



The

Status

of

Women

in

China.

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Status of Women in China,

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The *Status of Women in China.*



NE of the burning questions in our Christian countries is that in regard to Women. Their wants, their woes, their work and their wishes, their wrongs and their rights are occupying the thoughts of many distinguished writers. There can be no doubt that a number of women are suffering in Christian lands in a way that is unknown among Mohammedan and among heathen nations. There are hundreds of thousands of women who have to earn their own living, many of them wasting life and soul, gathering the scantiest subsistence and surrounded by the most over-powering and insidious temptations. Can Christianity be blamed for such a state of things? Not at all! For many modern developments are in open contradiction to the clear statements of divine truth. Christianity has elevated women to perfect equality with men before God and before moral law among men. But there remains a social difference based on the laws of nature which is from God and is proclaimed in His word. Human happiness is dependent on obedience to God, which implies keeping within the boundaries ordained by him in accordance with the present conditions of human life. Every social evil, ne

matter of what kind it may be, has its root in sin. Whatever remedies may be tried, if sin is left, the evil will remain, probably in a changed form. As the real nature of sin is enmity to God, the only remedy which Christianity presents to sinful men, is reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. The will of God becomes our own by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The will of God and the laws of our spiritual nature are identical. Both tend towards eternal happiness. We can, however, not enter deeper into this question at present.

In dealing with the Women of China another important question presents itself. How far are we justified to claim for revealed religion, especially for Christianity, the honor of having elevated women from their heathenish degradation to a position adequate to their destination? Not that perfection has been reached already. The state of Christianity is still in its development. It has not yet appeared what we shall be, neither in men nor in women. Perfection of society depends altogether on our individual perfection. Where are the men or the women that can say they are what they ought to be? Though we have to keep in mind this imperfect state of Christian life, which is too often overlooked, we can see higher development and a still higher aim among Christians than among heathen. We know from Revelation that the human destiny reaches beyond death and grave into a glorious state of resurrection where the difference between male and female will disappear and all human beings be like the angels of God. The perfect state of human nature, and corresponding equality in the heavenly abodes, is then realized.

Though woman has been treated in China not as badly as among savage tribes, but with a degree of respect, we shall soon discover the great difference between Chinese

notions and Christian notions, between Chinese life and Christian life in regard to Women.

Three of the ancient Chinese Classics, venerated as Holy Scriptures by the Chinese in ancient and modern times, contain each some interesting passages which are repeated by all modern Chinese writers dealing with females. As nowhere is found a contradiction to those sentences, nor any restriction in regard to their application, we have to take them as the unanimously accepted view which the Chinese entertain of female character and its virtues.

THE CLASSICS.

A., The *I-king* teaches, The celestial principle becomes the male, and the terrestrial principle the female. Chu-fu-tsz the great commentator remarks to this: It is most manifest that heaven and earth are one and 'the same principle with father and mother. For this reason the ancient Chinese, especially the Confucianists, laid much stress on a sharp distinction between men and women;

古之人重男女之別'

The practical bearing of this philosophical distinction we find already expressed in the classical Book of Odes, in an Ode probably written about 800 B.C. Mi. Odes 2. iv, 5; 8. 9.

The bears and grisly bears
Are the auspicious intimations of sons;
The cobras and (other) snakes
Are the auspicious intimations of daughters.
Sons shall be born to him:—
They will be put to sleep on couches;
They will be clothed in robes;
They will have sceptres to play with;
Their cry will be loud.
They will be (hereafter) resplendent with red knee-covers,

The (future) king, the princes of the land.

Daughters shall be born to him :—

They will be put to sleep on the ground

They will be clothed with wrappers ;

They will have tiles to play with.

It will be theirs neither to do wrong nor to do good.

Only about the spiri's and the food will they have to think,

And to cause no sorrow to their parents.

Li-ki xii. 59. says : After the birth of a child, if a boy, a bow was placed on the left of the door ; and if a girl, a handkerchief on the right of it. After three days the child began to be carried about and the ceremony of archery was celebrated for a boy but not for a girl.

E., Education. Li-ki xii. 74ff. When the child was able to take its own food, it was taught to use the right hand. When it was able to speak, a boy (was taught to) respond boldly and clearly ; a girl submissively and low. The boy was fitted with a girdle of leather, the girl with one of silk.

At six years, they were taught the numbers and the names of the cardinal points ; at the age of seven boys and girls did not occupy the same mat nor eat together ; at eight, when going out or coming in at a gate or door, and going to their mats to eat and drink, they were required to follow their elders ; this is the beginning of teaching them yielding to others (or humility). At nine, they were taught how to number the days.

At ten (the boy) went to a master outside, and stayed with him (even) over night, he learned to read and calculate, he did not wear a jacket or trousers of silk ; in his manners he followed his early lessons ; morning and evening he learned the behaviour of a youth ; he would beg for his lessons and speak distinctly. At thirteen, he learned music and to repeat the odes and to dance the

small civil and military mimics. He learned also archery and chariot-driving.

At twenty, he was capped, and first learned the different classes of ceremonies, and might wear furs and silk. He danced the great Hia mimic and attended sedulously to filial and fraternal duties. He might become very learned, but did not teach others;—(his object being still) to receive and not to give out.

At thirty, he married and began to attend to the business proper to a man. He extended his learning without confining it to particular subjects. He was deferential to his friends, having regard to the aims (which they displayed). At forty, he was first appointed to office; and according to the business of it brought out his plans and communicated his thoughts. If their principles agreed, he followed (his prince) submissively; if it could not be done he resigned.

At fifty, he was appointed a great officer, and laboured in the administration of his department. At seventy, he retired from his duties.

In all salutations of males, the upper place was given to the left hand.

A girl at the age of ten ceased to go out (from the women's apartments). Her governess taught her (the arts of) pleasing speech and manners, to be docile and obedient, to handle hemp and linen, to deal with the cocoons, to weave silks and form fillets, to learn (all) woman's work, how to furnish garments, to watch the sacrifices, to supply the liquors and sauces, to fill the square and the round grain-vessels and the dishes of pickled fruit and meat and to assist in setting forth appurtenances for the ceremonies.

At fifteen she (was engaged and) assumed the hair-pin; at twenty she was married, or, if there were occasion (for

the delay *i.e.* mourning for a parent), at twenty three. If there were the betrothal rites, she became a wife; and if she went without these, a concubine.

In all salutations of females, the upper place was given to the right hand.

Women should serve their father and mother-in-law as they served father and mother. At the first crowing of the cock they should wash their hands and rinse their mouths, comb and wrap their hair, fix the hair-pin, tie the hair up and gird their dress. On the left (of the girdle) they will suspend napkin and handkerchief, knife and hone, the small stiletto and the metal speculum; on the right side they will suspend a needle-box, thread, raw cotton kept in a pouch, a large stiletto, wooden fire fritters. They will fasten the ribbons, tie the strings of their shoes to go to the place of their parents and parents-in-law. Arrived there they ask with low breath and pleasant voice whether their (the parents') clothes are too warm or too cold, whether they are suffering from illness or itching, and reverently caress and rub them. In going in or out they should go either before or behind and reverently help them. In going to wash themselves the young ones present the basin, the older ones bring water and beg them to wash themselves. Is washing finished, they hand over a towel, ask what they want more and reverently advance it in a pleasant manner to cheer them. Congee, wine, soup, beans and all sorts of grains are what they need; (they also bring) dates, nuts, cakes and honey to sweeten them, the *kan* and *wa* plants, and elm-seeds fresh and dried, and rice-water to smooth them and grease ointment to anoint them. They will retire after the parents and parents-in-law have tasted some.

If the parents, or parents-in-law, wish to sit down they (the sons and their wives) should take the mat and ask where to put it. The younger ones carry the couch to give a seat, the servants bring the leaning-bench, wrap up the under-mat and the inner matting, suspend the covers, sheath the pillow, roll up the (soft) matting, and cover it.

The parents and parents-in-law's clothes, covers, inner matting, mat, pillow and leaning-bench are not transferred; they (sons and their wives) venerate even their staff and shoes and do not dare to approach them; the plates (for grain) and (wine)-goblets and (water)-cups they do not dare to use except if there are remnants therein; of what (the parents) constantly have for eating and drinking they do not dare to partake except of that which is left over.

While the parents are alive sons and their wives take the leavings of their regular morning and evening meals. After the parents have eaten, they have a regular second table.

Male persons should not speak about the inner affairs (of the house) nor females about external things. Except at sacrifices and mourning rites they will not hand vessels one to another. If they do so the female will receive them in a basket, if no basket is at hand they both get seated, lay the thing down and then take it up. Persons of the outer and inner apartments do not have a well in common; they do not wash or bathe together, do not use the same sleeping mat, nor borrow things one from another; male and female do not have the same kind of garments. Talk of the inner (apartment) must not come out and from the outer apartment not enter in. If a male person enters the inner apartments he should not whistle nor point with the finger; going about

at night he takes a torch; if he has no torch he remains. If a female person goes out she must cover her face. At night she goes with a torch; if she has none she stops. Male persons go on the right side of the road, females on the left.

Sons and their wives of filial piety and reverence do not oppose the command of the parents or parents-in-law nor act lazily. If they (the parents) give them to eat or drink, which they do not like, they have to taste it and wait till they are allowed to remove it; if they (the parents) present clothes to them which they do not want, they will put them on and wait in patience. If the parents get other persons to do their duties, though they (children and women) do not like it, they give (the work) to them and allow them (to go on with it) and return it afterward.

If sons and their wives have toilsome work, though they are much beloved (the father or husband) will let them proceed therewith, and rather allow them rest now and then.

When children and women are not filial or reverent, no violent aversion (is becoming). If they cannot be taught they may be scorned at, if they are unchastened by scorn the child is expelled, the woman divorced, even without any public formalities.

If a son have two concubines, the parents loving one of them and the son the other, regarding dress, food and duties he should not dare to regard her (differently) who is beloved by the parents; nor will he neglect her after his parents' death.

If the son thinks his wife extremely proper but the parents are displeased with her, he has to divorce her. If the son thinks his wife improper but the parents say, "She is of good service to us, my son perform the custom

between husband and wife," he will not neglect her all his life long.

If the father-in-law is dead, the mother-in-law being old, the lady of the house will ask her about every thing that she sacrifices, and about guests; the secondary wives will ask the lady of the house (first wife). The parents-in-law do not allow the first wife to be idle or to be a friend with any of the secondary wives who behave improperly. If father or mother-in-law employ a secondary wife she does not dare to puff herself up against the first wife. She will not dare to walk, nor command, nor sit on a level with the first.

No wife, if not commanded to repair to her private apartment, will dare to retire from waiting on her parents-in-law. If the wife should have any business, whether great or small, she must ask her parents-in-law. The son's wife has no private property, no private domesticated animals, no private vessels, she does not dare privately to borrow nor dare privately to give away anything.

If somebody makes the wife a present of food, garments, cloth, silk, girdle-ornaments or fragrance, she receives it and offers it to the parents-in-law; if they accept it she rejoices as if receiving a new present. If the present is returned to her she declines it, if not allowed, she takes it, as if receiving another gift. She stores it up to attend to their wants. If the wife wants to give of it to her own cousins she must ask leave to do so. If granted, she may then give to them.

Males and females will not use the same stand for clothes, (the wife) will not dare to hang anything upon the stand of her husband, nor to put anything in his boxes or drawers, nor will they dare to bathe at the same place. If the husband is absent she puts his pillow into a box, rolls up his mattings, packs all his utensils and puts

them away. The younger serve the older, the lower serve the nobler in the same way.

The rules of propriety between husband and wife have force only to their 70th year.

REMARKS.

We find in this teaching of the Chinese Classics about women that they are :

(1) As different in nature from man as Earth is from Heaven.

(2) Dualism, not only in bodily form, but in the very essence of nature, is indicated here and proclaimed by all Chinese moralists of all times and all creeds. The male belongs to *yang*, the female to *yin*.

(3) Though women are regarded as human beings, they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with men.

(4) As death and all evils have their origin, according to Chinese philosophy, in the *yin* principle, and life and prosperity come from the subjection of it under the control of the *yang*, it is regarded as a law of nature to keep women completely under the power of men and not allow them any will of their own.

(5) Female education thus aims at perfect submission, not at development and cultivation of the mind.

(6) Women cannot have any happiness of their own ; they have to live and work for men.

(7) Only as the mother of a son, and especially of the continuator of the direct line of a family, can a woman escape from her degradation, and become to a degree equal to her husband, but then only in household affairs especially of the female department and in the ancestral hall.

(8) Woman is bound to the same laws of existence even in the other world. She belongs to the same husband and is dependent for her happiness on the sacrifices offered by her descendants.

CHINESE LAWS IN REGARD TO WOMEN.

THE second department of Chinese law, 戶, "domestic affairs," includes the laws respecting service, landed property, marriage, public granaries, revenue, debts, and so forth.

Except in cases of adultery and capital crimes which require detention and imprisonment, women are liberated on a sort of bail, and committed to the care of their husbands, parents or respectable neighbours; for women or wives are in the same predicament as inferiors and children; their superiors are responsible for them. If a woman commits a crime which requires decapitation and public exposure of the criminal's head, the last part of the sentence is in her case to be dispensed with.

It was in former times the practice that any marriage contract was reported to the magistrate. Without this form the alliance was deemed a clandestine agreement. That form is now abolished, and a written agreement drawn out by the go-between is reckoned sufficient in form, and the acceptance of presents is equally binding. Thus go-betweens are considered indispensable to the most important business in life, they are recognized before the law and their signature is regarded binding on the parties. That such go-betweens should nevertheless be regarded as a disreputable class of people appears inexplicable to us.

The power of controlling or directing a marriage rests first with the grand-parents, next with the parents; in case of their death it rests with the nearest kindred, or with the mother alone.

All who being of the same surname intermarry, shall receive sixty blows and be separated. Sons and daughters of a former husband are not allowed to marry the sons or

daughters of a later husband. Reputable and disreputable classes of society are prohibited from intermarriage. This applies also to marriage between Chinese and the aboriginal tribes.

When marriages are contracted contrary to law, the crime shall be charged on the relation who has the control, and on the go-between.

He who marries a woman, wife or daughter, who has run away, is chargeable with the crime laid against her.

Mandarins are forbidden to marry the widows, or daughters, of the people under their government. Any officer of government, or his son or grandson, who by law inherits his rank, who should marry a singing-girl, either as wife or concubine, receives sixty blows, and the parties are separated.

All priests, Buddhist and Taoist, who marry wives or concubines, shall receive eighty blows, and be expelled from the priesthood. If priests get married through deceit, the crime is considered two degrees greater than fornication or adultery between common persons.

It is illegal for those in mourning to marry during the appointed period (of 27 months.) The penalty is one hundred blows. And it is contrary to law to marry whilst a parent is imprisoned (for a capital offence, or for transportation.) The penalty is eighty blows.

When men commit crimes for which their wives and daughters are forfeited to government, they become the officers' slave-women 婢.

A man who makes his wife take the place of a concubine shall be punished with one hundred blows. He who, whilst his wife is alive, puts a concubine in her place shall receive ninety blows, and both parties be again put into their proper rank. If he who has a wife marries

another, he shall receive ninety blows, and the last wife be separated from him.

All who falsely call their wives and concubines sisters, and marry them to other men, shall receive eighty blows.

In every case when a man shall allow his wife or concubine to have illicit intercourse with another, each of the three parties shall receive ninety blows. When a husband or father, forces a wife, concubine, or adopted daughter, to yield their persons to another man, he receives a hundred, and the last-mentioned eighty blows. If to evade the law, a man buy a divorce from another, and, with the consent of all parties, marries the wife divorced, each party is to be punished with a hundred blows, the wife compelled to separate from both, and their property confiscated. For, though all parties act voluntarily, their conduct tends to ruin the public morals, and their individual consent does not extenuate the offence against society.

Violence offered to the person of a boy belonging to reputable parents, or under 12 years of age, is a capital crime.

The punishment for rape is strangulation; for attempted rape a hundred blows and transportation to a distance of 3000 *li*. The violation of a girl of twelve years of age or under (although with her consent) is the same as rape, and punished with death. Chinese moralists say, he who defiles a widow or virgin, commits a crime as great as murder.

Wives who beat their husbands shall receive one hundred blows (杖); and, if the husband wish to separate from her, he shall be permitted to do so. If the husband receive any severe and permanent hurt, in consequence of his wife's beating him, she is to be strangled. If the husband, on the other hand, beat the wife, but does not

break her limbs, or maim her, the law shall not take any notice of it.

He who from poverty sells his wife should not be heavily punished; let the woman revert to the last husband (*i.e.* to the man she was sold to.)

REMARKS.

We easily discover one good feature in these laws quoted from the Chinese Criminal Code, *i.e.*, that matrimony is regarded as *a sacred institution*, which is well defended. Though divorce is possible, the reasons which allow it being too well-known to need enumeration here, still matrimony is an institution which is strictly guarded against corruption in China.

Only one wife for a time is allowed by law, but the institution of concubinage, *i.e.* the husband's living with a number of women along with the wife, is recognized by law. Thus we at once see the great gulf between the idea of Christian matrimony and that of Chinese. The Christian is based on personal affection, and becomes a union of souls: the Chinese betrays throughout a mere business character. Concubines are not equals to the wife in China; they are subject to the wife who has power over them without any legal restriction. The wife is, however, under the power of her mother-in-law whose authority is almost absolute, as we have seen from the *Li-ki*.

According to Chinese law the husband may commit adultery, but in the case of the wife it is a capital crime. A husband may divorce his wife for several reasons; but the wife can *under no circumstances* ask for a divorce from her husband. A wife is punished for beating her husband; but not a husband for such a treatment of his wife, except he breaks her bones. A husband would not suffer death by law for the most cruel treatment of

his wife, as she will for any trifling injury done to him. That all females of a family are forfeited to the government, and have to live in slavery, for crimes of the head of the family, wherein they have no participation whatever, is still a feature of barbarity in China inexcusable even from their own standard of moral teaching.

POPULAR RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF THE CHINESE.

We have now examined the Chinese Classics and the principal paragraphs of Chinese Criminal Law in regard to Women. It will be of interest to enter also a little into Chinese popular religion and its literature. Of special value in many respects are those works that deal with the scales of merits and demerits from which a few extracts are quoted in Dr. Morrison's Dictionary. I have in my possession a new and elegant edition of 彙纂功過格 in ten large vols. Every possible commission or omission in life under Chinese circumstance is enumerated, and one to several hundred, or even a thousand, marks of merit 功, or demerit 過, are ascribed to each. Such a work presents a true picture of Chinese daily life and also of popular Chinese moral and religious ideas. It should be read by every preacher of the Gospel. Another smaller work of this kind is the 仙佛真傳章句直解 in three small vols.

For a wife to be dutiful and obedient to her husband's father and mother, and respectfully serve her husband is rated at one degree of merit for every day she so behaves.

If she can persuade her husband to correct any error or vice—one merit for each case.

For every day she waits on her husband or his parents in their sickness—one merit. If she sells her toilet to assist them—one merit.

When her parents in-law treat her with violence and anger, and she suffers it without an angry look or a resentful

word—three merits each time. The same if her husband be a coarse and violent man, and she is able to yield and manage things well. If husband and wife assist each other in virtue, and bear their lot when it is hard, the husband desiring no ill-gotten gain, and the wife not refusing to draw water and pound rice—for each day one merit.

If the husband desire to retain a reputable friend to dinner, and the wife will not provide the food and lay the table—three demerits.

For every word she utters to impede her husband in what is virtuous, or to excite him to what is vicious—one demerit.

If she loves wine to drunkenness—three demerits each time; for playing at cards with anybody—five demerits. A want of cleanliness and going to see sights—from three to ten demerits. She who never goes to a temple to burn incense—a hundred merits for a life-time. She who never looked at a theatrical play—two hundred merits.

For a poor woman to be satisfied with her lot, instead of complaining to her husband—fifty merits a year.

For a man to be ruled by his wife, for every day one demerit.

Suffering his wife to go out of the house, burn incense in temples and have intercourse with nuns—one demerit each time.

A wife who dislikes her husband on account of his ugly face has demerits one thousand.

If a wife takes the child of another woman and palms it off as her own or if she exchanges in this way a girl for a boy—her demerit is one thousand.

If she drowns children born by wives of slaves—300 demerits.

For ill-treatment of the children of women of the harem—30 demerits.

For using paper with writing (or print) on it to wrap up needles or thread—ten demerits.

For not living in peace with her neighbours, each time one demerit.

Such passages could be multiplied, but the few given are sufficient for our purpose. We have to admit that Chinese sentiment in regard to Women is almost the same now as two and three thousand years ago. No development to nobler ideas is perceptible as is the case in Christian countries. This again is proof that Chinese religion and morals have retained, to a degree, the form of life that once existed in ancient times, but this life has become so feeble in the course of many centuries that no regeneration can be expected from it. A new life full of divine energy, as Christianity alone can communicate it, is needed to animate the dead bones.

We acknowledge, however, a number of examples of excellent female virtue in China: another article on "The Famous Women of China," will give evidence of it; but exceptions prove the rule! Human nature is still powerful enough to show some of its fine qualities even amidst the most unhealthy environments.

