positionality. This dualistic division works to link the parallel between family and society. The lecturers then locate women as the focal point of this parallel logic.

Nonetheless, the question still remains: how to instill faith in the audience for this cosmic order? The process of erecting such a cosmic order is laborious. It requires a certain extent of rationality of the audience to follow this logic and to be convinced. Rationality itself is not sufficient to push a person into believing certain ideas unconditionally, for individual rationality can argue something entirely different from the cosmic order and could refute the lecturers' claim. Is there another mechanism employed by the lecturers to coax their audience into believing in this cosmic order? This question then brings us to investigate the relationship between women's virtue, karma, and moral transformation.

¹⁴⁷ See Rouse, "'If Our Women Remain Pure,'" 22-29.

Chapter V: Women's Virtue, Karma and Moral Transformation

The detailed logic of cosmic order may not be sufficient to convince the audience to buy into the lecturers' claim. Nonetheless, other methods remain open for the lecturers to use. Karmic causality, along with a feature of moral transformation (*jiaohua* 教化), becomes a powerful approach for the lecturers to cajole their audience's belief. This chapter contends that karma is the guiding principle for the cosmic order described in the previous chapter, with the intention of transforming their audience, mostly women, morally.

If there were an index for the lectures and textbooks of the Women's Virtue Movement, karma and moral transformation would be among the most cited subjects in the index, especially in Ding Xuan's and Zhong Maosen's lecture. For example, Ding Xuan mentions at the opening of her lecture that women should "recognize karma, comprehend karma, and follow the rule of karma, so that they can bring blessing to their husbands and manage the households better."¹⁴⁸ As we have seen, women/wives are the ones charged with supplying blessing for their husbands. Ding Xuan's words illustrate that karma can serve as a source of support for the lecturers' cosmic order.

A Buddhist doctrine, karma is understood by the lecturers in the literal sense of "moral action" that has corresponding consequences, and it is seen as an integral part of the teaching of women's virtue and family education. Ding Xuan states that women should be mindful of the rule of karma.¹⁴⁹ Ding Xuan later expounds this point by stressing that mothers must believe in karma. She suggests that if "the mothers don't believe in karma, their children won't believe in karma, either. This would then result in eternal evil retributions."¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Ding then shifts her rhetoric to state that if "mothers do believe in karma, their children will also believe in karma," and the children would be enlightened and thus bring

¹⁴⁸ Bilibili, Part I, 07:52.

¹⁴⁹ Bilibili, Part I, 07:52.

¹⁵⁰ Bilibili, Part I, 40:49-41:38.

peace to\ All-under-Heavens and achieve the Great Harmony (*Datong* 大同).¹⁵¹ Ding Xuan considers karmic causes to be an important component of the women's virtue education, for the mother's receptiveness to the idea of karma would have a direct correlation to the education of their children. Similarly, Zhong Maosen in his lecture mentions the importance of karmic education in the teaching of women's virtue.¹⁵² Their words establish the link between karmic education and women's virtue.

In fact, the lecturers establish the claim that karmic education is a type of moral education, citing specific religious masters. Zhong Maosen holds that education of karma should be on equal footing with ethical and moral education (*lunli daode jiaoyu* 伦理道德教育), as all traditional Chinese culture is about ethical and moral education.¹⁵³ Zhong backs his claim by citing Master Yinguang 印光 (1862-1940), a renowned Buddhist Pure Land Master of the Republican Period (1912-1949). Zhong quotes Yinguang's words on family education to say that education of karma is crucial in cultivating a good mother, and it thereby could produce good sons and daughters for society and the nation in future.¹⁵⁴ Zhong quotes Yinguang's recommendation of finding specific books to inculcate children with a sense of karma. Those books belong to the genre of "morality books" (*shanshu* 善书), popular in imperial China. They employ simplified and straightforward hyperbolic tales to persuade readers to act benevolently.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, a closer reading of Ding Xuan's, Chen Jingyu's and Ma Yiling's lectures reveals a similar pattern of referencing Master Yinguang's words either to popularize the notion of karmic causes and karma education, or to promote the importance of women's virtue education and moral education for the women.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Bilibili, Part I, 41:50.

¹⁵² Zhong, 20, 226.

¹⁵³ Zhong, 20.

¹⁵⁴ Zhong, 207. Master Yinguang says that "Mother's education is most important in the family education."

¹⁵⁵ Zhong, 226.

¹⁵⁶ Bilibili, Part I, 04:40; Zhong, 2, 4, 18-19, 20, 207, 226, 232, 238-239; Chen, 3; Ma, 2, 39.

Master Yinguang is not the only religious master that was quoted by these lecturers. Another figure that is frequently quoted by the lecturers is Wang Fengyi 王凤仪 (1864-1938), a spiritual healer and rural moralist based in Northern China. Ding Xuan quotes Wang's words that "Woman is the source of the world," and recapitulates Wang's concept of "Jiating liubu jiaoyu" 家庭六步教育 (Six-step Family Education): Women should uphold women's virtues and obey their husbands and act quietly; during pregnancy, women should remain peaceful, stay calm and solemn in their daily actions, listen to sage's teachings, practice vegetarianism and maintain personal hygiene; in the swaddling stage, women should tend to the infant carefully and let it grow naturally; in the breast-feeding stage, women should sit upright, feed the child regularly, stay calm and avoid any sadness and anger; in the infant stage, women should retain child's purity of heart by teaching the child virtue and morality; in the toddler stage, women should teach the child by her example, read the classics to the child and lead the child not into evil and temptation, but enlighten the child with wisdom.¹⁵⁷

Ding Xuan also quotes Wang's teaching that the three transformations, the transformations of xing 性 (virtue), xin 心 (heart), and shen 身 (body), are aligned with his vision of women's three obedience: her virtue should obey Heaven's rule (*xing cong tianli* 性从天理), her heart should obey morality's rule (*xin cong daoli* 心从道理) and her body should obey compassion's rule (*shen cong qingli* 身从情理).¹⁵⁸ Wang's teaching is synthetic in nature, as he combined the Three Jewels of Buddhism (the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha) with the three transformations of the Daoism and the three bonds of Confucianism (father-son, ruler-subject, husband-wife) altogether.¹⁵⁹ His words emphasized karmic cause,

¹⁵⁷ Bilibili, Part I, 04:40; Tencent, Part II, 2:37:56.

¹⁵⁸ Tencent, Part II, 42:05; *Wang Fengyi nianpu yu yulu*, edited by 朱循天, 2 Volumes (Beijing, China: The China Overseas Publishing House, 2011), vol. 1, 129, 202.

¹⁵⁹ *Wang Fengyi nianpu yu yulu*, 202; Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East*

the similarly dualistic cosmic order espoused by the WVM lecturers, and a parallel logic associating family, society, and the nation, and All-under-Heaven.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, by quoting masters such as Yinguang and Wang Fengyi, the lecturers aim to proselytize that karma teaching and moral education are part of the indisputable essence of women's virtue education. Their engagement with karma teaching and moral education supports the cosmic order in the previous chapter.

Apart from citing those religious masters, the lecturers of the Women's Virtue Movement mostly employ karmic cause/karma teaching and moral education to warn their audience off conducting morally decadent behaviors. Those lecturers consider behaviors, sentiments and features such as divorce, women's bossiness, defiance, and complaints against husbands and mothers-in-laws, abortions, extramarital affairs, plastic surgery, femme fatale, and again, career women/professional women as horrible antitheses to the teaching of women's virtue. They deem those attributes as morally unacceptable and productive of bad karma. The lecturers elicit numerous hyperbolic tales and warnings, such as the tale of a wife who mistreated her mother-in-law and was punished by Heaven and sank into a sandpit; the tale of a mother's extramarital affairs and sexual indiscretion resulting in her daughter's premarital sex with numerous male students and consequent abortions; the admonition that a wife's act of calling her husbands "hubby" (*laogong* 老公) will lead to male impotence and subsequent extramarital affairs; the warning that women during their menstrual period should avoid seeing their husbands, otherwise they will bring bad luck to their husbands' careers and future; tales of career women and professional women who are bossy and who are punished by Heaven by taking away their feminine features (such as breast cancer, spinal disc herniation, and uterine cancer); tales of writers (both male and female) whose writings

Asian Modern, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 113-114.

¹⁶⁰ See *Wang Fengyi nianpu yu yulu*, vol. 1, 140-160, 192.

violated moral codes, and as a result they and their descendants received bad karma; the warning that a woman's sexual indiscretion will lead to that family's comeuppance; the warning that hair dyeing will lead to environmental desertification and damage; the warning that women who dress inappropriately and provocatively will shape men into beasts who have concerns for nothing but sex.¹⁶¹ Lecturers use these tales to substantiate one thing: that this universe, this cosmos, and Heaven are a moral and virtuous one.¹⁶² Ding Xuan also quotes the Chinese proverb that "the gods are always watching over you" (*jutou sanchi you shenming* 举头三尺有神明) to warn her audience not to commit any bad deeds listed above, since they produce nothing but bad consequences.¹⁶³

The carrots and the stick usually come hand in hand. After using all those hyperbolic tales to warn their audience of the different possibility of bad karma, the lecturers also introduce the good alternatives to bad karma, which are good actions that produce good karma. They claim that women should be solemn and morally superior, acknowledge the ancestral virtues, have a righteous and upright mind and intention, practice confessions, teach karmic causality to their children, cultivate good karma, uphold purity, and, chastity, have fewer complaints against their husbands, clean their houses for beneficial boons, be tolerant and forgiving (which lecturers claim to be the Great Wisdom) when husbands conduct violence against them, be well-behaved, so they can bring happiness, blessings and fortunes to the family, for being well-behaved women, under the guidance of good karma, which will be rewarded with good results such as their ascent to heaven, and most importantly, women who spread the teaching of women's virtue will be transformed into bodhisattvas, sages and immortals with good karma.¹⁶⁴ In Ding Xuan's lecture, the audience is asked to read those

¹⁶¹ Bilibili, Part I, 45:07, 93:00, 131:00, 154:34, 158:20; Tencent, Part II, 07:16, 17:59, 20:10-21:16, 33:43, 1:05:49, 1:34:09, 2:14:19, 2:26:35, 2:52:20, 3:10:24, 3:13:29-3:13:52, 3:46:20; Zhong, 87, 157-158, 161-164, 174, 177; Chen, 154-155.

¹⁶² Bilibili, Part I, 128:49.

¹⁶³ Bilibili, Part I, 73:52.

¹⁶⁴ Bilibili, Part I, 89:35-91:26, 96:10-99:55, 102:24, 159:22; Tencent, Part II, 1:10:38-1:11:15, 1:30:54,

guidelines.¹⁶⁵ Lecturers treat actions that produce good karma as a sort of medicine that can cure bad karma.¹⁶⁶ The lecturers then prompt their audiences, asking them to decide which karma they want to engage in. The response? In the case of Ding Xuan's lecture, rounds of applause followed after Ding's proclamation. The audience made their decisions with their hands.

For the lecturers, the good karma is related to the process of moral transformation (*jiaohua* 教化). With good karma, they see women endowed with women's virtues as sages, immortals and bodhisattvas. Those women, equipped with superior morality, karma, and women's virtue, can cultivate their children to become sages, thereby transforming the world starting from their own households. They are enjoined to bring order, peace and stability to the nation and the All-under-Heaven, and, more crucially, to contribute to the rejuvenation of traditional Chinese culture.¹⁶⁷ Women thus become the prime mover of the world order.

Lastly, karma also has its connection with vegetarianism. In her Shanghai lecture, Ding Xuan suggested to her attendants that they should practice vegetarianism, or eat meats based on the Buddhist standards, and refrain from eating pork (i.e. with periodic abstentions from all meat). Ding Xuan quotes the sixteenth-century *Ben cao gang mu* 本草纲目 (*Compendium of Materia Medica*) to say that as pigs are lustful and licentious, their pork, once eaten by women, results in their own lustfulness.¹⁶⁸ She even goes further to explain the reasons Muslims do not eat pork: Muslims believe that pigs eat their own male offspring and commit incest among themselves, and the pigs' genes would pass down to the woman who eats pork.¹⁶⁹ She further warns that women who commit adultery and other types of sexual

1:44:56, 2:14:19, 3:29:57-3:30:30, 3:31:15; Zhong, 99, 157-158, 174, 226, 312; Chen, 21,

¹⁶⁵ The audience also read the bad karma examples in Ding Xuan's lecture. Bilibili, Part I, 153:52-157:42, 158:21; Tencent, Part II, 1:30:54, 1:47:02-1:48:57.

¹⁶⁶ Tencent, Part II, 1:48:32-1:48:34.

¹⁶⁷ Zhong, 4,5-6, 18-19, 21, 80, 104, 158, 181, 206; Bilibili, Part I, 04:21, 07:16, 07:52, 10:45, 38:00, 41:00 minutes; Chen, 83, 179; Ma, 1, 64, 69, 111, 147, 176, 243.

¹⁶⁸ Tencent, Part II, 3:26:00-3:26:30. Yet again, nothing she said can be found in the original text.

¹⁶⁹ Tencent, Part II, 3:27:00-3:27:14.

misbehaviors will reincarnate as pigs in their next lives.¹⁷⁰ Ding Xuan's demand that women restrain from eating pork is thus part of her emphasis on the karmic cycle .

Although all these claims about karma sound illogical, it is imperative to take those claims seriously as important data for understanding the dynamics between women's virtue, karma, and moral transformation. To understand this dynamic, we have to resort to China's religious history as a guide. A prior knowledge of Chinese religious history is crucial, especially the bits of this history that still have their reverberations in contemporary Chinese society today. Specifically, two themes of Chinese religious history stand out: the popular moral teachings and the life and views of Master Yinguang and Wang Fengyi. The two themes are interrelated in their own ways. Each has its imprint on the WVM.

In the previous two chapters I explained how in imperial China a politicized Confucianism served as the state religion and the official discourses assigned *yin* and *yang* to femininity and masculinity respectively. Chinese society and the Chinese state, throughout history, have always been a religious society and a religious state.¹⁷¹ This politicized Confucianism was upheld by imperial rulers until the end of Manchu Qing Dynasty. Even with the politicized Confucianism as a state religion, the religious landscape of imperial Chinese society was not stagnant and homogenous at all. During the *longue duree* of Chinese history, traditional Daoism remained resilient. Chinese society witnessed the sinicization of Buddhism from India beginning as early as the first century C.E. By the end of Qing dynasty, Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam all flourished in China. Various popular religions thrived, too. The erection of local cults and the spread of morality books (*shanshu* 善书) (which persuades people that their actions carry good or bad

¹⁷⁰ Tencent, Part II, 3:27:14-3:27:50.

¹⁷¹ Kuo, "Religion, State and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies," 18. A more extensive on the relationship between traditional Chinese religions and the Chinese state can see Yu, *State and Religion in China*, Ch. 1 and 2.

retributions/karmas and that they should therefore abide by the framework of common ethics) also add more layers to the imperial Chinese religious landscape.¹⁷² Therefore, as China entered the twentieth century, the outlook of its religious landscape was diverse.

Popular moral teaching books were diffused among Chinese society. Morality books, while ignored by the Confucian philosophers and other dedicated intellectuals, reflected popular moral norms. Morality books were synthetic in nature, combining Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism teachings altogether. They were used by the local authorities to deliver moral lessons to the public. The rhetoric of divine retributions and karma was regarded by the late imperial Confucian elites as a good tool to convince the uneducated masses to adopt moral teachings and moral practices, achieving moral transformation.¹⁷³ Some morality books were also used in the ritual spirit writing, which were practiced typically by the grassroots literati in the locals who did not pass the civil examination.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, morality books during imperial China promoted a model of the house-cloistered, submissive, and bound-feet housewives.¹⁷⁵

When the Qing court abolished the civil examination in 1905, this caused a stir among the grassroots literati, as they now lost the chance to take the examination and devoted more attention to the morality books. Based on scholar Adam Yuet Chau's case study, many grassroots literati practiced the "cherishing of written words" (*xizizhi* 惜字纸), which involves the reverence towards the written word or peculiar characters from any scrap of paper. The literati burnt this paper carefully in the furnace that devotes to the worship of Lord Wenchang (*Wenchang Dijun* 文昌帝君), the patron deity of traditional literati.¹⁷⁶ Facing

¹⁷² Dessein, "Religion and the Nation," 206; Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, ch.1. Popular moral teaching books and morality books refer to the same thing and are used interchangeably.

¹⁷³ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 21, 26.

¹⁷⁴ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 21, 26; Adam Yuet Chau, "The Nation in Religion and Religion in the Nation," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*, edited by Cheng-tian Kuo, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 119-121.

¹⁷⁵ Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 281.

¹⁷⁶ Chau, "The Nation in Religion and Religion in the Nation," 118.

threats to their careers as well as the grave threat of Western imperialism, the grassroots literati, encountering social Darwinian ideas, provided the illiterate and poor individuals with the *xizizhi* practice and morality books. They use stories of karma and divine retribution to “Confucianize” society, as they saw society becoming increasingly immoral and amoral. Their stories also connected Chinese-character writing with the fate and future of the Chinese nation, consecrating Chinese writing as the foundation of Chinese civilization.¹⁷⁷ Morality books thus were tied with nationalist rhetoric.

The story of morality books did not end here; instead, its journey continued in the 1920s and 1930s, with religious masters such as Yinguang and Wang Fengyi. Whereas the May Fourth Movement intellectuals and participants debated hotly over women’s fate and China’s fate, these two masters voiced their own visions of women. Their claims concerning women and women’s virtue left their imprint on the Women’s Virtue Movement with people’s modern rediscovery of them.

Buddhist Master Yinguang was a Pure Land Buddhism master during the Republican China. A charismatic leader, Yinguang was able to attract a flock of followers with him, both Buddhist and lay practitioners. Throughout his life, Yinguang was a promoter of the popular morality teaching books. He circulated the related morality books, along with the texts of Pure Land Buddhism, to his followers.¹⁷⁸ Many of his followers came from urban backgrounds in cities such as Shanghai and Hangzhou. They were attracted by Yinguang’s moral forte and uprightness. More importantly, his followers found Yinguang’s moral image convincing and fascinating. Born with and immersed in the idea of using Confucian ethics to maintain the world order, those lay social elites devoted their lives to studying governance and commerce in order to bring balance to the turbulent Chinese society. These elites were

¹⁷⁷ Chau, “The Nation in Religion and Religion in the Nation,” 122-126.

¹⁷⁸ Jay Kiely, “The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Masses: Master Yinguang and His Pure Land Revival Movement,” in *Making Saints in Modern China*, edited by David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert, and Ji Zhe, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 34.

repulsed by the enthronement of warlord Yuan Shikai (袁世凯) in 1916, yet they were also troubled by the May Fourth Movement and the radical New Culture Movement activists. Meanwhile, although not exactly anti-foreign, these elites also found the Western influence in Chinese society, such as governance, commerce and industry, abhorrent. They thus found Yinguang's emphasis on karmic causality and neo-Confucianist moral transformation much in alignment with their worldview. For them, Yinguang personified a modern, activist Buddhism that served as a means to redress China's existing cultural, political and social failures.¹⁷⁹ Those followers sacralized Yinguang in their discourse.¹⁸⁰

Yinguang's lay elite followers shared similar traits with the "modernizing conservatives" discussed in chapter III, as those followers still honored the traditional Confucian morals in their everyday life.¹⁸¹ Yinguang's words registered exactly with this mentality. In his correspondences with his followers, Yinguang voiced his opinion on women, specifically on women's virtue. Yinguang lamented the moral decadence of contemporary Chinese women, lambasted the fact that women were irrationally competing for rights and power against men in society. Understanding the teaching of karma, Yinguang proposed that since women and men have biological differences, women should stay in the household and take care of the households, while letting men explore and work in the society. Relying on the popular moral teaching books, karmic teachings, and myth of the ancient Zhou dynasty empresses as exemplary roles, Yinguang saw women's role firmly in the household and domestic sphere. He insisted that women should only concern themselves with helping the husbands and educating their offspring. He believed that as women returned to the household, they could better educate sons and daughters that would, in turn, morally transform Chinese society and

¹⁷⁹ Kiely, "The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Mass," 46-47.

¹⁸⁰ Kiley, "The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Mass," 48-77.

¹⁸¹ Kiely, "The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Mass," 48-77.

take care of the Chinese nation and All-under-heaven.¹⁸² Needless to say, Yinguang's words had his followers' ears. Those words reflected both Yinguang's bent on popular moral teachings and worldview, as well as his lay elite followers' concerns and outlooks. It was a rejection of the May Fourth activism.

Like Yinguang, Wang Fengyi's influence on women's virtue and women education during the 1930s should not be overlooked. Wang Fengyi was a rural moralist and healer based on Manchuria and Northern China. Known as "Wang the Good" (Wang Shanren 王善人), Wang was associated with the redemptive society the Association for Universal Morality (Wanguo daodehui 万国道德会).¹⁸³ Wang's teaching placed a special emphasis on women. His theory was a syncretic teaching of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist religious doctrines and philosophies, Wang sought to impart women with the knowledge that their disposition should be as soft and flexible as water and that women should understand this in order to cultivate children to become enlightened sages that could restore the Chinese civilization and transform the world.¹⁸⁴ Wang thus set out to establish girls' schools and women's schools for women to actualize his agenda.¹⁸⁵ Wang's vision for women, including his cosmic order, though it claimed an internationalist and global perspective (transforming the world), was thus more in line with the Chinese nationalists' vision at that time. He imagined women to be independent, yet he also expected them to act as traditional and self-sacrificing wives/mothers.¹⁸⁶ He made reference to the morality books when addressing women's

¹⁸² The Honghua Society (弘化社), the branch organization of Yinguang's Pure Land Movement, produced and published *The Volume of Perpetual Commemoration of Master Yinguang* (*Yinguang dashi yongjiu jinian shuxi*, 永久印光大师纪念书系), which includes Yinguang's remarks on women's virtue education. This volume is still published today. It will be discussed below further.

¹⁸³ Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*, 79.

¹⁸⁴ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 113-114, 152; Shao Yong (邵雍), *Zhongguo huidaomen* (中国会道门), (Shanghai, China: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 1997), 307; Also see *Wang Fengyi nianpu yu yulu* (王凤仪年谱与语录).

¹⁸⁵ See Goossaert and Palmer, *Religious Question in Modern China*, 96-97; Kang, "Women and the Religious Question in Modern China," 514-515.

¹⁸⁶ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 167 n. 86

virtues. His vision of women's virtue, like Master Yinguang's, was anti-May Fourth Movement as well.

Like Yinguang, Wang's teachings spread fast thanks to the blossoming modern technology in China at that time.¹⁸⁷ With advanced transportations such as trains and the new printing press, Wang was able to travel around northern China and Manchuria to address large groups of people. His speeches were published and circulated among his followers. Eventually, with his followers' assistance, Wang Fengyi's speeches were compiled and published in standalone book format.

However, Wang's agenda was complicated due to his own milieu. As Japan had occupied Manchuria since 1931, the Japanese authority was keen to appropriate any form of civilizing process that could assert the sovereignty of their newly named Manchukuo and legitimize their claim of a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." At the same time, the Japanese authority emphasized that women were the authentic bearers of civilization and transmitters of East Asian spirituality to the globe.¹⁸⁸ In this way, Japanese authority accentuated women's sacrifice for Manchukuo. To spread its ideological agenda, the Japanese authority connected with local redemptive societies such as the Association for Universal Morality, with which Wang Fengyi was associated to employ their education programs for women and instill in them the vision of sacrifice for the nation. Wang Fengyi's programs were channeled into teaching women ideas that they were the bearers of "traditions within modernity" and that they were to hold up the civilizational essence through their conduct. By promoting these messages of women's sacrifice and authenticity, the Japanese authority hoped to establish a parallel logic that the female authenticity proves the authenticity of Manchukuo's sovereignty.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, Wang Fengyi's education agenda had its complicated historical

¹⁸⁷ On how modern technology in the Republican period facilitated the religious masters and the "making saints" process, see Yinguang's case in Kiely, "The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Masses," 37-38, 76-77.

¹⁸⁸ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 103-169.

¹⁸⁹ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 114-162; Shao, *Zhongguo Huidaomen*, 320-322, 382-385. Yet, even

impact and legacy during the 1930s regarding both the women and the religious question in modern China.

Fast forward to contemporary China. After the 1978 Opening-Up, many people experienced a sense of a spiritual void. When the Maoist ideology died away, people searched for a new spiritual substitute. Many, in fact, turned to Buddhism to seek solutions for their personal and moral crises and the meaning of life.¹⁹⁰ During this process, as those people sought refuge in the Buddhist monastery, they found the distributions of older morality books circulated during imperial China. These meaning-seekers consulted these morality books and circulated them again among their companions. Though the circulation of these morality books is still restricted, they certainly received a boost in popularity.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, some morality books are now openly for sale on Chinese e-commerce websites such as Taobao.¹⁹²

Yinguang's texts and Wang Fengyi's words also made a comeback. Honghua Society, the branch organization under the wing of Yinguang, published its collected volumes of Yinguang's speeches and correspondences posthumously, intending to commemorate Yinguang.¹⁹³ This is an example of the "Saint-Making in Action" that religion scholars such as David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert and Ji Zhe attempt to dissect in their collectively edited volume *Making Saints in Modern China*.¹⁹⁴ As of today, Honghua Society continued its process of commemorating Master Yinguang by republishing their five-volume collection *Yongjiu jinian yinguang dashi shuxi* 永久纪念印光大师书系 (*The Volume of Perpetual*

under those conditions, the Chinese women still had chance to exercise their own agency to empower themselves through their participation in the redemptive societies such as the Association for Universal Morality until post-1937 when Manchukuo became more and more subservient to the Japanese government for its own expansionist interest. Kang, "Women and the Religious Question," 514-515; Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity*, 160-162.

¹⁹⁰ See Gareth Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas: Moral Dimensions of Lay Buddhist Practice in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014). Also see Johnson, *The Souls of China*.

¹⁹¹ Fisher, *From Comrades to Bodhisattvas*, 140-148. This is mainly based on the cases in Beijing.

¹⁹² This is my own personal experience, as my father ordered those morality books online in Taobao recently.

¹⁹³ Kiely, "The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Masses," 71, 73.

¹⁹⁴ Vincent Goossaert, David Ownby and Ji Zhe, "Introduction," in *Making Saints in Modern China*, edited by Vincent Goossaert, David Ownby and Ji Zhe, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13-14.

Commemoration of Master Yinguang) in 2015.¹⁹⁵ This volume includes Yinguang's views on women's education, karma/divine retribution and other subjects such as family education, filial piety and the concept of Pure Land. This collection is published under the approval of the Chinese Religious Culture Publisher (Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 宗教文化出版社). The Chinese Religious Culture Publisher is a state-owned institution, which belongs to the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA, Guojia zongjiao shiwuju, 国家宗教事务局). In other words, Honghua Society's publication and printing of Yinguang's words, including his "feudalistic" words on women's virtue education, are legitimate under the blessing of the Chinese state in 2015.

The appropriation of Wang Fengyi's texts is performed by the grassroots organizations such as Yidan Xuetang (一耽学堂). Those organizations belong to the umbrella movement of the popular Confucian revival, promoting the idea that "Confucianism is for the masses." They appropriate Wang Fengyi's texts for moral lessons, and for "gaining awareness of the Way" (wudao 悟道).¹⁹⁶ The appropriation and circulation of Yinguang's words and Wang Fengyi's words indicate their popularity among the popular Confucian revival movement and China's contemporary popular social discourse since the 2000s.¹⁹⁷

The words of Master Yinguang and Wang Fengyi on women's virtue provide a firm foundation for the lecturers' dream. Subsequently, by citing Master Yinguang, Wang Fengyi and morality books, the lecturers add further religiosity to the WVM. Both Master Yinguang and Wang Fengyi were religious and spiritual masters. They sought to use their personal charisma to transform the world and restore the cosmic social order. Morality books were

¹⁹⁵ *Yongjiu jinian yinguang dashi shuxi* 永久纪念印光大师书系, 5 Volumes. Edited by Honghua Society (弘化社), (Beijing, China: Chinese Religious Culture Publisher, 2015).

¹⁹⁶ Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*, 79-81, 100.

¹⁹⁷ Even though we only have proof that Honghua Society published its collection on Yinguang's words in 2015, the evocation of Yinguang in Zhong's 2010 lecture and Chen's 2010 lecture reveals to us that in early 2000s, Yinguang's words are already popular among the discourse of the Women's Virtue Movement.

popular religious books that aimed to provide moral principles for audience to act morally. By investing themselves firmly in such resources, the lecturers erect the Women's Virtue Movement not only as a social movement, but also as a popular religious movement. This movement clings to an authoritative tradition, a transcendent cosmic order, and the principle of karmic retribution. Its goal is to activate moral transformation across family, society, the nation, and the world. In this sense, the Women's Virtue Movement is similar to the American fundamentalists as they both eagerly try to preserve and return to the past cosmic order, whether a dualistic Chinese one or the "Victorian morality." They both stress the moral superiority of women in their discourses. Yet what distinguishes them is that whereas the Victorian morality was based on the American South and was related to the U.S. Christian fundamentalists, the Women's Virtue Movement relies on the tradition of morality books and the notion of karmic retributions to shape audience reception of the women's virtues.

Furthermore, by citing Master Yinguang and Wang Fengyi, the lecturers, like the two masters and their followers, exploit modernization to reject modernity. The lecturers deliver their lectures in an urban setting. Their lecture relies on modern technology such as the printing press, computers, projections and modern transportation in order to bring themselves and their attendants together. Yet during their lectures, they endorse women's virtue, karmic retribution and moral transformation against the modern concepts and practices, which they arbitrarily demarcate as the examples of bad karma. Of course, not all modern concepts and practices they abhor are condonable, such as the extramarital affairs. The lecturers successfully construct the dichotomy between women's virtue and tradition, modern women, and modern actions with their emphasis on the positivity of women's virtues. Ding Xuan's words that "progress of the era requires women to study women's virtue" also enhances the positivity of women's virtue.¹⁹⁸ The lecturers designate women's virtue, along with tradition,

¹⁹⁸ Bilibili, Part I, 56:09.

as the marker of progress and reject modern ideas and modernity.

This chapter closes its analysis of the dynamic between women's virtue, karma and moral transformation. This dynamic approves of the dualistic cosmic order and heightens the religiosity of the Women's Virtue Movement. The facts that Master Yinguang's and Wang Fengyi's works are published under state approval, and that the karma tales and moral transformation also evoke the nation in the lecturers' discourse remain puzzling. This puzzle leads us to inquire further into the relationship between the women's virtue and the nation-state, specifically the Chinese nation.

Chapter VI: Women's Virtue and the Nation-State

As we have seen in the previous three chapters, there is always an implicit connection between women's virtue and the Chinese nation-state. To unravel this relationship, we will again scrutinize the discourse espoused by the lecturers to see below the tip of the iceberg. In this case, we must learn more about them in order to uncover the pattern among the lecturers' identities. This chapter studies each lecturer case by case, in chronological order according to when each gave their lecture on women's virtue and what each evoked about the connection between women's virtue and the Chinese nation. The sequence will be Zhong Maosen, Chen Jingyu, Ding Xuan and Ma Yiling.

Through the study of these lecturers, there emerges the relationship between women's virtue and the nation-state. The established, popular religiosity of the Women's Virtue Movement contributes to the consolidation of religious nationalism promoted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This religious nationalism has a catechism: the political trinity that encompasses patriotism, socialism and the rule by the Chinese Communist Party. It requires all religions to be submissive to this political trinity.¹⁹⁹ China's religious nationalism not only enshrines the Chinese nation and traditional Chinese culture, but it also sacralizes the CCP. The Women's Virtue Movement, like the other social movements in China, sets out to solve Chinese social issues and correlates with the CCP's agenda, especially Xi Jinping's words since 2012, to confine Chinese women to the household as the reproductive tool of the state.

As previously mentioned, the first women's virtue lecture was held in public in 2006. However, since there is no video recording or transcript of that lecture, I will start with Zhong Maosen's lecture given in Hong Kong on June 17, 2010, and its transcribed text. In this lecture, he provides a report on his study of the Tang Dynasty work *Analects for Women* (*Nülunyu* 女论语). Previously, Zhong was an Economics Professor in Australia. In 2004, he

¹⁹⁹ Kuo, "Religion, State, and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies," 16.

started to promote the teaching of Chinese traditional morality and virtues to the public. This promotion grew louder after the 2008 Financial Crash, and he was invited to lecture in many prestigious universities, including Peking University and Chinese University of Hong Kong. Eventually, he became a monk in 2011.

In the introductory note of his lecture, Zhong says that “the ‘*muyi*’ 母仪, or “model mother,” is women’s virtue. ... We need to promote [women’s virtue], because it is a matter of a nation’s rise and fall.”²⁰⁰ He relates that if “you [the mostly female audience] can practice women’s virtue in your own households, you can transform your family, transform the neighborhood, transform society, transform the world,” and this will “pacify the nation and bring harmony to All-under-Heaven.”²⁰¹ He asserts that marriage is a sacred act, since it is the responsibility of couples to produce an heir and cultivate a future generation of sages for society and the nation.²⁰² He welcomes the trend of women returning to households so they can take better care of their sons and daughters.²⁰³ Zhong calls for the rejuvenation of traditional Chinese culture and invites women to preserve Chinese virtues through their daily conduct.²⁰⁴

Our next lecturer is Chen Jingyu. She gave her women’s virtue lecture on *Lessons for Women* (*Nijie* 女诫), one of the *Confucian Four Books for Women* written by the Han dynasty female scholar Ban Zhao (45-117 AD), in Hong Kong on July 8, 2010. Prior to teaching women’s virtue, Chen was the CEO of her self-owned company. She earned a B.A. in Economics and an M.A. in Law. In 2008, she started learning traditional Chinese culture in Dalian, China and soon after began promoting Chinese traditional culture and women’s virtue to the public.

²⁰⁰ Zhong, 18-19.

²⁰¹ Zhong, 206.

²⁰² Zhong, 207.

²⁰³ Zhong, 255.

²⁰⁴ Zhong, 178, 326-327.

In the opening of her lecture, Chen emphasizes that “as long as everyone believes in moral education and retains the true spirit of the Chinese nation (*minzu jingshen* 民族精神), only then will this nation have spirit, have direction and persevere against any obstacle [thus becoming a strong nation].”²⁰⁵ She invites every woman to “take care of her household and strengthen its moral foundation,” so that “the nation’s future will be bright and brilliant.”²⁰⁶ She chides modern women for being selfish, and exhorts them to think more for society, the nation and their descendants.²⁰⁷ She repeats the same phrase again and invites mothers to dedicate themselves to cultivating their children for the sake of their parents, extended family, the nation and humanity.²⁰⁸ She equally promotes the dissemination of women’s virtue education to the entire Chinese nation so that every woman is morally upright, and so that her “hard-work can stabilize the nation” (*yi lao ding guo* 以劳定国).²⁰⁹ Near her lecture’s end, she appeals to women to study women’s virtue and bring honor, through the perfection of their virtuosity, to themselves, to their families, to their lineages, and to their parents. She hopes to spread women’s virtue to every corner of the world so women can take pride in themselves.²¹⁰ Significantly, Chen and Zhong frequently referred to each other and praised each other during their lectures, which is early evidence of the formation of a network of common ideas, texts, and speakers that would ultimately become the WVM.

Ding Xuan is our third lecturer here. Ding Xuan learned about women’s virtue through an incident during the Cultural Revolution. After her retirement from an electricity company, she spent most of her time visiting monasteries. Ding Xuan was a member of Hebei Province Traditional Culture Research Association (*Hebei chuantong wenhua yanjiuhui*, 河北传统文

²⁰⁵ Chen, 15.

²⁰⁶ Chen, 15.

²⁰⁷ Chen, 70.

²⁰⁸ Chen, 103-104.

²⁰⁹ Chen, 162-163.

²¹⁰ Chen, 262.

化研究会), an organization that arranges summer camps, pseudo-traditional Han Clothing-style marriages, and schools for learning Chinese national studies (*guoxue* 国学) and women's virtues.²¹¹ The members of this association are mostly women's virtue lecturers and cadres who retired from central government and provincial government positions. Accordingly, most of the lecturers in this association are Chinese Communist Party members.

Ding's lecture was held in an auditorium in Shanghai on October 4, 2015. Her lecture provides the most extensive evocation of the Chinese nation, the Chinese state and the CCP compared to other three lecturers. She opens her lecture by paying a lengthy homage to the Chinese Communist Party, President Xi Jinping, the government officials in Shanghai, as well as to the volunteers for the lecture and the attendants' ancestors, whose heavenly virtues brought them together to study women's virtues.²¹² She next pronounces that "the household is the smallest nation, and the nation is thousands of households," alluding to the 2009 song "Guojia 国家" (Nation-Household), which commemorates the sixtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China.²¹³ Ding Xuan proceeds to say that she is overjoyed with the recently-released two-child policy for women.²¹⁴ She sees it as an opportunity for women to further cultivate their children to become sages for the nation.²¹⁵ She alleges that "marriage is not only about two people. It also concerns the couple's respective families, lineages, and also the serious matter of the nation. ... Marriage between men and women is to fulfill the responsibility of the nation."²¹⁶ This vision of women serving China becomes more blatant when Ding Xuan proclaims that a woman's offspring "does not belong to yourself solely; it

²¹¹ See www.zhjd.org. After 2017 when Ding Xuan was heavily criticized, the website and this organization still operates until today.

²¹² Bilibili, Part I, 00:01-02:07.

²¹³ The Chinese word "Guojia" usually refers to the English equivalent of nation-state. Nonetheless, the song's lyrics relate the parallel between the nation (Guo 国) and the family/household (jia 家). Thus, to faithfully convey its meaning, I choose to translate the song's title as "Nation-Household." Bilibili, Part I, 06:45.

²¹⁴ Bilibili, Part I, 21:46.

²¹⁵ Bilibili, Part I, 33:13, 113:29.

²¹⁶ Bilibili, Part I, 106:11, 107:53.

also belongs the Chinese nation and the Chinese race.”²¹⁷ She calls women to adhere to women’s virtue and traditional Chinese culture, as she predicts the advent of “Greater China” (*Dazhonghua* 大中华) with numerous virtuous person and the “noble ones” (*junzi* 君子) blossoming in the land that goes far beyond their imaginations.²¹⁸

As there is a sense of joy and hope here, there is also a sense of lamentation and anxiety from Ding Xuan in evoking the Chinese nation. Ding Xuan laments contemporary mothers’ lack of concern for families and their children. She states the fact that China’s annual abortion rate is the highest in the world, which she considers a disgrace to the nation.²¹⁹ She views abortion, along with growing gynecological disease rates in China, as a severe social and moral crisis. She calls for more attention to be given to women’s virtue education and warns that if “we do not come to rescue women, our nation-state and our people will suffer catastrophic consequences.”²²⁰ She rejects outright any suggestion of divorce, as she deduces that divorce would destroy the household, would result in the taking of drugs, and ultimately damage the nation.²²¹ To shape people’s respect for marriage and the household, she plays the song “Xi Dada aizhe Peng Mama 习大大爱着彭麻麻” (Daddy Xi Loves Mama Peng) to set up Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan as domestic figures to follow. She admonishes the attendants to speak less and against speaking any slander against the ruler, in particular.²²² She takes jabs at abortion, calling it the result of sexual lustfulness and sexual misconduct. She views abortion as an invidious plot by the “Foreign Anti-Chinese Forces (*Xifang fan Hua shili* 西方反华势力).” She accuses these “Foreign Anti-Chinese Forces” of spreading sexual openness, sexual liberation and sexual freedom to China, ruining their women, the Chinese

²¹⁷ Tencent, Part II, 2:41:48.

²¹⁸ Bilibili, Part I, 112:56-113:21.

²¹⁹ Bilibili, Part I, 46:20.

²²⁰ Bilibili, Part I, 47:12-49:26.

²²¹ Bilibili, Part I, 118:26-119:21.

²²² Tencent, Part II, 2:09:34.

people, and ultimately the Chinese nation.²²³ She declares that “abortion is an act of killing. ... The Chinese women’s wombs cannot hold up our Chinese nation’s future [with millions of abortion annually].”²²⁴ She therefore appeals to all to introduce women’s virtue education into higher education, prisons, villages, cities, factories, schools, families/households and local communities.²²⁵ Her words ring a sense of urgency and desperation.

Yet for Ding Xuan, not all hope is lost. She quotes the statements released by some female students in higher education that call, first, for daughters to dress only for the family, parents and peaceful lives, not for themselves, and second, for female students to refuse premarital sex, to study traditional Chinese culture, and to become the “fair lady” of the new era. This trend has risen nationwide, she attests, with the intent of protecting the Chinese nation.²²⁶ Ding applauds the fact that the Chinese Communist Party and the national leaders are paying close attention to “family education,” “family values” and “family circumstances” (*jiajiao* 家教; *jiafeng* 家风; and, *jiadao* 家道).²²⁷ She equally endorses Xi Jinping’s recent crackdown on the pornography industry as an act of protecting young women, children and the Chinese nation.²²⁸ To conclude her lecture, Ding Xuan appeals again to its attendants to join the crusade of building their nation’s future—cultivating China’s descendants and managing household harmony—by studying and promoting women’s virtue education.²²⁹

Lastly, Ding Xuan also includes a discussion of Chinese race in her lecture. Ding forbids those listening from getting abortions, and suggests that they should not get divorced or change sex partners after marriage either, as doing so would harm first-borns and their

²²³ Tencent, Part II, 2:50:15-2:54:06.

²²⁴ Tencent, Part II, 3:06:31.

²²⁵ Tencent, Part II, 3:06:53.

²²⁶ Tencent, Part II, 3:17:39.

²²⁷ Bilibili, Part I, 07:26.

²²⁸ Tencent, Part II, 3:18:19.

²²⁹ Tencent, Part II, 4:05:30.

nation's "racial superiority" (*zhongzu youliang* 种族优良).²³⁰ She references the ancient Chinese sages to defend her argument.²³¹

Ma Yiling is the last lecturer to be analyzed. Ma has been very active in terms of teaching and spreading women's virtue since 2010, serving as editor for both Zhong Maosen's and Chen Jingyu's lectures-turned-textbooks. She started lecturing on women's virtue around the same year, and was hired by the Yunnan provincial government to lecture on the fifteenth-century *Neixun* 内训 (*Teaching for the Inner Court*) in 2015.

Although her rhetoric is less bombastic and provocative than Ding Xuan, Ma also stresses similar points on the relation between women's virtue and the nation. She demands that women cultivate their children to be talented for society and the nation, otherwise it would be a disgrace for their parents and society.²³² She states that "the vicissitude of a clan and the vicissitudes of a nation are all connected with marriage."²³³ She quotes Xi Jinping's words to accentuate that women are important for elevating family virtues, and that their actions matter to social harmony.²³⁴ She sees the vicissitudes of a household and those of a nation are related by women's words, actions and virtues. Therefore, she suggests, women should speak and act cautiously in line with women's virtue teachings.²³⁵ She instructs women to concern themselves with the national well-being.²³⁶ She tells her attendants that women are the critical foundation of and guarantors for the prosperity of family and the nation. Hence, they should study women's virtue to bring blessings to the family, prosperity to the nation, and pass the torch of the Chinese nation.²³⁷ At the end of her lecture, she calls women to study women's virtue since it will bring flourishing and happiness to themselves,

²³⁰ Tencent, Part II, 3:06:45, 3:17:11.

²³¹ Tencent, Part II, 3:15:40.

²³² Ma, 10.

²³³ Ma, 71.

²³⁴ Ma, 73.

²³⁵ Ma, 76.

²³⁶ Ma, 98.

²³⁷ Ma, 165-166, 177.

and because it is an act of inheriting and transmitting the Chinese culture. Moreover, this personal happiness and flourishing from women's virtue would ultimately transfer to the family and the nation.²³⁸ Ma ends her evocation of women's virtue and the nation on an optimistic note.

Commonalities overlap among those four lecturers' evocations of women's virtue and the nation. They often recommend, read, and cite each other's names and books, and they assist each other in other ways, such as Ma serving as editor for Zhong and Chen's books. In the lecturers' evocations, traditions, the cosmic order and karmic retributions are all alluded to. Each one emphasizes that women's virtue should be spread to every sphere of the nation, some saying even to every corner of the world. They eulogize the Chinese nation and its two-child policy, demanding Chinese women serve and sacrifice for their nation. The lecturers highlight the link between family and the nation by underscoring the importance of women's virtue, which they ask women to learn in order to achieve the above goals.

To understand the link between women's virtue and the Chinese nation, a brief overview of the contemporary Chinese context and an introduction to the theory of religious nationalism are necessary. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest, there was a gradual process of increasing the emphasis on patriotic education and tradition. With the growing trend of moral decadence and scandals keeping people in constant shock, the popular Confucian revival movement, initiated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, emerged to combat those issues by promoting "reading the classics" (*du jing* 读经) and organizing traditional Confucian schools. A conflated movement grew on par with the popular Confucian revival: the national studies fever (*guoxue re*, 国学热). As the Chinese state under Hu Jintao during the early 2000s endorsed the slogan "harmonious society" and exported its "soft power," the activists of national learning fever tried to advocate more learning of the classic Chinese

²³⁸ Ma, 264.

canons. These activists used national studies to challenge Western universal values; they called upon Chinese tradition and Chinese knowledge to present an alternative to Western modernity. The movement holds a dual character: nationalist (harkening back to China's tradition) yet universalist (proposing an alternative for the globe). By creating an imagined past, however, activists of the national studies fever presented their cherished learnings in an ahistorical sense – unchanging over time. They have a sense of cultural nostalgia that longs for something now absent in Chinese society. Furthermore, entangled with capitalism, Marxism, economic developmentalism and the catchphrase of “harmonious society,” the national studies fever also illustrates ambiguities of Chinese modernity in the twentieth-first century.²³⁹

More social movements ensued after the popular Confucian revival and the national studies fever. The rise of the neo-Maoist movement first took shape. Disgusted by the news of moral corruption and scandals among Chinese Communist Party officials, some Chinese citizens deplored such officials' failures to follow Maoist ideals from the era of Mao Zedong, such as “serve the people,” self-sacrifice, voluntarism and frugality.²⁴⁰ Associating the free market and capitalist reforms after Deng Xiaoping with moral decadence and bureaucratic corruption, many people began calling for a return to Maoist socialism and proposed to re-enact Maoism to hold the corrupted officials accountable. These people are neo-Maoists, trying to resurrect Maoist ideals as Chinese society's guiding ideology. Neo-Maoists glorify the Maoist era in their rhetoric, whitewashing and denying any catastrophic events under

²³⁹ See Arif Dirlik, “Guoxue/National Learning in the Age of Global Modernity,” *China Perspectives*, No. 1 (85), 2011, 4-13; John Makeham, “The Revival of Guoxue: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Aspirations,” *China Perspectives*, No. 1 (85) (2011), 14-21; Xie Shaobo, “Guoxue Re and the Ambiguity of Chinese Modernity,” *China Perspectives*, NO. 1 (85) (2011), 39-45.

²⁴⁰ In fact, as Chinese journalist Yang Jisheng (杨继绳) points out in his book *Tombstone* (which was banned in China for its documentation on the Great Leap Forward), during the Maoist era, the early period of PRC from 1949 to 1958, the Party officials' corruption and luxurious lifestyle, including Mao's, were excessive and lavish. Nonetheless, since majority of Chinese were poor back then, there was no obvious gap between rich and poor, nor would people then have been aware of official corruption.

Mao's rule, especially the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). They direct their criticisms at economists, who recommend free markets, and at liberal public intellectuals, who criticize Mao's historical blunders and question China's official history narratives. Neo-Maoist groups thrive in Chinese society today.²⁴¹

With Confucianism as an epitome of traditional Chinese culture, other popular movements center their efforts on promoting traditional Chinese culture. Two movements exemplify this tendency: the Han Clothing Movement and the popular revival of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The movements take the *hanfu* 汉服 (Han Clothing), a historical style of Chinese clothing, and TCM as concrete, unchanging entities in their discourses. The two movements specifically target Han Chinese people, as both movements claim to promote the glory of traditional Chinese civilization. The Han Clothing Movement advocates the preservation of the Han Chinese, its purity and anti-foreign sentiment. Participants in the Han Clothing Movement adapt *hanfu* as a marker to distinguish their identity from the urbanites, showcasing their dedication to the Chinese nation and traditional Chinese culture.²⁴² Similar rhetoric goes with the popular revival of TCM, as the movement artificially divides TCM with Western medicine and claims TCM's superiority to Western biomedicine and sciences.²⁴³ Therefore, the Han Clothing Movement and the popular revival of TCM convey intensive yearning for a return to China's past.

All this nostalgia to return to China's glorious past is supplemented by the structural discrimination against women exacerbated intentionally and implicitly by the state. Since the 2000s, the derogatory term "leftover women" (*shengnü* 剩女), referring to the Chinese women who are unmarried over the age of twenty-five, stigmatizes single women. These single women are coerced to find a marriage partner by further pressure from her family and

²⁴¹ See Blanchette, *China's New Red Guards*.

²⁴² See Carrico, *The Great Han*. The Han Clothing those participants wear is actually pseudo-traditional.

²⁴³ See Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*; Unschuld, *Traditional Chinese Medicine*.

the society.²⁴⁴ The gender wealth gap was widened concurrently as women generally do not have ownership of their houses.²⁴⁵ When President Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, he stressed frequently that women should return back to the household, coinciding with the change to the two-child policy in 2015.²⁴⁶ Simultaneously, the Chinese government began more actively suppressing feminist activism, maintaining its political authority. The Chinese state has called “Western feminism” part of the “Foreign hostile forces” (*Xifang fan Hua shili* 西方反华势力) that intends to disturb the social stability in China.²⁴⁷ This can be seen through the case of China’s Feminist Five in 2015, in which five young Chinese feminists were arrested by police for their social activism, such as distributing pamphlets to factory workers to raise consciousness of gender inequality and celebrating their identities as single, queer and child-free women in Chinese society.²⁴⁸ The Chinese state’s repressive policies for women, as Leta Hong Fincher points out, are attempts to maintain patriarchal authoritarianism and to conform women as the reproductive tool of the state. This can be seen with the initiate attempt of cultivating the cult of personality around Xi Jinping by referring to him as “Big Daddy Xi” (Xi Dada, 习大大) and Xi’s emphasis on traditional family values and women’s role in taking care of the youngsters.²⁴⁹ Songs such as “Daddy Xi Loves Mama Peng” became popular as “Big Daddy Xi” remained in circulation from 2012 until 2016. Even as this phrase is dropped out of use, Xi Jinping has still been portrayed as the patriarch of the whole nation.²⁵⁰ By emphasizing traditional family values, the official narratives and Xi Jinping pushed women to return back to the households and perpetuated the notion that

²⁴⁴ See Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women*.

²⁴⁵ Hong Fincher, *Leftover Women*, 75-108.

²⁴⁶ Similar rhetoric is prevalent in Chinese newspapers this time. For example, see <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2017-08-03/doc-ifyiswpt5013262.shtml> and http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-02/24/c_1118142363.htm

²⁴⁷ Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 13, 163.

²⁴⁸ For a more detailed account, see Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*.

²⁴⁹ Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 164-170.

²⁵⁰ Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 164-165.

women should be the reproductive tool of the state.²⁵¹

Grimmer tales lay ahead. In March, 2018, roughly a month after Xi Jinping struck down the two-term presidential limits, Zhenjiang College in Jiangsu Province, China launched a new course for women to learn how to be a perfect woman in the “new era” of Xi Jinping. The course teaches women of traditional Chinese culture, ranging from Chinese history and how not to wear too much makeup in their daily lives. The goal is to preserve traditional Chinese culture.²⁵² This news story portends the future that Xi Jinping and the CCP carve for women.

At the same time, the CCP continues to increase its legitimacy by relying on religion as a source of inspiration. Anthropologist Frank N. Pieke recognizes in his work that the CCP develops red tourism, requiring its Party cadres to conduct pilgrimage-like excursions to sites that chronicle Party’s beginning, revolutionary struggles, and triumphs. The Party hopes to cultivate the cadres’ party spirit (*dangxing*, 党性) and inculcate patriotism in them. The end goal of this red tourism is to reconstruct the Party as the sacred entity of worship so that the Party can govern with stronger legitimacy. Pieke finally concludes that the cultivation of party spirit is the CCP’s recent attempt to “turn the Party itself rather than its ideology and mission into a sacred entity and an object of religious awe.”²⁵³

A final word on the theory of religious nationalism with some mainland China characteristics is in order, as explored by political scientist Kuo Cheng-tian. Religious nationalism is a synthesis between religion and nationalism.²⁵⁴ It helps to build the state religion in China. This state religion has a political trinity: patriotism, socialism and rule by

²⁵¹ Hong Fincher, *Betraying Big Brother*, 170.

²⁵² Emily Rauhala, “Hold in Your Belly... Legs together: Chinese College Teaches Female Students To Be ‘Perfect,’” *Washington Post*, June 25, 2018. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/hold-in-your-belly--legs-together-chinese-college-teaches-female-students-to-be-perfect/2018/06/25/c0e1205e-6a21-11e8-bbc5-dc9f3634fa0a_story.html, accessed on February 20, 2020.

²⁵³ Pieke, “Party Spirit: Producing a Communist Civil Religion in Contemporary China,” 709-729.

²⁵⁴ Kuo, “Religion, State and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies,” 16, 31.

Chinese Communist Party. Its logic follows this: China is socialism, socialism is CCP in rule, and CCP rule is China.²⁵⁵ Under this trinity, the Chinese state becomes the supreme God of this state religion. As the supreme God, it compels other religions to incorporate patriotism into their theological frameworks and organizations. Under this political theology of Chinese patriotism, religions such as Buddhism, Islam, and Protestant/Catholic Christianity should all serve the Chinese state in their practices.²⁵⁶ Since 2015, the shape of Chinese religious nationalism has become multi-faceted: it has its own religious holidays; it has its great prophets, including Marx, Lenin, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and its holy scriptures; its Supreme God has aliases such as “Han” and “the Yellow Emperor;” it demarcates its devils and archrivals, including all kinds of national separatists, democracy, Japan, and the United States.²⁵⁷ The Chinese nation is firmly enshrined in this religious discourse. Religious nationalism imbues its public discourses with morally and religiously charged notions. With the above contemporary context and theoretical framework of religious nationalism in mind, we can better comprehend the dynamics between women’s virtue and the nation.

First and foremost, the lecturers of the Women’s Virtue Movement repetitively call upon all to introduce the teaching of women’s virtue to every sphere of society, the nation and even the world. Their reiteration is a classic example of the maximalist view of religion. Scholar of religion Bruce Lincoln expounds this idea in his work *Holy Terrors*. Using the case of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian Islamist, and his visit to the U.S. between 1948 to 1950, Lincoln describes how Qutb dictated that religion “ought to permeate all aspects of social, indeed of human existence.”²⁵⁸ Similarly, Ding Xuan, Chen Jingyu and Zhong Maosen speak of transmitting the teaching of women’s virtue to every social sphere.

The Women’s Virtue Movement exhibits other religious features as well. More

²⁵⁵ Kuo, “Religion, State and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies,” 13.

²⁵⁶ Kuo, “Religion, State and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies,” 26, 41.

²⁵⁷ Kuo, “Religion, State and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies,” 30-31.

²⁵⁸ Lincoln, *Holy Terrors*, 5.

specifically, it is a popular religion. The previous chapters keep noticing the internal religiosity within the movement. The lecturers build the movement with an authoritative, transcendent discourse on tradition, wrap the movement with a dualistic cosmic order that demarcates men and women, and bolster this cosmic order with karmic retributions and the process of moral transformation. Furthermore, the Women's Virtue Movement identifies a problem, offers a solution, prescribes a technique that enables practitioners to move from the problem to the solution, and articulates a list of exemplary figures for followers to imitate.²⁵⁹ The lecturers find their problem in the moral decadence and depravity among Chinese women. Their solution against this moral decadence is moral discipline and moral uprightness. The technique articulated by the lecturers consists primarily of women's virtue education. The exemplary figures include virtuous mothers, chaste wives and daughters. The list of exemplary figures goes on to include sages, ancestors, and contemporary leader Xi Jinping. With additional karmic retribution backing up this system, the Women's Virtue Movement is a robust popular religion, which functions to reinforce morality in the women and to bring harmony, order and stability to Chinese society.

The WVM's emphasis on morality is not a surprising one. The variation here is its obsession with women. Compared with the other movements in the early 2000s, such as the popular Confucian revival, the national studies fever, and the neo-Maoist activism, and even the Han Clothing Movement, the WVM shares the similar line for treating concerns of treating moral decadence as a social crisis in China. Yet why women? Recall that the first lectures of women's virtue were held in 2006, and the Women's Virtue Movement became more formative around 2010, when the term "leftover women" became popular in the street. The reprint of the *Confucian Four Books for Women*, and the popular morality books and

²⁵⁹ Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run The World* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 14-15.

catechism of women's virtue all started around the mid-1990s, coinciding with the resurgence of popular Confucian revival. The circulation of morality books helped to boost up the Women's Virtue Movement during its formative years. A fair speculation would be that the beginning of the Women's Virtue Movement is simply a movement that tries to promote women's virtue based on an ahistorical interpretation of the *Confucian Four Books for Women*. Yet a more thorough study reveals that the origin and makeup of the movement is more complex than that. With the popularization of "leftover women," and circulation of morality books, the Women's Virtue Movement mutated to become a diffused religion that focuses on women. It acts as an ominous octopus that stretches its limbs across fifteen provinces in China and hits the Chinese metropolises such as Shanghai, Wuhan, Tianjin and Hong Kong.

The lecturers' hidden connections or *guanxi* 关系 with the Chinese state/the CCP should not be ignored, for this connection reveals equally the dynamics between the Women's Virtue Movement and the Chinese nation-state. All those lecturers conduct their lectures with state approval. Ding's 2015 Shanghai lecture and Ma's 2017 Haikou lecture illustrate that women's virtue lectures are approved and invited by local governments. Local government officials approve these lectures based on the dominant principle stated by the central government. Xi Jinping's emphasis on family value and the State Administration of Religious Administration's approval of printing Master Yinguang's speeches and correspondences on the topic of women's virtue education. The Women's Virtue Movement has thus become a civilizing process for the Chinese state. It provides a platform for the Chinese state to instill the ideas of morality and virtues, such as sacrifice, patriotism, chastity and responsibility, to the female population. Nor should one overlook Ding Xuan's flagrant institutional affiliation with Hebei Province Traditional Culture Research Association, which entails a conspicuous participation of the Communist Party members. Even though those Chinese Communist Party

members listed in Ding Xuan's institution are retired, their support and participation still has an impact promoting women's virtue and family values. Like Pieke's study of red tourism, the lecturers' connection with the Chinese state and the CCP has the effect of re-instilling magic into the Party.

More importantly, Kuo's theoretical engagement with Chinese religious nationalism helps us to better understand why lecturers decry feminism. While scholar Leta Hong Fincher explains how the Chinese state and the Communist Party have portrayed feminism as a foreign hostile force, this categorization is treated with a secular perspective, as if it does not deal with religion. Yet with Kuo's study of Chinese religious nationalism in mind, we should view the Chinese state's framing of feminism in a different light. With Xi Jinping's emphasis on family values, women returning to the family, and the parallel logic between "family" and "nation," the Chinese state consecrates itself in the holy cloak of religious nationalism. Feminism is detested by the Chinese state for another contextual reason: it damages family order. Damaging family order means sabotaging the nation, and further, a disobedience to the Chinese state and to the Chinese Communist Party. Feminism, along with the other "foreign hostile forces," is transformed into be the archenemy and devil of the Chinese state. Its existence is not only as a challenge to the patriarchal authoritarianism that the CCP desires to uphold, but also as a blasphemy to the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party.

This explanation sheds light on the confrontation between the Nü Quan activists and the attendants of the Haikou women's virtue lecture described in Case Number 1 in Chapter II. During the confrontations, the activists, all feminists, were accused of being "Western invaders" and "traitors." They were referred to as Hong Kong pro-independence activists, Hong Kong separatists, and Taiwan separatists. The host and attendants of the Haikou lecture called activists representatives of the "Western anti-Chinese forces." Although those remarks are ultra-nationalistic, they are equally religious in nature. Under the framework of religious

nationalism, the attendants act vehemently and lambaste any dissidents aggressively with a religious fervent. They rally themselves in the name of the Chinese nation and guard it from any possible devils who might desecrate this sacred entity, as if their deepest convictions were being threatened. In this sense, the attendants of Haikou lecture are self-branded crusaders who set out to combat any infidels such as the feminist activists. Attendants of the WVM thus express their disposition: In nation and the party they trust.

Therefore, the Women's Virtue Movement is the unofficial civilizing and proselytizing mission for the Chinese Communist Party. With its own articulation of problem, solution, technique and exemplary, the Women's Virtue Movement promotes women's virtues teaching and in turn legitimizes the Chinese nation and the Chinese state. In the process, the CCP sanctifies itself and puts on for itself the holy cloak.

There is also Ding Xuan's discourse of race and racial superiority in her lecture. Her rhetoric is two-folded: first, it is about the excellence of the Han Chinese race; second, its rhetoric leans on the issue of racial purity. As Ding Xuan is a Han Chinese, and that most of her audience would be Han people, Ding Xuan's rhetoric directly refers to the Han Chinese race. Her rhetoric of racial superiority focuses on staying faithful to one male partner, implying the practice of loyalty among the female audience. It indicates a sense of bodily purity, as a woman's body would remain chaste in her lifetime, since she is going to have sex with one person, eschewing any possibility of adultery and contamination.

Ding Xuan's two-folded notion of racial superiority should be expounded with an overview of China's historical discourse on race and its contemporary ones. China, either pre-modern or modern, has a long intellectual history on the discourse of race.²⁶⁰ During the last years of the Qing dynasty, revolutionaries such as Dr. Sun Yatsen, under the influence of

²⁶⁰ See Frank Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, Fully Revised and Expanded Second Edition, 2015).

ideas such as social Darwinism, developed a theory that merges race with the nation. Sun Yatsen's racial nationalism focused strictly on Han people, as he pledged that Han people should rally together to get rid of the Manchu rulers of China. The Han people were envisioned as a people with one common culture, language, religion and blood—in short, a race that is one, pure and singular. Like Italian fascists, Sun and his counterparts utilized an application of biological concept of “race” to mobilize people to participate in the nationalist cause.²⁶¹ This eugenics rhetoric has a comeback in contemporary China since the 1978 Opening-up, as the Chinese government reenacted eugenics laws in the late 1980s (rescinded in the 1990s), while the public discourse continues to be filled with popular racism today.²⁶²

Ding Xuan is not the first one to pronounce this rhetoric of racial superiority in the contemporary Chinese social movement. Participants in the Han Clothing Movement voice their discourse of race during their activities as well. Picking up the racial discourse from Dr. Sun Yatsen, they employ Han Clothing to reimagine a pure Han race whose strength lies in women, since women is part of the superior Han race. Han Chinese women, in those participants' reimagination, only serve for reproduction. The participants envision that Han Chinese women do not have any sexual desires and that when women do have sex it is all about producing Han descendants, transmitting the DNA, and preserving the racial purity.²⁶³ Those participants consider sex and reproduction as a matter of a national holy war, in which they have to protect the Chinese women from barbarians (foreign people and black people) and other means of contaminations.²⁶⁴ It thus is of no wonder that some participants of the Han Clothing Movement cooperate with a “ladies' academy” that emphasizes a traditional, idealized femininity and targets primarily Chinese women in Carrico's observation. The teachers of this “ladies' academy” fill the class with abstract traditional virtues such as

²⁶¹ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 77-78.

²⁶² Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 130-135.

²⁶³ Carrico, *The Great Han*, 168-170.

²⁶⁴ Carrico, *The Great Han*, 170.

diligence, purity, and sacrifice and a conspiracy theory that “foreign hostile forces” employ democracy, freedom and sexual liberation to encroach on Chinese women, thus weakening China.²⁶⁵ The female uteruses thus carry the future of the Chinese race and the Chinese nation for the participants.²⁶⁶

With those pieces of information, Ding Xuan’s discourse on racial superiority shares similar concerns with the participants of the Han Clothing Movement. Ding appropriates the racial nationalism rhetoric from Dr. Sun Yatsen. She promotes the similarly abstract, idealized and imagined femininity and virtues to her audience. This imagined femininity is embedded within her emphasis on racial superiority. She views this issue as a nationwide holy war. There is only one difference between her emphasis and that of the Han Clothing Movement: Ding Xuan concentrates more on the female chastity and purity of being loyal to one male partner, avoiding mention of foreign people and black people. Considering racial superiority in a similar manner as a holy war, she consciously or unconsciously adds more layers of religiosity to the movement and to the Chinese nation.

At this stage, one can make another comparison between China’s case, the cases of the United States, South Korea and India, regarding their nationalist and fundamentalist rhetoric of women and the nation. One common feature stands out in those four cases: a masculinist and patriarchal perspective on women. All four cases view women’s morality, body and actions as connected with their nationalist causes. The reasoning is that all these discourses, across time and space, establish the parallel between the women and the nation. Women embody the nation. They all believe that protecting women’s bodies and purity is paramount in protecting the nation’s purity. Yet there is one difference between the WVM and the other three cases: the Chinese Communist Party implicitly seeks to use a popular religious

²⁶⁵ Carrico, *The Great Han*, 174-186. He did not mention if this rhetoric is perpetuated by the Chinese state.

²⁶⁶ Carrico, *The Great Han*, 183.

movement to legitimize its rule and to wrap itself with a growing religious nationalism. This situation is not entirely in alignment with the case of South Korea, as the Korean nationalist rhetoric did not anticipate a level of religiosity or employ religion when discussing women and nationalism. The WVM can be seen in parallel with the U. S. Christian fundamentalists, with the only difference that the WVM and the CCP do not espouse liberalism and democracy.

There can be some similarity between the Hindu nationalism and China's religious nationalism, as both use religious discourses to serve their nationalism rhetoric, and both India and China suffered and endured from foreign imperialism. Yet the difference is that, in the case of China, religious nationalism also weaves the nation with the Chinese Communist Party together, while Hindu nationalism mostly does not, with the exception of the currently ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The difference between the WVM and the Hindu nationalism then is because that China today remains a single party state. The religious nationalism in China serves directly the interests of the Chinese Communist Party, while the other three cases show no such a robust and direct correlation between their nationalisms and ruling parties.

Conclusion

As this paper argues that the Women's Virtue Movement is a popular religious movement, its implications lie on both the local Chinese level and the global level. There are four observations we can conclude with at the local Chinese level. The WVM, like the other social movements in Chinese society during the 2000s and 2010s, reflects the latest effort of Chinese people seeking answers to solve their existential crises and attempting to answer their life questions. Seeking those answers, participants in the WVM, or other social movements, look backward into the past for a cure to make a better future. This orientation reveals not only a sense of nostalgia, but also a sense of anxiety. This sense of anxiety is not surprising. As China has moved away from the Maoist ideals toward economic development and personal material affluence since the 1978 Opening-up, there have been unforeseen side effects and byproducts. People, befuddled and startled at these side effects and byproducts, need principles to navigate their lives in this apparently new society. While many people stick to economic developmentalism and material affluence, there are people trying to retrieve the Maoist ideals; some seek refuge in religion, and others, like the WVM, pledge their faith to imagined and invented traditions. Either way, it demonstrates the process of reconstituting a common foundation for both individuals and society.

In this process of reconstituting this common foundation, the WVM has proceeded in a similar manner as other social movements do: it identifies the moral crisis as the most urgent problem; it places an emphasis on traditional ideals and archetypes; it prescribes techniques to solve those problems; and, it rallies followers under its wings. In this way, the WVM repackages itself with religiosity. It no longer remains a secular movement; instead, the lecturers of the WVM elevate it to be a popular and diffusive religious movement. Many other social movements do the same, not to mention Chinese people's return to mainstream religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. What is different, though, is that the WVM not

only relies on the immanent framework that is prevalent among secularism; it also attempts to link the transcendent in this world. This distinguishes the WVM from other social movements. Discourses and practices of the WVM not only require human rationality to accept them; the WVM surrounds those discourses and practices with supernatural and magic powers, as in the example of karma, to coerce attendants to accept them unconditionally as their confessed faith, with an underpinning of service for the nation.

As a social movement, the WVM did not grow in a vacuum. Its religiosity and emphasis on women are rooted in the soil of Chinese society. Building its religiosity on morality books, the WVM reflects part of the changes and continuity of China's religious landscape. Chinese religions in the long twentieth century remained resilient. Even under the current People's Republic of China, previous religious features and practices revamp themselves and resurge again in the market. At the same time, as China remains a nation that emphasizes patrilineal and patriarchal notions in its popular discourses, phenomena such as the WVM will never go away. It will continue to haunt Chinese women and Chinese society, like a specter.

This leads us to our second observation, which relates to the Chinese state. The Chinese state, ruled by the CCP, is complicit in creating a Frankenstein such as the WVM. The existence of the WVM and its fidelity to the state convey to us the endeavor the CCP takes to reinstall its legitimacy with religious means. In doing so, the CCP reinvents itself as a supreme religion, coercing other religions to bow to its transcendence and authority. This is a continuity of imperial China with variations. Like the emperors of imperial China, the CCP is the only true orthodoxy on the table, who grants orthodox status to some religions while it persecutes others as heterodox sect. If we borrow the church-state metaphor from the Latin Christendom context, then the CCP carries a dualistic identity: it is both Caesar and Pope. It performs political functions for society, while it furbishes itself with magic and enchantment. Consciously or unconsciously, the CCP bred the WVM, like a mutant religious daughter, to

police society for her father.

Thirdly, the WVM is also a local manifestation of the larger global context we live in. First, the WVM reflects the recent wave of anti-feminism. It is not a type of prejudice only native to China. If we look over the globe, while the #MeToo Movement remains an international movement, there are numerous backlashes against the feminist movement across the globe. On many occasions the state acts as a perpetrator of the existing bigotry. This study of the WVM thus hopes to remind people of the root of feminism: it is about equality, equity, independence, freedom and justice. It calls for the global feminists, whether residing in developed countries or in developing ones, whether white people or people of color, whether the top 1% or the 99%, to stand together in solidarity to fight against the existing patriarchy and to make the system fair for women. Making a fair system that works for women is to enable a better gender dynamic in society.

The WVM also exposes the worldwide return to nationalism and isolationism. Regardless of one's political system, each nation has its own far-right, fundamentalist and nationalist groups that call back to the reinvented traditions and ideals. Their existence is a reminder of our common shared past: the rise of modern nation-states and the cultivation of nationalism. It may seem ironic that the Chinese Communist Party finds itself associated with such groups, but it alerts us to the fact that patriarchy knows no ideological grounds. This reminder urges us to constantly take those nationalist groups seriously. Meanwhile, we should recognize that the historical birth of nationalism is also a reaction to and adoption of religion, mainly since the Protestant Reformation.²⁶⁷ It implies that in the future, the study of nationalism should expand its scope to consider the tensions and intersections between nationalism and religion. The field of nationalism should be further interdisciplinary to

²⁶⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, Revised Edition, 2016), 37-46.

include religious scholars and religious theories in order to find more nuances and more commonalities between different trends of nationalism.

Lastly, the implication of the connection between nationalism and religion also applies to the question of the relationship between secularity and religion. In our secular society, we have created boundaries that we hope separate the religious and the secular. Yet the WVM is a local indicator of the global phenomenon that the separation between the sacred and the secular is not always clear-cut. The field of secularity does not exist in a vacuum; it constantly fluctuates with the field of religion. Following historian Brad S. Gregory's work *The Unintended Reformation* and his genealogical study on the impact of the Protestant Reformation on modern society, the study of the WVM here invites us to examine secularity with an eye on the *longer duree* history of religion.²⁶⁸ Understanding religion's past, present, and future, its interaction with society, at both individual and collective levels, is crucial for understanding the society we are living in today, the decisions we make, the rituals we practice in everyday life, and the stories we tell ourselves that shape our identities.

One cannot help but wonder: how did the Women's Virtue Movement, and other social movements, happen in China? I looked back in my sources and saw a pattern: its root grew up in the 1990s, when the Chinese state started to implement a more patriotic education curriculum. Yet its seed was sowed on the night of June 3 and the morning of June 4, 1989. When the army intruded into Tiananmen Square, shot ammunition at civilians, cracked down on the democracy movement, and framed the movement as foreign hostile forces, it dashed away any hope that the CCP would ever be a truly open-minded, moderate and healthy ruling party. Instead, what we soon experienced was nothing but cowardly acquiescence. We accepted the massacre without publicly addressing the trauma. We no longer fought, or

²⁶⁸ See Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8-10.

thought about our civil rights and the responsibility of citizenship but only looked at economic gains, personal affluence and development. We indulged ourselves with the illusion that it was better to trade off our political rights for the palpable material gains. We entrusted ourselves to the Party and yet we have been happy for it, for the Party has granted us peace, order, money and security.

The Women's Virtue Movement thus is the result of the long and convoluted trajectory of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest and the Party's subsequent implementation of patriotic education. It is a result of amnesia and myopia. The Chinese people are yet to recognize the hidden religious and sociopolitical factors behind the WVM, nor are they to see its origin with the affiliated historical underpinnings. This amnesia and myopia prevent people from reaching towards a holistic picture of the stakes of the Women's Virtue Movement.

The study of the WVM is not only an end. It is an opening for more possibility of scholarly entries and enterprises. First, intellectuals, historians and religious scholars alike should continue the efforts of putting religion and women back into Chinese history. This effort helps us to see Chinese history not as a singular "history," but as plural "histories." Understanding the "histories" enables us to re-think and re-imagine alternatives that can work for us. Second, there should be more research on the life of Wang Fengyi, as he features immensely in the WVM, and yet there is no critical biography of him. A critical biography of Wang can achieve the first agenda above and provides a lens to see how the historical past influences the present and the future. Third, it is time to conduct a more synthetic overview of the Chinese social movements of the early 2000s altogether. We need to understand whether those movements, like the WVM, have religiosity that can reveal to us the face of Chinese society and the Chinese state. Fourth, there should be more public history works on the May Fourth Movement. As the WVM keeps setting up the May Fourth Movement as a straw man, it is crucial to continue researching the history of the May Fourth Movement to better

understand its spirit and legacy rather than let its importance be obscured by the superficial reading of the WVM.

Lastly, all previous studies on the contemporary Chinese social movements alluded to in passing, including this paper, have not paid close enough attention to the recent economic development of authoritarian capitalism in China. A study of Chinese capitalism is necessary, but this study should be conducted through the lens of religious theory. Historically, religions interacted with capitalism on numerous occasions. By using religious theory, we can comprehend how capitalism perpetuates the existing systemic problems and how we might come up with a way to move forward from the status quo. As religious scholar Kathryn Lofton exemplifies in her work, theories of religious studies can provide tools for us to understand the world as it is and to critique this status quo.²⁶⁹

In the end, we should not walk away from misogyny, patriarchy and systemic injustice. Rather, we should confront them, challenge them, and continue our journey.

²⁶⁹ Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), introduction.

Appendix

A Map of China showing the spread of the Women's Virtue Movement. Provinces and cities highlighted are those that held women's virtue lectures between 2006 to 2019.



Provinces marked: Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan, Hebei, Henan, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanxi, Yunnan, Zhejiang.

Cities marked: Beijing, Changsha, Chongqing, Dalian, Dongguan, Fushun, Haikou, Hong Kong, Jiujiang, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Wenzhou, Wuhan, Zhenjiang.

Full Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Bilibili, “The Complete Women’s Virtue Lecture by Ding Xuan,” (【完整版】丁璇上海女德演讲，一本正经的胡说八道。) uploaded on May 28, 2017. Accessed on September 10, 2019.
- Chen, Jingyu. (陈静瑜) *Qijia zhiguo, nüde wei yao—nüjie xuexi xinde* 齐家治国，女德为要—《女诫》学习心得 (*Women’s Virtue is the key to regulate the family and maintain the state rightly*). Beijing, China: The Chinese Overseas Publishing House, 2012.
- Ma Yiling. (马益玲). *Zuo zijide huanghou—Xuhuanghou neixun jiangji* 做自己的皇后—徐皇后《内训》讲记 (*Becoming Your own Queen: Lectures on Empress Xu’s Inner Lessons for Women*), Beijing, China: The Chinese Overseas Publishing House, 2016.
- Nü Quan (女泉). “Tale of Defying the Dojo: We went in group to the Women’s Virtue Schools visited by Ding Xuan,” (踢馆记：我们组团去了丁璇来过的女德班). Wechat, June 1, 2017. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8x0aBeCcdCh23o9Fgkckpg>
- Tencent, “Conserving Women’s Virtue: How to manage a good life and a life of wisdom, Part II (涵养女德：怎样经营一个智慧美好的人生，下),” uploaded on August 21, 2016. Accessed on October 10, 2019.
- The Volume of Perpetual Commemoration of Master Yinguang, 5 Volumes (Yinguang dashi yongjiu jinian shuxi, 永久印光大师纪念书系)*. Compiled and Edited by Honghua Society (弘化社). Beijing, China: Chinese Religious Culture Publisher (宗教文化出版社), 2015. Vol. 3.
- Zhu Xuntian (朱循天), ed. *Wang Fengyi nianpu yu yulu* (王凤仪年谱与语录). Beijing, China: The China Overseas Publishing House, 2011. 2 Vols.
- Zhong, Maosen. (钟茂森) *Yaotiaoshunü de biao zhun: Songshangong nülunyu yanxi baogao* 窈窕淑女的标准：《宋尚宫女论语》研习报告 (*The Criteria of My Fair Lady*). Beijing, China: The Chinese Overseas Publishing House (中国华侨出版社), 2011.

Secondary Sources

- Adler, Joseph A. “Daughter/Wife/Mother or Sage/Immortal/Bodhisattva? Women in the Teaching of Chinese Religions,” *ASIANetwork Exchange*, Vol. XIV, no. 2 (Winter 2006), 11-16.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York, NY: Verso, Revised Edition, 2016.
- Bailey, Paul J., “‘Modernizing Conservatism’ in Early Twentieth-Century China: The Discourse and Practice of Women’s Education,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies*,

Vol. 3, no. 2 (2004), 217-241.

Balmer, Randall. "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 47-62.

Banerjee, Sikata. "Women, Muscular Nationalism and Hinduism in India: Roop Kanwar and the Fire Protests," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 11, nos. 3-4, (September-December 2010), 271-287

Billioud, Sebastien and Joel Thoraval, *The Sage and the People: The Confucian Revival in China*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Blanchette, Jude D. *China's New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Brown, Karen McCarthy. "Fundamentalism and the Control of Women," *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 175-201.

Chatterjee, Partha. "Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, no. 4 (November, 1989), 622-633.

Chau, Adam Yuet. "The Nation in Religion and Religion in the Nation," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*. Edited by Cheng-tian Kuo. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017, 117-141.

Cheng, Sealing. "Popularizing purity: Gender, sexuality and nationalism in HIV/AIDS prevention for South Korean youths," *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 46, no. 1 (April 2005), 7-20.

Daodejing. Translated by Robert Eno. Accessed on April 8, 2020.

Dessein, Bart. "Religion and the Nation: Confucianism and New Confucian Religious Nationalism," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*. Edited by Cheng-tian Kuo. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017, 199-231.

Dikotter, Frank. *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*. New York: Oxford University Press, Fully Revised and Expanded Second Edition, 2015.

Dirlik, Arif. "Guoxue/National Learning in the Age of Global Modernity," *China Perspectives*, No. 1 (85), 2011, 4-13.

Duara, Prasenjit. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Fincher, Leta Hong. *Leftover Women: The resurgence of gender inequality in China*. New York: Zed Books, 2014.

— *Betraying Big Brothers: The Feminist Awakening in China*. New York: Verso, 2018.

- Goossaert, Vincent, and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 2012.
- Goossaert, Vincent David Ownby and Ji Zhe, "Introduction," *Making Saints in Modern China*. Edited by Vincent Goossaert, David Ownby and Ji Zhe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 1-29.
- Gregory, Brad S. *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Paperback Edition, 2015.
- Hawley, John S. and Wayne Proudfoot. "Introduction," *Fundamentalism and Gender*. Edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 3-45.
- Hardacre, Helen. "Japanese New Religions: Profiles in Gender," *Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Stratton Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 111-133.
- Hershatter, Gail. *Women and China's Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003.
- Johnson, Ian. *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*. New York: Vintage Books, 2017.
- Judge, Joan. "Talent, Virtue and Nation: Chinese Nationalism and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century," in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (June, 2001), 765-803.
- Kang, Xiaofei (康笑菲). "Women and the Religious Question in Modern China," *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-2015* (2 Vols). Edited by Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerway. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016, 489-559.
- Kiely, Jay. "The Charismatic Monk and the Chanting Masses: Master Yinguang and His Pure Land Revival Movement," *Making Saints in Modern China*. Edited by David Ownby, Vincent Goossaert, and Ji Zhe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 30-77.
- Klausen, Susanne M. "'Reclaiming the White Daughter's Purity': Afrikaner Nationalism, Racialized Sexuality, and the 1975 Abortion and Sterilization Act in Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 39-63.
- Kuo, Cheng-tian (郭承天). "Introduction: Religion, State, and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies," *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*. Edited by Cheng-tian Kuo. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017, 13-51.
- Lee, Wong Yin. "Women's Education in Traditional and Modern China," *Women's History Review*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (1995), 345-367.
- Li, Tianfei (李天飞). "You misunderstood Women's Virtue School, it is not feudal dregs," (你

- 们错怪女德班了，它根本就不是封建糟粕). WeChat, December 7, 2017. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WcF9GR4W5FU_uEs31Gz-cA
- Lincoln, Bruce. *Holy Terrors*, University of Chicago Press, 2006 Paperback Edition.
- Liu, Jane. And Marilyn Carpenter, "Trends and Issues of Women's Education in China," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 78, no. 6 (July-August, 2005), 277-281.
- Lofton, Kathryn. *Consuming Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Makeham, John. "The Revival of Guoxue: Historical Antecedents and Contemporary Aspirations," *China Perspectives*, No. 1 (85) (2011), 14-21.
- Mookerjee-Leonard, Debali. "To Be Pure or Not To Be: Gandhi, women and the Partition of India," *Feminist Review*, no. 94 (2010), 38-54.
- Nadeau, Barbie Latza. "Femme Fascista: How Giorgia Meloni became the star of Italy's far right," *World Policy Journal*, vol. 35, no.2, (Summer 2018), 14-21.
- Nü Quan (女泉). Tiguanji: Women zutuan qule dingxuan laiguode nüdeban 踢馆记: 我们组团去了丁璇来过的女德班 (Tale of Defying the Dojo: We went in group to the Women's Virtue Schools visited by Ding Xuan), Wechat, June 1, 2017. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8x0aBeCcdCh23o9Fgkckpg>
- Pang-White, Ann A. Trans. *The Confucian Four Books For Women*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Prothero, Stephen. *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run The World*. New York: HarperOne, 2010.
- Puett, Michael. "Critical Approaches to Religion in China," *Critical Researches on Religion*, vol. 1, no.1 (2015), 95-101.
- Richardson, Sophie. "China Tells Women to 'Go Home and Live Well,'" *Human Rights Watch*, August 28, 2017. Accessed on October 10, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/08/28/china-tells-women-go-home-and-live-well#>
- Ren, Jiantao (任剑涛). *Dang jing chengwei jingdian 当经成为经典 (When Scriptures Become Classics)*. Beijing, China: Social Science Academic Press, 2018.
- Rouse, Anderson. "'If Our Women Remain Pure': Bob Jones and the Construction of Gender in the New South, 1900-1925," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, (2016), 21-33.
- Shao Yong (邵雍), *Zhongguo huidaomen (中国会道门)*. Shanghai, China: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 1997.
- Shih, Fang-Long. "Women, Religions, and Feminists," *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*. Edited by Bryan S. Turner. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell,

Hardcover Edition, 2010, 221-243.

Smith, Leslie Durrrough. *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concern Women for America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Soherwordi, Syed Hussain Shaheed. "Hindu Nationalism and the Political role of Hindu Women: Ideology as a Factor," *South Asian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1 (January- June 2013), 39-54.

Sun, Anna. *Confucianism as a World Religion: Contested Histories and Contemporary Realities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Table π (yuanzhuopai, 圆桌派). Season 2, Episode 6, "Women's Virtue Schools: how to understand Ding Xuan's absurdity (女德: 丁璇之荒谬怎理解?)" Hosted by Wentao Dou (窦文涛) . YouTube, June 20, 2017. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAIEm39TNNU>

The Great Learning. Translated by Robert Eno, 2016. Accessed on March 5, 2020.

"The Moral Crisis in China Part I- Seven Areas that Showcase China's Moral Crisis," in *ChinaScope Analysis Series*, (December 2011), 1-20.

Woo, Tak-ling Terry. "Women in Contemporary Chinese Religions," in *Chinese Religions in Contemporary Societies*. Edited by James Miller. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

Xie, Shaobo. "Guoxue Re and the Ambiguity of Chinese Modernity," *China Perspectives*, NO. 1 (85) (2011), 39-45.

Xu Zi (徐梓), ed. *Nü Jie—Rensheng de jiasuo 女诫—人生的枷锁 (Lessons for Women—Of Human Bondage*. Annotated by Zhang Fuqing (张福清). Beijing, China: Zhongyang Minzu Daxue Chubanshe, 1996.

Yeong-ae, Yamashita. "Nationalism in Korean Women's Studies: Addressing the Nationalist Discourses Surrounding the "Comfort Women" Issue." Translated by Sarah Kovner, *U.S.- Japan Women's Journal, English Supplement*, no. 15 (1998), 52-77.

Yu, Anthony C. *State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives*. Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2005.

Zhou, Zhelun (周哲伦). "Politics of Confucian Revival: Analysis of Memorial Ceremony for Confucius," *UCLA Journal of Religion*, Vol. 3, (2019), 62-82.

Online News Sources and Periodicals

Associated Press

BBC News

China News

Christian Science Monitor

Companion (Banlǚ 伴侣)
Gaozhongsheng Xuexi 高中生学习
Global Times
Guancha Syndicate (Guanchazhe wang 观察者网)
Guangxi Journal of Light Industry (Guangxi Jiaoyu 广西教育)
(H)Education & Social Science
New York Post
Modern Youth (Xiandai Qingnian 现代青年)
Sina News
The Paper (Pengpai Xinwen 澎湃新闻)
The Sixth Tone
VOA News
Washington Post
Xinhua News Agency (Xinhua She 新华社)
Zawen Xuankan 杂文选刊