

Traditional gender roles and patriarchal values: Critical personal narratives of a woman from the Chaoshan region in China

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Abstract

This study utilizes the personal critical narrative of myself, a woman from the Chaoshan region in China, as the primary data source to explore the impact of traditional gender roles and patriarchal values on women's personal growth transformation through a feminist lens. Integrating feminist and transformative learning theory, it encompasses my journey, including growing up with traditional patriarchal norms and thinking; being shaped by traditional gender bias without critical thinking; struggles from valuing males over females; and becoming a feminist-informed and transformative adult education scholar. This study emphasizes the significance of integrating feminist and transformative learning theories into personal narratives and gender issues in adult education. Through dialogic connections, it may inspire self-transformation in readers, potentially evolving into informed adult learners and feminist practitioners. This understanding can improve culturally sensitive adult education, fostering inclusivity, empowerment, and enhancing Western researchers' comprehension of societal norms' influence on personal transformation in diverse contexts.

INTRODUCTION

While researchers like Lutz (2010) have effectively integrated Chinese women into the broader narrative of gender issues in history, they have yet to fully incorporate them into modern Chinese history, as noted by Cai (2012). This is primarily because

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these researchers' studies position Chinese women within specific contexts like Christian institutes, confraternities, or congregations such as schools and hospitals rather than within the context of the local community. However, the majority of pertinent research in both Western and Eastern countries focuses on gender roles and issues within extensive groups, often lacking an approach rooted in individual and local daily life experiences. To fill the gap, this study takes a "bottom-up" approach, starting from my individual experiences and gradually building a more comprehensive understanding of the traditional gender roles and patriarchal values in rural Chaoshan, China.

Above all, this study aims to promote social transformation and create a more inclusive and equitable society by amplifying marginalized experiences and promoting understanding. This study illustrates how regional social perceptions influence the evolution of women's personal growth. Through this article, one can gain insights not only into the effects of the historical norms surrounding gender roles and patriarchal values in the Chaoshan region but also into the enduring legacy of traditional beliefs that have impeded women's personal development and transformation. By examining these effects, this study provides valuable insights into how cultural dynamics shape women's development, thereby enhancing Western researchers' understanding of the complex interplay between societal norms and personal growth in diverse contexts. This understanding can inform more effective and culturally sensitive approaches to adult and continuing education, fostering inclusivity and empowerment. Therefore, the research question is as follows: How can the narratives of women in the Chaoshan region of China contribute to the development of feminist-informed and transformative adult education practices that promote gender equity and social transformation?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study's initial theory was feminist theory, which encompasses various feminist perspectives and forms of feminism. It addresses different modes of existence and action, advocating for substantial change in women's perspectives and behaviors. Theory, like feminism, is for everybody, and people "practice theorizing without ever knowing/possessing the term" (hooks, 1994, p. 62). According to hooks (1989), feminist theory has become "a narrow constricting concept" (p. 36) to the extent that "it reinforces the fear, especially on the part of the exploited and oppressed, that the intent of theorizing is not to liberate but to mystify" (p. 37). When this happens, the radical, subversive potential of theory is clearly undermined. If the transformative purpose of theory is to be realized, hooks believed it must be written in accessible terms. In her view, "Theory cannot become the groundwork for feminist movement unless it is more accessible" (p. 39).

Another theory this study employed is transformative learning theory. This theory, developed by educational theorist Jack Mezirow, explores how individuals undergo profound cognitive and emotional shifts in their thinking, beliefs, and perspectives as a result of transformative learning experiences. It suggests that learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge and skills but a process of critically reflecting on and questioning one's assumptions, beliefs, and values. Mezirow (2003) described transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58). According to Mezirow (2003), transformative learning occurs when individuals confront a disorienting situation that prompts them to reassess their beliefs to incorporate this new

dimension into their personal worldview. When personal perspectives shift towards broader, more perceptive and self-reflective viewpoints, transformative learning is said to have taken place (Mezirow, 2003). According to Hoggan and Higgins (2023), there have been some studies under the banner of “transformative learning” that have addressed human transformation as a learning process (e.g., Ensign, 2019; Hoggan, 2016; Maiese, 2017). Transformative learning theory has been applied in various educational settings, including adult education and social justice education. It emphasizes the roles of self-reflection, critical thinking, and dialogue in fostering personal growth, expanding perspectives, and promoting social change. Thus, in this study, transformative learning theory provided the theoretical framework for understanding the process of personal transformation (Mezirow, 2018, pp. 114–128). Transformative learning is a helpful lens through which to view the experience of women and adult learning. Transformative learning has the potential to help us understand the ways in which women encounter learning in the community, in higher education and in the workplace. Yet the links are not always clear, and insufficient attention has been paid to gendered dimensions of transformative learning” (English & Irving, 2012, p. 245).

While researchers in adult education have shown interest in women’s learning, gender issues, and feminism in learning, there have been a limited number of studies directly addressing the intersection of these topics (English & Peters, 2012). Several studies have explored the influences or interaction of feminist theory and transformative learning, examining transformative education from complementary gender-focused viewpoints (Branlat et al., 2023; Brookfield, 2003; Davis, 1974; English & Peters, 2012; English & Irving, 2012; hooks, 1989; Ntseane, 2011). Similarly, in Taylor’s (2008) mapping of the transformative learning research, he does not highlight gender as a primary focus of researchers in this domain. However, he does encompass traditions like psychodevelopmental and social emancipatory perspectives, which can be seen as having potential intersections with feminism. The absence of a focus on gender is concerning, especially considering that the initial concept of transformation originated from Mezirow’s (1978) study of women.

Cranton (2006) and Taylor (2009) have highlighted the significance of personal life experiences in the transformative process, even when these experiences are uncomfortable. Additionally, Taylor and Jarecke (2009) emphasized the importance of learners engaging in experiences that push them beyond their comfort zones. In addition to personal experience and context, recent research on transformative learning has underscored the significance of genuine relationships in catalyzing and nurturing transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). This includes the educator’s role as a model for alternative beliefs and behaviors, as pointed out by Taylor and Jarecke (2009). This acknowledgment of the importance of relationships aligns with the findings of Belenky et al. (1986), who emphasized women’s appreciation for connected knowing, also discussed by Cranton (2006). However, while the literature hints at the potential for transformative learning among women, there is a scarcity of empirical work in this area.

Feminist theory can influence transformative learning theory by encouraging a more inclusive, context-specific, and socially conscious approach to personal and collective transformation. By integrating feminist perspectives, transformative learning theory becomes more equipped to address issues of gender inequality, social justice, and intersectionality, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive understanding of transformative learning processes. Thus, the theoretical framework of this study effectively integrates feminist theory with transformative learning theory, which is highly suitable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a feminist perspective, using my personal narrative as a woman from the Chaoshan region in China as the primary data source. It seeks to investigate how traditional gender roles and patriarchal values influence women's personal growth and transformation. Critical personal narratives (CPN) offer a practical approach for individuals to engage in self-reflection and dialogue with others. As Chapman (2004) mentioned, "CPN narrators tell stories of their own experiences as learners or teachers or administrators, hoping these are resonant with the reader, even as they write their own way to an understanding of particular problems. Although the stories are personal, they are offered for public reading in order to link theory to personal experience deliberately and dialectically" (p. 99). Moreover, CPN serves as a powerful mode of self-expression, aiming to challenge prevailing societal norms and systems. It often spotlights power imbalances, inequalities, and experiences of marginalization or oppression. Through CPN, I use storytelling rooted in my personal experiences to explore themes related to gender and other intersecting identities. The narrative data from my personal experiences and reflections were collected through written autobiographical accounts. I have shared my stories, experiences, and perspectives related to specific traditional gender issues in Chaoshan, China. This form of expression provides a platform for sharing lived experiences, perspectives, and insights, ultimately contributing to a disruption of dominant narratives and the promotion of social change. Furthermore, CPN allows me to express my truths and shed light on systemic gender issues and their effects on my life.

Aligned with the research question and theoretical framework, this study reflects the data related to traditional gender roles and patriarchal values of my experiences in the Chaoshan region. Additionally, as a scholar, I highlight the implications of this study for women in general and Western adult education scholars specifically after collecting and analyzing the personal narrative data. Engaging in CPN, as described by Chapman (2004), entails work to "analyze and unsettle extant power configurations [and try] to defamiliarize and make remarkable what is often passed off as the ordinary, the mundane, the routine, the banal" (p. 96). It highlights the goal of making everyday aspects stand out and encourages deeper consideration. Thus, CPN was a fitting methodological approach. Sharing my stories about traditional gender roles and patriarchal values in the Chaoshan region will allow these everyday experiences to connect with readers from both Eastern and Western backgrounds. This approach not only facilitates personal introspection and development but also offers a unique insight into gender roles and issues, enabling readers from different cultural perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of traditional gender roles and patriarchal values in Chaoshan, China.

STUDY BACKGROUND

Women in Chaoshan region, China

Understanding the traditional gender roles and patriarchal values in Chaoshan, China, is crucial, as a foundation of knowledge about traditional values in the region enriches the interpretation of CPNs from myself, the primary data source for this study. This background knowledge is essential because it provides contextual insight into the cultural, social, and historical factors that shaped my experiences and perspectives. Traditional gender roles and patriarchal values deeply influence societies and comprehending these elements aids in interpreting my narrative within a broader framework. It allows to uncover

how my story both aligns with and challenges prevalent norms, shedding light on the intricate interplay between my personal journey and the broader sociocultural landscape.

The Chaoshan region is located in eastern Guangdong Province, China, and was estimated to have around 15 million residents in 2021. It covers an area of approximately 10,000 square kilometers, encompassing three main cities and their surrounding rural areas. Moreover, the Chaoshan region stands out for its rich cultural heritage, distinctive dialect, culinary excellence, historical significance, and vibrant social customs. The Chaoshan region is a traditional region deeply influenced by the broader Chinese cultural background; as Gu (2021) highlighted, rural Chaoshan is “an area in Guangdong allegedly very ‘traditional’ in maintaining the men-outside-women-inside family model” (p. 67).

Firstly, I will discuss the family structure. The Chaoshan region traditionally adheres to patrilineal descent, where family lineage and inheritance are passed down through the male line. The eldest male, typically the father or grandfather, holds authority and makes important decisions for the family. This hierarchical structure places greater emphasis on the male members' roles and positions within the family than on that of females. Regarding Chinese society, Freedman (1961) observed that the desirable family structure involved a patriarch who adhered to Confucian values of decorum and organization, overseeing numerous relatives and their spouses. As he said: “The ideal family was one in which large numbers of kinsmen and their wives were held under the control of a patriarch imbued with the Confucian values of propriety and order” (Freedman, 1961, p. 327). The prescribed virtues for women in alignment with Confucian principles were delineated in established texts like the Family Regulations of Zhu Zi (1617–1689), a text widely recognized in Confucian homes. Additionally, two fundamental primers intended for both males and females, the Three-Character Classic (1223–1296) and the Thousand-Character Classic (AD 502–549), played a role in forming the prevalent Confucian gender ideals among the general population.

Secondly, I will discuss the traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles in the Chaoshan region are strongly influenced by Confucian ideology, which emphasizes hierarchical relationships and the importance of filial piety. According to my narrative, “most of the work and lifestyles in the Chaoshan region follow the principle of ‘men dominate outside, women dominate inside.’” These historical values can easily lead to women not having their own ideas and opinions. As Cai (2012) mentioned, “throughout her whole life, a Chinese woman was never independent” (p. 6). Women follow the “three obediences” in Chinese society: obeying father and brothers before marriage, obeying husband when married, and obeying sons in widowhood. Confucian values also demanded the “four virtues” from women: moral character, proper speech, modest demeanor, and industriousness. These standards, known as the three obediences and four virtues established the framework for family life in China. Men used them as benchmarks to assess their wives' behavior, while women aimed to uphold these principles in their actions. Moreover, the idea of “men dominate outside, women dominate inside” still exists. There is a clear division of labor between male and female householders. Men are responsible for heavy physical work in production and housework and for dealing with the outside world; while housework, serving the elders, raising children, raising livestock, and doing handicrafts are done by women. Those traditional thoughts have shaped the traditional gender roles and patriarchal values that are obvious in the Chaoshan region.

Thirdly, I will discuss the social expectations. The patriarchal values in the Chaoshan region also extend to broader societal expectations. Men are often encouraged to pursue careers and education outside the home, while women are encouraged to prioritize marriage, motherhood, and maintaining harmony within the family. A woman's role is often seen as subordinate to and supportive of men. This environment has led to the existence of

male chauvinism and the frequent portrayal of women in passive roles in everyday societal interactions. A woman's primary role is to oversee household management, while being excluded from significant decision-making. Pursuing knowledge for the sake of intelligence was not a priority for women, aligning with the saying "ignorance is woman's virtue." If a woman possessed intelligence, it was meant for supporting her husband and compensating for his deficiencies. Furthermore, in a Confucian family, the ideal couple dynamic was defined as follows: the woman should esteem chastity, while the man should emulate those with ability and wisdom. The husband assumed the guiding role, with the wife as his follower. Additionally, the principle of "husband and wife treat each other with respect" served as a behavioral norm to attain marital harmony.

CRITICAL PERSONAL NARRATIVE

My story

After writing down my personal experiences using CPN, I have analyzed and summarized my story into four themes, encompassing the following aspects: growing up with traditional patriarchal norms and thinking; being shaped by traditional gender bias without critical thinking; struggles from valuing males over females; and becoming a feminist-informed and transformative adult educational scholar.

Growing up with traditional patriarchal norms and thinking

Male chauvinism in the Chaoshan region is rooted in the traditional gender norms and patriarchal power structures that have been prevalent in many societies. These beliefs and practices often limit women's opportunities, autonomy, and agency while reinforcing gender inequalities and reinforcing harmful gender roles and expectations. But it is essential to note that while patriarchal values have historically been dominant in the Chaoshan region, societal attitudes and gender dynamics are evolving. With increased education, urbanization, and exposure to different cultures, there is a growing recognition of gender equality and the importance of empowering women. That said, according to Tu et al. (2023), the majority of Chaoshan residents hold onto feudal superstitions and engage in patriarchal gender bias. These values have influenced various aspects of society, including family structure, gender roles, and social expectations. From my narrative data:

The Chaoshan region, where I grew up, has a history deeply rooted in patriarchal values. During my childhood, these traditions were still preserved. For instance, on the 16th day of the first lunar month, every household has to light lamps to worship, implying "have a flourishing population." Moreover, if a son instead of a daughter is added to the family, the family will distribute oranges to every household in the village on the 16th day of the first lunar month. I, as a female, was not honored with this elaborate ceremony; however, my brother was. During my childhood, I did not experience any discontentment or doubts regarding this tradition. Instead, I held a sense of joy and appreciation for this unique cultural practice.

"Have a son to carry on the family name" is a Chinese term that refers to the traditional cultural belief of passing on the family name and lineage to the next generation. It is rooted

in maintaining the family's ancestral heritage, continuing the family line, and ensuring the continuity of the family name and legacy. In traditional Chaoshan region society, sons are considered essential for continuing the family lineage, performing ancestral rituals, and upholding family traditions. Moreover, the belief in having a son to continue the family name often leads to a preference for male children, resulting in gender imbalances and mistreatment of females. Especially in older generations, this stems from historical legacies. Due to family planning policies, many female infants were abandoned or given away, or mothers were forced into sterilization to have male heirs. The primary goal was male lineage continuation. Families with only one female child faced a dilemma: they would have their daughter marry a man who would then adopt the daughter's surname, resolving the lineage issue. Furthermore, there is a preference for passing down knowledge and skills to males rather than females. For instance, in the Chaoshan region, when it comes to practices like calendar-making or medical expertise, the older generation would rather pass them on to daughters-in-law from different surnames than their own daughters. This is because these practices may involve certain secrets or core knowledge. Even if a daughter shares the same surname, she will marry outside the family, and her descendants will carry a different surname.

Being shaped by traditional gender bias without critical thinking

In 1995, when I was born, the family planning policy in China was still the one-child policy. The policy strictly enforced that most couples in urban areas could have only one child. Exceptions were made for people in rural areas and for specific circumstances; for instance, if the first child was a girl, if both parents were only children themselves, or if the first child had a disability. The reasoning behind this thought was valuing males over females, which was indoctrinated into people from the older generation to the present. It refers to the gender bias or preference for male children over female children that is often seen in specific cultural or societal contexts. This bias can manifest in various ways, such as differential treatment, expectations, or resource allocation, leading to gender inequalities and discrimination against women. I wrote in my narrative:

I think I am both lucky and unfortunate. I consider myself fortunate to have been accepted by my family and to have the opportunity to live with them. And I am given the opportunity to be educated. There are, unfortunately, some unfortunate female children who are abandoned by their families from birth, or they may be asked to work to contribute to the family's expenses from a young age. Moreover, my family was a victim of that era; as a woman, I was also a female victim of that feudal society. I remember very clearly, when I was in the second grade of primary school, receiving praise from teachers and neighbors, I quietly developed an interest in studying. But later, due to the implementation of the family planning policy, with a child born in excess of the permitted limit, my family was fined a considerable amount, my father's salary was reduced, and in the end my mother lost her job. The financial constraints at home, despite my strong desire to study at that time, left me helpless. And I started to help doing some work to earn some money.

The ramifications of the one-child policy placed an economic burden on my family, shaping my mindset towards prioritizing income generation to ease the family's financial burden rather than focusing on enjoying my education. Notably, Chinese primary

education policy allows many rural girls to receive free education, and it does so without increasing the financial burden on their families. Yet, free education does not exempt a woman from unfair experiences in the family. China has a policy that requires children to attend school for a minimum of 9 years, typically starting at the age of 6. The structure of compulsory education in China consists of 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior secondary school. Primary school generally covers Grades 1 to 6, while junior secondary school covers Grades 7 to 9. These years of compulsory education have significantly benefited children from the countryside. Prior to the implementation of this policy, access to education in rural areas was limited, resulting in high illiteracy rates and educational disparities between urban and rural regions. Traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained in societal norms and customs in China. From a young age, individuals are often socialized into traditional gender roles and expectations. Without questioning these roles, people may unconsciously conform to them. Moreover, without exposure to alternative viewpoints, individuals may not be exposed to diverse perspectives or experiences that challenge traditional gender bias, and thus, critical thinking may not develop. Who would have thought that as a little girl, I thought sacrificing my own study time to working to improve the family's finances was only natural because of the result of the one-child policy. And even more terrifying is that in my mind, I was feeling guilty and thinking, "Let my brother study, and I can help earn money." Even though I resisted the appearance and influence of this "dangerous" thought, I didn't realize that it was there.

Struggles from valuing males over females

Valuing males over females is evident in the Chaoshan region, especially in the older generations' minds. Due to the existence of traditional gender bias of valuing males over females, the idea of women receiving higher education in the Chaoshan region is something that many people find "inappropriate." Women are expected to get married, have children, and support their husbands in raising the children after reaching a certain age, rather than pursue higher education. To this day, the number of doctoral students from my village can be counted on one hand. Female doctoral students are even rarer than male doctoral students. I struggled with the gender bias. The influence of being raised with these traditional thoughts since childhood led me to choose to be "rebellious." I didn't want to conform to the societal expectations of following the rules and doing certain things at certain ages. After much internal struggle, I chose to pursue my dreams. This was the first time I had made a decision that made me feel liberated. Even though I do not yet know what the outcome will be, I remain steadfast. In my narrative I wrote:

In the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had just graduated. Job opportunities became scarce as the situation worsened. It took me a long time and a lot of effort, but I eventually found a stable job; however, in the eyes of my family, it's too far away from the Chaoshan region, even though it's within the same province. Of course, eventually, due to the circumstances of the pandemic, my parents stopped objecting. However, traditional societal and secular beliefs made me doubt myself, and I was struggling. Should I follow the social norms of getting married, having children, and being a good wife and mother, or should I pursue what I am passionate about? Even as a woman and a mother, my mother emphasized, "You finally found a job; do you want to give it up?" She added, "You will be too old if you finish your PhD, and it will be too late."

Moreover, because of the perceived distinctions between daughters and sons, and influenced by feudal thinking, rural families in the past generally regarded a daughter as a financial burden, leading to gender inequality in rural education (Kuang et al., 2022). Because not only did a daughter have to be raised until adulthood, but she also required a dowry when she got married. As a result, daughters faced much unfair treatment. In pre-liberation Chaoshan rural areas, most families had multiple children, and under similar conditions, daughters often started schooling later than sons. If there were sons in the family, the responsibility of assisting and supporting siblings fell on the shoulders of the daughter. There were some families that would ask their daughter to give up school because it is a woman's responsibility to work to subsidize her family's livelihood. This is consistent with the research findings of Lutz (2010), which showed that "women in impoverished rural families, furthermore, were not generally cloistered. They had to contribute to family subsistence. Working in the fields, hiring out as servants, engaging in petty trading, running a food shop on the streets, or even begging, all were common" (p. 39). In fact, gender inequality in education persists as a long-standing issue in Chinese society. Despite the widespread expansion of education in rural areas, noticeable disparities exist in the availability of educational opportunities based on gender. Specifically, rural females encounter reduced access to education, uneven distribution of educational resources within families, and higher rates of dropout and illiteracy (Kuang et al., 2022).

Becoming a feminist-informed and transformative adult education scholar

Reflecting on my early life, I see that I lacked the awareness of the possibility of independence or having my own thoughts. I adhered to traditional rules in the Chaoshan region, which posed a disorienting dilemma for me. Consequently, my self-esteem and confidence were low. Transitioning to study in a larger city or abroad challenged my worldview, teaching me critical thinking and enhancing my discernment. Unintentionally, my self-assurance grew through encountering new ideas, evaluating them, and embracing change. Venturing beyond my familiar environment inherently facilitated transformative learning, as it confronted me with diverse challenges and promoted critical thought and expanded perspectives. This process connected me with others undergoing similar transformations, enabling collective growth (Mezirow, 2003). Initially, as I stepped out of Chaoshan both physically and mentally, I was uncertain about interacting with others, integrating into different cultures, and shaping my identity. My sole aspiration was to be an empowered and independent woman, capable of pursuing my aspirations. Notably, my transformative journey gradually revealed my latent potential. This self-discovery granted me the opportunity to venture abroad and explore uncharted territories. Meanwhile, this journey reflects my dedication to critical thinking, fostering social change, and promoting inclusivity in adult education. As mentioned in my narrative:

It is a pity that not many individuals or organizations are working towards challenging and transforming traditional gender norms to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Women seem to have been brainwashed, causing them not to make a certain resistance, but to suffer silently. I myself am surprised and disappointed; or sad. Lately, I have always been interested in understanding my past and present, especially why some of my behaviors and thoughts are so different from those of foreigners or people in other regions of China. I

am on a journey to develop into a scholar who actively incorporates feminist perspectives and seeks to catalyze positive transformations within the realm of adult education. After studying abroad and being influenced by the Western environment, I gradually started to transform my thinking. I began discussing feminist issues with my mother, who holds traditional beliefs. She always says, "This is a new era, and I also need to accept and learn new ideas."

Transformative learning fosters an understanding of feminism's pervasive presence in life and promotes enhanced self-awareness. Becoming feminist-informed is based on my personal journey, and it is essential to approach it with an open mind, empathy, and a commitment to promoting gender equality and social justice. By becoming feminist informed, I have developed deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges I have faced in being marginalized due to my gender. This understanding helps guide my interactions with others, making people more sensitive to their own experiences and struggles. In particular, I gained knowledge about the issues related to feminism. Sharing this knowledge with others can help raise awareness and educate those who may not have had exposure to feminist ideas in Chaoshan region. By actively engaging with feminist ideas and challenging gender stereotypes and biases in my own life, I can inspire those around me to question and reevaluate their own beliefs and behaviors. This can lead to more inclusive and equitable attitudes. Moreover, the actions and beliefs can encourage people to explore feminist perspectives.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By sharing my personal narrative stories, this study aims to raise awareness, provoke critical thinking, and foster empathy and understanding among readers. This narrative also serves as a means of personal healing, empowerment, and community building, as it encourages individuals to reclaim their narratives and connect with others who may have shared similar experiences. This reflective study may inspire or motivate readers, especially women, to self-awareness and to practice similar feminist issues. Moreover, by highlighting the disparity in women's roles and gender issues and unraveling the underlying perceptions, the paper contributes to Western worldviews. It prompts introspection on traditional values that may hinder gender equality, fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

More specifically, on the one hand, this study fosters awareness and recognition by spotlighting the challenges faced by women adhering to traditional gender roles within patriarchal societies, exemplified by those in the Chaoshan region. Through CPN, it challenges conventional stereotypes, empowering women to break free from norms and exhibit agency. This narrative-driven empowerment highlights strategies for resilience, inspiring women in similar situations to assert themselves and pursue their aspirations. Moreover, the study's potential to illuminate the intersectionality of challenges, influenced by factors like traditional gender roles and patriarchal values in Chaoshan, China, adds depth to the understanding of women's experiences. Lastly, by contextualizing gender roles and patriarchal values within the Chaoshan region's cultural framework, it promotes nuanced comprehension of gender dynamics in varying cultural contexts and societies. On the other hand, this study sparks dialogues across society, academia, and communities, prompting the redefinition of gender roles, the rejection of oppressive norms, and the nurturing of inclusivity. By examining traditional gender roles in a specific context and exploring intersectional experiences, including cultural, social, educational, and economic factors,

it enhances cross-cultural understanding for scholars, broadening insights into diverse gender role constructions.

This study achieves the integration of feminism theory and transformative learning theory. “Transformative learning has been most influenced by feminist pedagogy in gender studies” (Branlat et al., 2023, p. 28). As Shrewsbury (1997) noted, feminist pedagogy is “engaged with [the] self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change” (p. 166).

Moreover, this study highlights the significance of CPN as a tool for individuals to share their experiences and perspectives, and the integration of feminist theory and transformative learning theory in addressing gender-related issues and promoting equity in adult education. This study encourages women to engage in self-examination and self-discovery. It is in accordance with Thompson’s (1983) mission, in which she aimed to empower her learners with the skills, knowledge, and theory necessary to seize control of their lives and to challenge anyone who sought to oppress them simply because they were women. Moreover, the implication here is the potential for individuals to evolve into feminist-informed transformative adult learners, signifying a shift from conventional thinking rooted in patriarchal norms to a more inclusive, gender-equitable perspective within the realm of adult education. Narratives from the Chaoshan region may inspire culturally sensitive pedagogical methods, fostering gender role discussions. Potential stories and reasons behind women challenging norms could offer adaptable empowerment strategies or shape gender equality policies in Western adult education and societies. Findings might stimulate global collaboration among Western and Eastern scholars to tackle gender inequality. The study’s reflective role could heighten awareness of cultural biases, enhancing respectful engagement with gender issues in adult education. If studies employ CPN methods, Western scholars could assess their effectiveness in capturing marginalized groups’ experiences within their societies.

CONCLUSION

This paper reflects the critical personal narrative of a woman from the Chaoshan region of China about her traditional gender roles and patriarchal values on her traditional and modern transitions from formative to transformative. In particular, the study bridges women’s roles and gender issues to the broader discourse on women, gender, and equality in the local and individual perspective. It is important to continually engage in critical reflection, confront new challenges, and revise my perspectives as I navigate different experiences and contexts. The ideas of the old generation exist in the new era as well. But with the influx of new ideas, they are not as profound as they used to be. There is a close relationship between national policies, social attitudes, and individual development. At the top level, the Chinese government influences the lower levels and affects every aspect of people’s lives. In general, individual development and transformation are influenced by the intersection and integration of the culture of the nation as a whole, the culture of the society, and the culture of the individual. Undeniably, one’s upbringing, traditional valuing of males over females, significantly impacts one’s thinking and behavior. Thus, affirming and achieving self-transformation is a deeply personal journey that enables individuals to evolve, become their best selves, and live more fulfilling, purposeful lives. Through CPN, people could learn: firstly, acknowledge and accept areas where they may need to improve

or change, set goals for self-improvement, and take intentional action to bring about positive transformation. Secondly, women should focus on areas of personal growth, such as improving communication skills, developing emotional intelligence, or developing a healthier lifestyle. Lastly, people could learn to embrace new perspectives, challenge limiting beliefs, and cultivate a mindset of continuous learning and personal development.

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