

TEACHING ABOUT ASIA

Daughter/Wife/Mother or Sage/Immortal/Bodhisattva? Women in the Teaching of Chinese Religions

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Teaching the history of Chinese religions in a gender-balanced way involves a rather large number of variables. First, of course, there is the fact that one must deal with at least three religious traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, each of which itself varies both synchronically (at a given period of time) and diachronically (through time).¹ In addition, there are the following sets of polarities that must be taken into account:

1) The various *textual traditions* and the *social practices* that may or may not reflect them.

2) *Normative texts* and *descriptive texts*. Students usually need to be warned not to make the same mistake as some of the early Orientalists, i.e. to assume that such texts as the *Liji* (Record of Ritual) described actual practices, when they were more like idealized norms. Similarly, the traditional dynastic histories were written from a distinctly Confucian perspective and cannot be relied upon as transparent sources on topics in which the Confucians had a particular sectarian interest (such as Buddhism and Daoism).

3) The practices of the literate *elite* and those of the majority of *commoners*. This distinction should not be over-emphasized though, since there was considerable mutual influence.

4) Women constructed as *ideal symbols* and women seen as *diverse individuals*.

5) Women portrayed as *objects* of a male-centered “gaze” and women as *subjects* expressing their own lives and worldviews.

Since these are polarities, not dualities, any specific observation may be located anywhere along the spectrum defined by each one. And in certain cases the boundaries between the three traditions can be just as fluid. So we have

a large number of variables at play, and little time in which to do them justice.



Sage

Of the three traditions, Confucianism must be central to this discussion, since it largely defined the mainstream discourse on gender in China from the Han dynasty onward.

But just as we need to distinguish between the treatment of women as symbols of a feminine ideal and women as diverse individuals, we also need to be aware that Confucianism is not a fixed, monolithic, entity but rather a dynamic field of discourse. Not only does it display both synchronic and diachronic variation, it also has different levels of discourse. For example, the same Confucian thinker might express one view of women in a commentary to a classic scripture and quite another in a letter, conversation, or eulogy. The same is true, of course, for the other religious traditions.

The conventional view

I will begin by sketching what might be called the conventional view of women in Chinese religions, and then will suggest ways by which to go beyond it. The usual story goes something like this. The Confucians—or “scholars” (*ru*), as they were actually called—were the conservative supporters of the *status quo*, especially after the 2nd century BCE, when their teachings and their authority were given official sanction by the government

and they became invested in its stability and continuance. Confucians argued that the family was a microcosm of the state, and just as the state was ruled by a male emperor with the mandate of Heaven, the father possessed a natural authority that legitimized the social superiority of men in any social context. The proper place for women was in the home, where they were largely responsible for the upbringing and education of children. The “woman’s way (*dao*)” was to assume the roles of wife and mother. The chief virtue proper to these roles was obedience: first to her father, then to her husband, and finally to her grown son. Such views, it is said, led eventually to such misogynistic practices as foot-binding (for the erotic pleasure of men), which began in the Tang

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dynasty (7th -10th centuries), and the “cult of chastity” (in the Ming and Qing dynasties, 14th - early 20th centuries), which elevated chaste widows to the role of cultural heroes. In the early 20th century such Confucian repression was harshly criticized, for example by the writer Ba Jin in his novel, *The Family (Jia)*, which portrayed the stifling and lethal influence of Confucian family values on both women and men. The “May Fourth” generation of intellectuals and the Communists, who later came to power, rejected Confucianism as one of the chief causes for China’s failure to modernize. For the Communists, Confucianism was a “feudal ideology” (terminology that one still hears from tour guides in China) that stood for social hierarchy and thus was inimical to socialism.

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The conventional view presents Buddhism and Daoism as the woman's refuge from the hostility of Confucian values. Although Confucianism to a great extent defined the playing field for two thousand years, alternatives were available to women by recourse to the values and practices of Daoism and Buddhism. In the early phase of Daoist thought—i.e. the classical texts *Laozi* (a.k.a. *Dao de jing*) and *Zhuangzi*, which took their present forms by the 3rd century BCE—Confucian values were strongly criticized as being human contrivances, and the spontaneous processes of the natural world were seen as the model for a meaningful human life. The *Laozi*, in particular, seems to express a strong preference for distinctly “feminine” virtues, such as yielding, softness, fertility, and non-aggression, and suggests that these are, in the long run, both healthier and (perhaps ironically) more effective in the furtherance of personal interests.² Earlier versions of the conventional story end the Daoist chapter right there, completely ignoring the full-fledged Daoist religion, which only began in the 2nd century CE. But until the 1980s there was relatively little scholarship available in English on the Daoist religion.

Buddhism played a similar role. Entering China from India by way of Afghanistan and the “Silk Road” at the beginning of our first millennium, Buddhism at first was solely the religion of foreign monks, all of whom (as far as I know) were male. But as it gradually spread into the Chinese population it attracted women in substantial numbers. Buddhist nunneries provided alternative vocations not only for those women who chose not to marry, but also for widows and those women who, once their children had grown, felt limited by Confucian social restrictions. A prominent example of the greater possibilities for women in Buddhism is the fact that one of its most important “deities” (using that term loosely), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokitesvara (Guanyin in Chinese), essentially became female in China, reflecting the enormous appeal of Buddhism among women.³

Updating and complicating the conventional view

That, more or less, is the standard account of women in Chinese religions.

But it doesn't incorporate much of the scholarly literature on women in Chinese religions that has appeared in the past two decades or more, and continues to appear at increasing rates. Here I will not attempt to review it all, but I will merely offer an impressionistic outline of some of the trends since about 1980 and new perspectives to which students today can and should be exposed.

To begin with Chinese Buddhism, in the early 1980s Diana Paul, who has been called a pioneer in the field, published two important works on women as portrayed in the normative textual tradition of Mahayana Buddhism: *The Buddhist Feminine Ideal* (Scholars Press, 1980), focusing on Queen Srimala in the *Srimaladevi Sutra*; and *Women in Buddhism* (2nd ed., University of California Press, 1985), surveying the Mahayana *sutra* literature more broadly. Paul showed that there is a tension in the canon between the philosophical foundation of Mahayana thought, which provides no justification for

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discrimination against women, and the patriarchal attitudes that were so deeply-rooted in both the Indian and Chinese cultures that gave rise to and interpreted the canon. The famously ambiguous story of the 8-year old daughter of the Dragon King in the “Devadatta” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* can be taken as a symbol of that tension. The precocious young girl shows up the sceptical disciple, Shariputra, by manifesting her full Buddhahood at the wink of an eye—yet she does so by first briefly transforming herself into a man, reflecting the popular Buddhist notion that women cannot achieve Buddhahood in their polluted

female bodies, but must first be reborn as men.⁴

Several other scholars, since Paul's ground-breaking work, have been focusing less on the normative textual tradition and more on the lives of individual women in Chan Buddhism, the most prevalent school since the Song dynasty (10th - 13th centuries). Among them are Miriam Levering, who has published a series of essays since the 1980s on women in Chan Buddhism (primarily the female disciples of the Song dynasty Chan master Dahui), Beata Grant, and Ding-hwa Evelyn Hsieh.⁵ One of the most interesting developments in Buddhism today is that Buddhist nuns in Taiwan have been leaders in such groups as the Buddhist Compassion Relief (Tzu-chi) Foundation (founded in 1966 by the nun Cheng Yen), which may be the fastest-growing religious organization in Taiwan. I might also mention an excellent documentary film, “To the Land of Bliss” by Wen-jie Qin (who has a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Harvard), which examines the responses of Buddhist nuns at a Pure Land Buddhist temple in Sichuan to the death of their abbot in 1998.⁶

In the case of Daoism, the most remarkable development bringing the conventional view up to date since the early 1980s is that scholarship on the Daoist religion, as opposed to the early Daoist classics (*Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*), has come into maturity and opened up essentially a whole new tradition to the English-speaking world. Beginning in the late 2nd century CE, several series of revelations were received and recorded (the first series from the now-divinized *Laozi*), and now comprise the core of the enormous Daoist Canon (containing over 1400 titles). Daoist communities existed (in the Celestial Masters tradition) in which women could be priests or “libationers”, and later on there were respected female Daoist teachers, a number of whom achieved apotheosis as “immortals.” In medieval Daoist monasteries, women were equal in status to men in all ways, distinguished only by the type of cap they wore.⁷ The current generation of Daoist scholars, many of whom were trained by the late Michel Strickmann at the University of California at Berkeley and by Livia Kohn at Boston University, have been churning out translations, essays, and monographs at a

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furious rate, including a substantial number of accounts of Daoist women. As in the case of Buddhism, this has shifted the focus somewhat from normative texts and idealized conceptions of the feminine to individual female figures, including deities, immortals, and mere humans. The recently published *Women in Daoism*, by Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn (Three Pines Press, 2003), provides an excellent summary of current scholarship. So now there is much more solid data available to show how Daoism provided alternatives for women to the Confucian-dominated mainstream of society, in terms of vocation, social status, and religious symbolism.

And so we arrive at last at the *bête noir*, Confucianism. It is not my intention to exonerate Confucianism from responsibility for the subjugation of women in China, but rather to complicate the over-simplified picture presented above. It is unrealistic to attempt to explain away or minimize the damage done to women's lives in China by policies and practices that have been legitimized in Confucian terms, such as the "cult of chastity" in the Ming and Qing dynasties, which condemned many widows to poverty and loneliness by placing a social stigma on remarriage by women.⁸ Nor is it adequate to separate Confucianism entirely from these practices by arguing that they stem ultimately from patriarchal social values, and are only reflected secondarily in Confucian thought. While that may be true, it does not remove from the Confucian ledger the responsibility for reinforcing those values.

On the other hand, it is intellectually and historically mistaken to essentialize the Confucian tradition—to treat it as a static, monolithic, misogynistic entity—and thereby to condemn it out of hand. Throughout most of the twentieth century in China that is precisely what occurred: first by the pro-Western, rationalistic New

Culture and May Fourth movements, and then by the rabidly anti-traditional Communist regime. An admittedly extreme example of this approach is embodied in a pamphlet produced during the Cultural Revolution, called *Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Criticize Confucius and Lin Piao*, which begins, "Confucius was a reactionary who doggedly defended slavery and whose doctrines have been used by all reactionaries, whether ancient or contemporary, Chinese or foreign, throughout the more than 2,000 years since his time."⁹ Even putting aside the strident political dimension of such material, many non-Maoist scholars today, both Chinese and Western, have not critically examined the clichés and out-of-context Confucian quotes that provided fodder for this kind of polemic, such as the oft-quoted comment by the 11th-century scholar Cheng Yi to the effect that it would be better for a widow to die of starvation than to lose her "virtue."

Nevertheless, Confucian scholarship in the West since World War II has blossomed and matured, led by the estimable William Theodore de Bary and Wing-tsit Chan at Columbia and Tu Wei-ming at Harvard (and formerly Berkeley), and building upon the work of eminent scholars in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. In mainland China, however, serious contemporary scholarship on Confucianism got a relatively late start. It began in the early 1980s after the death of Mao Zedong, the fall of the Gang of Four, and the rise to power of the more pragmatic Deng Xiaoping. Even then, such influential scholars as Ren Jiyu brought to their work the Marxist assumption that religion was inherently bad. Only in the past decade or so—paralleling the revival of popular religion in China since the early 1990s—has Chinese scholarship on Confucianism put aside the tired old debates about materialism vs. idealism and begun to take seriously the prospect of learning something valuable from the tradition. The

website Confucius2000.com, for example, is an extraordinary forum reflecting the re-evaluation of Confucianism occurring in China today, including vigorous debate on its religious dimensions.¹⁰

So what can we learn (and teach) from contemporary scholarship concerning women in Confucianism? The first two points I would stress are methodological: (a) we need to examine the Confucian tradition as a dynamic field of discourse unfolding through history rather than a static body of ideas, and (b) we need to bear in mind the conceptual polarities outlined at the beginning of this paper, the most important of which, in regard to Confucianism, are the first two: (1) the distinction between the textual tradition and social practices, and (2) the distinction between normative texts and descriptive texts.

Taking the historical view, we must identify the Han dynasty¹¹ as the first important turning point. Two events are central to this episode, and one man is the key figure in both: Dong Zhongshu (179-194 BCE). It was Dong who persuaded the Han Emperor, Wu-di (r. 140-87 BCE), to switch allegiance and state support from Huang-Lao Daoism to Confucianism. The Confucian scriptures (at that point limited to the so-called Five Classics) and the ideas of Confucius (551-479 BCE) then became the ideological basis for the training of government officials, and for the first time the state

had an interest in controlling the content of those teachings. And, to further develop and clarify the relevance of Confucian thought to government, Dong Zhongshu wrote his *magnum opus*, the *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu fan lu*), in which he incorporated, for the first time in a systematic way, the theory of *yin* and *yang* into the emerging Confucian synthesis.

There is an emerging consensus among recent scholars that it was the rigid application of the *yin-yang* rubric to women and men, respectively, that has led to the repression of women in Confucian thought and practice. There are two aspects to this process that need to be

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Bodhisattva

explored: the intellectual and the historical. First, the intellectual point is actually somewhat counter-intuitive, because the *yin-yang* concept is a principle of complementarity or polarity, which, one would think, would not be consistent with a hierarchical structure. But even before the Han, *yin-yang* was associated with an implicit hierarchy, since Heaven (above) and Earth (below) were early examples of the distinction. Yet they were originally seen as *functional modes of activity*, which both men and women were understood to embody. The key interpretive shift, which seems to have occurred in the Han and is certainly seen in Dong Zhongshu's writing, was to *essentialize* men as *yang* and women as *yin*:¹² "The husband is *yang* and the wife is *yin*;"¹³ and "*Yin* and *yang* also may be called man and woman, and man and woman may also be called *yin* and *yang*."¹⁴ As Chan Sin Yee points out in an excellent essay, the *yin-yang* concept itself does not imply gender essentialism. But, she says, "the alignment was in fact made by Confucians in the past, and with the alignment, gender essentialism is suggested."¹⁵ This, of course, begs the question why Dong Zhongshu should have made this interpretive shift in the application of the *yin-yang* complementarity. One can only speculate, but since Dong was constructing a massive intellectual system of correspondences, it is not unreasonable to assume that even a garden-variety level of sexism or patriarchal attitude might have tempted him to align women and men with *yin* and *yang*, in the interest of filling out his system.

If Dong Zhongshu's system had remained merely an intellectual construct it almost certainly would not have had the social impact that is claimed for it. But Dong was not just an effete scholar; he was a prime minister working for an activist emperor who was reconceiving a theory of government that was destined to sustain a great empire. It was the resulting *politicization* of Dong Zhongshu's Confucian synthesis that provided the conservative inertia which,

over the centuries, would draw Confucianism consistently toward support of stability, a hierarchical order, and the *status quo*. We see this even more strongly in the *Comprehensive Discussion in the White Tiger Hall (Baihu tong)*, which is a

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record of an imperially-sponsored conference in 79 CE (although the received text may contain later additions). The meeting was convened to decide the authenticity of the "New Text" and "Old Text" versions of the Confucian canon, and includes such statements as "*Yang* takes the lead; *yin* acts in concert. The male acts; the female follows."¹⁶

Another important Han-dynasty text is one written by a woman for women: the *Lessons for Women (Nüjie)*, by Ban Zhao (45-114 CE). Ban was the sister of Ban Gu, the official historian of the Former Han dynasty, who died before he could complete that history, so she finished it. She wrote the *Nüjie* ostensibly for her daughters, instructing them on how to live proper Confucian lives as wives and mothers. Although this is a relatively rare instance of a female Confucian voice, Ban Zhao almost entirely accepts the prevailing views concerning women's proper roles; they should be silent, hard-working, and compliant. She stresses the complementarity and equal importance of the male and female roles according to *yin-yang* theory, but she clearly accepts the dominance of the *yang*-male. Her only departure from the standard male versions of this orthodoxy is that she insists on the necessity to educate girls and women. We should not underestimate the significance of this point, as education was the bottom line qualification for being a *junzi* or "noble person," and the prevailing view, ever since the time of Confucius, was that a *junzi* is presumptively male. Still, some scholars assert that Ban Zhao did more harm than good to the fate of women in China.¹⁷ But her example suggests that the Confucian prescription for a meaningful life as a woman was apparently not stifling for all women. Even some women of the literate elite, for whom Confucianism was quite explicitly the norm, were able to

flourish by living their lives according to that model. But we also know from the personal accounts of women who joined Buddhist nunneries that that was not the case for all women.

The process by which male and female were rigidly boxed into the categories of *yin* and *yang* was a gradual one, and it was slowed considerably by the fall of the Han dynasty and the resulting discredit brought upon Confucianism in the eyes of many intellectuals, who were drawn instead to Buddhism and Daoism. But the growth of politicized Confucianism resumed again in the Song dynasty (960-1279). Here we meet with another great systematizer, Zhu Xi (1130-1200), who was heavily indebted to his predecessor Cheng Yi (1033-1107). Both of these figures are frequently depicted as culpable for the suppression of Chinese women over the last millenium. Cheng Yi's statement about widow chastity, referred to above, is one of the most-quoted indictments of the entire Confucian tradition. Zhu Xi occasionally expressed similar views, e.g., "To do wrong is unbecoming to a wife, and to do good is also unbecoming to a wife. A woman is only to be obedient to what is proper."¹⁸

Here is where the distinctions of text vs. social practice and normative vs. descriptive texts become crucial. Scholars such as Bettine Birge and Pat Ebrey have shown that these "Neo-Confucian" writings do not necessarily reflect either the prevailing social practices or the scholars' own attitudes and practices in regard to actual women.¹⁹ Cheng Yi, for example, praised his father for "marrying off" an orphaned, widowed relative, contrary to the scriptural injunction that a widow should not remarry.²⁰ Zhu Xi similarly treated the actual women in his life far differently than one would expect given his theoretical writings and statements on the proper role of women. He, even more so than Dong Zhongshu, was a systematizer, and he too regarded *yin-yang* as the most fundamental ordering principle.²¹ Zhu was, in fact, intent on fitting everything he possibly could into this intellectual system. So it is not surprising that he would align the categories of man and woman with the fundamental *yin-yang* principle. But as the above-mentioned scholars have shown, we should not superimpose that theoretical

structure onto the actual lives of Song women. In fact, the very existence of such arguments for restrictions on women's lives might suggest precisely the opposite: the stronger the polemic, the *higher* the percentage of women there might be who are actually ignoring the strictures.

The politicization of Confucian principles resumed in strength when Zhu Xi's teachings became the basis of the civil service examination system, and remained so for almost 600 years. It was really the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties in which the lives of women—at least women belonging to the literate elite—became seriously restricted. For example, “[a] woman who was widowed before she was thirty and remained chaste until she was fifty was granted a memorial arch, and her family was exempt from certain kinds of taxes” (under a system of state rewards that actually began in the early 13th century during the Yuan dynasty, and continued until the 20th century).²² Of course it was the situation during the Qing, in particular, that was the immediate point of departure for the liberal and radical critiques of Confucianism in the twentieth century.

Finally, we should note that the limitations placed on women in Confucian texts never really applied to the peasant class, for whom the restriction of women to work within the home and with children was a luxury they could not afford. And since the percentage of the literate elite was tiny in the Han dynasty and still relatively small even in the Qing, we should not assume that the majority of women were even aware of these restrictions—which, in any case, were idealized norms rather than descriptions of the prevailing state of affairs.

Conclusions

The conventional view outlined above is fairly accurate in regard to Daoism and Buddhism. They did indeed provide welcome alternatives to the sometimes stifling restrictions on women's lives prescribed by Confucianism. What is most important today in teaching Chinese religions is (1) to include the first-person voices of Buddhist and Daoist women (making use of the scholars mentioned above), and (2) to include institutional Daoism. These are fairly easy and straightforward ways of presenting

Chinese religions in a gender-balanced way to undergraduates.

Confucianism is the hard part. Its role should neither be whitewashed nor villainized. What is most crucial here is (1) to unpack the historical development of the tradition, with some attention to the way in which the *yin-yang* theory was interpreted, which resulted in the essentializing of gender roles; (2) to distinguish between normative texts and actual social practice; and (3) to note that it was *politicized* Confucianism that became the supporter of a harshly patriarchal society. A rigid social hierarchy, of which the gender hierarchy was a part, was one way of maintaining a stable society.

This is not to say that politicized Confucianism is not “true” Confucianism; that it is inauthentic. That would be a sectarian judgment, not a scholarly one. But we can say that this version of Confucianism was and is not the only version. It arose at a specific historical moment in response to the political needs of a new empire, and it continued to be reinforced as later iterations of that empire found it a useful tool to support a hierarchical social system. Gender essentialism was not a feature of the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, nor is it part of contemporary Confucian thought.²³ In fact, there are contemporary female scholars who call themselves feminist Confucians. So in my view, the story of how Confucianism became politicized and what became of it as a result is an excellent object lesson in the danger of implicating religion too closely with politics.²⁴

With these suggestions for nuancing the presentation of Confucianism, and with the numerous resources readily available to balance the teaching of Daoism and Buddhism with women's lives and voices, it is quite possible today to present an adequately gender-balanced picture of the history of Chinese religions.

Footnotes

¹For the sake of brevity I will omit popular religion (*minjian zongjiao*), Islam, and Christianity from this discussion.

²For an alternative interpretation — that the *Laozi* stresses the feminine with the aim of reaching a balance between masculine and feminine virtues — see Roger T. Ames, “Taoism and the Androgynous Ideal,” in Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen,

eds., *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship* (Youngstown, NY: Philo Press, 1981).

³See Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁴This widespread notion is roundly rejected by the 13th-century Japanese Zen master, Dōgen, in the “Raihai tokuzui” essay of his *Shōbōgenzō* (translated by Francis Cook in *How to Raise an Ox: Zen Practice as Taught in Zen Master Dogen's Shobogenzo* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1978), pp. 133-150.

⁵The syllabus for Hsieh's course, “Women in Chinese Religions,” is on the website of the American Academy of Religion (<http://www.aarweb.org/syllabus/default.asp> under “Syllabus Project”) and could serve as a valuable guide for anyone interested in teaching a similar course.

⁶“To the Land of Bliss” (47 minutes) is distributed by Documentary Educational Resources in Watertown, Mass. (<http://www.der.org>).

⁷Livia Kohn, *The Daoist Monastic Manual: A Translation of the Fengdao Kejie* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 65.

⁸This is based on a line in the *Liji* (Record of Rites), ch. 9.

⁹Trans. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976.

¹⁰See Anna Xiao Dong Sun, “The Fate of Confucianism as a Religion in Socialist China: Controversies and Paradoxes,” in Fenggang Yang and Joseph B. Tamney, eds., *State, Market and Religions in Chinese Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

¹¹206 BCE - 220 CE, with a short interregnum from 9 CE to 23 CE.

¹²Chan Sin Yee, “The Confucian Conception of Gender in the Twenty-First Century,” in Daniel A. Bell and Hahm Chaibong, *Confucianism for the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 312-333.

¹³*Chunqiu fan lu* 53, trans. Mark Csikszentmihalyi, in Robin R. Wang, ed., *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), p. 168.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁵Chan Sin Yee, p. 320.

¹⁶Trans. Paul R. Goldin in Wang, *Images of Women*, p. 171.

¹⁷See Lily Xiao Hong Lee, *The Virtue of Yin: Studies on Chinese Women* (Australia: Wild Peony, 1994), ch. 1.

¹⁸Trans. Robin R. Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*, p. 325.

¹⁹Bettine Birge, “Chu Hsi and Women's Education,” in Wm. Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee, eds., *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and

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Patricia Buckley Ebrej, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also Bettine Birge, *Woman, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China, 960-1368* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and idem., "Women and Confucianism from Song to Ming: The Institutionalization of Patrilineality," in Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

²⁰See Wang, *Images of Women*, pp. 318-319.

²¹I have argued elsewhere that this claim is the key to the significance of the term *taiji* (Supreme Polarity) in Zhu Xi's thought. See Joseph A. Adler, "Varieties of Spiritual Experience: Shen in Neo-Confucian Discourse," in Tu Wei-ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Confucian Spirituality*, vol. 2 (NY: Crossroad, 2004), pp. 122-123; and idem., "Zhou Dunyi: The Metaphysics and Practice of Sagehood," in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 672. The argument is developed further in a work in progress.

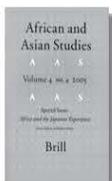
²²Ann Waltner, "Recent Scholarship on Chinese Women," *Signs* 21:2 (1996), p. 422. See also her "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," in Guisso and Johannesen, eds., *Women in China* (note 2 above).

²³As Li Zehou put it in 1980: "In the hands of different Confucian scholars serving the interests of their respective classes or political ideologies, Confucianism often went off at a tangent. The Confucius that the May 4 movement in 1919 destroyed was just the Confucius that Confucians from the

Han dynasty to the Qing dynasty had identified with monarchy. This is just as Li Dazhao said: 'We are launching an attack not upon Confucius himself but upon the Confucius whom the past successive emperors have molded into a political idol and authority — not upon Confucius himself but upon the Confucius whom the emperors have invested with a tyrannical soul.'" Trans. Liu Qizhong, in Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 578.

²⁴Aside from the sources already mentioned, there are numerous recent studies on women in Confucianism. Some of them are: Patricia Ebrej, "Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History," in Paul S. Ropp, ed., *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Mary Gallagher, "Women and Gender," in Howard Giskin and Bettye S. Walsh, eds., *An Introduction to Chinese Culture Through the Family* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001); Theresa Kelleher, "Confucianism," in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Women in World Religions* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987); Dorothy Ko, "Footbinding as Female Inscription," in Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms, *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asia Institute, 2002); Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott, eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Chenyang Li, ed., *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics, and Gender* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000); Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in*

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