

Growing Up in a Chinese Secondary School for Girls: "Do You want to know what I think or what I really think?"**

*Heidi Ross**

Introduction

Gender relations are a powerful key to understanding the relationship between official ideology and popular values, the social costs of economic development, and the persistence of hierarchy in a society that has tried and rejected, some dramatic routes to egalitarianism (Honig and Hershatler, 1989: 11).

The primary research setting this paper describes is the Shanghai Number Three Girls' Middle School (hereafter referred to as # 3). # 3 is a municipal key secondary school with a student body of approximately 1,500 students and 106 teachers. It is unique among Mainland China's most prestigious key schools in that it educates only young women. The school has, in fact, been one of China's most prominent girls' school since its establishment in 1892, when American Southern Methodist missionaries founded the McTyeire School for Girls (zhongxi nushu) to provide a liberal education to young Chinese women "of the well-to-do classes" (Bennett, 1983).¹ # 3 received its present name and structure as a result of the Chinese Communist revolution in 1949. The school lost its religious affiliation in 1952

* Assistant Professor, Education Department, Colgate University(本篇審查完畢定稿日期:1992年12月23日)

** I would like to thank the following institutions and individuals for their generous assistance in my research: the Colgate University Research Council, The Spencer Foundation, The Luce Foundation, and the administrators, teachers, and students of the Shanghai # 3 Girls School.

1. This description of McTyeire School's purpose originated with Young, J. Allen, who was appointed the Superintendent of the China Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1881 by Bishop Holland N. McTyeire, founder of Vanderbilt University. In this capacity Allen coordinated the Methodist Church's Woman's Missionary Society in China. By fusing Victorian and Christian values, Allen sought to change Chinese social relationships through the work of female missionaries, who would, by educating Chinese women and their children, transform Chinese families, and ultimately the extended Chinese nation. The McTyeire School was named after the late Bishop McTyeire who supported the school's establishment and died just before it opened. The school's Chinese name, selected to remind parents of a successful Anglo-Chinese name, School for Boys, also run by Allen, embodies the school's purpose and tension. Its educational goal was to give girls tong cai, practically defined as the capacity to understand and enrich both Chinese and American cultural traditions.

and became administered by the Shanghai Bureau of Education. In 1982 the school was designated by the Bureau of Education as an advanced institution for experimental educational research (jiaoyu keyan xianjin xuexiao) on female adolescent development.

An article entitled "Cradle of Female Talent," featured in Peoples Daily in 1987 (Chen, 1987), clearly reflects how the school's present reputation retains, albeit substantially transformed, the genteel "McTyeire mystique" of its missionary and early Republican past. The school is described as both "stately seat of learning" and "garden," a green haven in the midst of sprawling Shanghai, a place of seclusion for the "perfect" development of young women. To be sure, care in sustaining this tranquil educational environment is balanced with pride in the manner in which #3 has incorporated into its vision of female education modern technology--a closed-circuit television system, a micro-computer laboratory, a 4-story science building which was built at a cost to the state of 1,500,000 yuan. Yet, when school leaders assure alumni that "the old school exists within the new one growing" the school's long attachment to female privilege and entitlement is powerfully echoed.

During the past five years, #3's teachers and administrators have responded to China's open door policies and efforts to decentralize educational funding and planning by using North American as well as Chinese research on gender to inform their pedagogical practice.² The research that interests them most is represented by Carol Gilligan's contention that "the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in representation, a limitation in the conception of the human condition, an omission of certain truths about life" (Gilligan, 1982:2).

This conclusion is intriguing to #3 educators, because they agree with North American researchers like Gilligan that the study of female development has been neglected (Han, 1985). In fact, this realization provides #3 with its current *raison d'être* and privileged status. In addition, some Chinese psychologists have assumed that adolescent development, as it has been traditionally defined in North America and Europe, offers an appropriate or at least possible model for studying Chinese students (Huang, 1983; Zhang, 1987). The awareness that experience and judgment can be voiced by young people in more than one way proves as useful an insight to Chinese teachers interested in rethinking female adolescent development as it has to North American educators.

The following discussion begins with a very brief summary of changes in the structure

2. The teachers and administrators of #3 are particularly interested in international research on gender and secondary schooling because of their school's experimental status.

and purpose of secondary schooling in China that, coupled with efforts to extend China's market economy, currently influence the educational aspirations and achievement of Chinese girls. Part two examines the problems of Chinese adolescence as a metaphor for the healthy development of Chinese socialism. Part three provides a limited analysis of how the construction of gender at is reflected in recent efforts to integrate sex education into the formal secondary school curriculum. The paper concludes with an analysis of student essays and interviews that indicate a striking similarity between recent research on North American girls' school experiences and the frustrations Chinese students feel in expressing their concerns about growing up female.³

Readers are reminded that these conclusions are, by definition, limited. Portraits of single institutions like # 3, far from depicting Chinese education writ small, represent all of the limitations of case study research that engages in "procedures for counting to one" (Punch, 1986: 5). # 3 is an example of what Chinese educators believe can be accomplished when optimum education conditions are approached in practice. Key schools like # 3 dominate the creation and distribution of secondary school knowledge. Their best teachers are not only called upon to write and grade national examination test papers, they are publishing researchers who set the terms of secondary school debate through their domination of district education bureau publications. # 3 has reestablished its connections with over-seas McTyeire alumni associations from which it derives prestige and hard currency. It also benefits from Shanghai's diversified economy which affords access to the alternative forms of financing increasingly required to fund exceptional programs.

Yet, even as # 3 enjoys enviable material and human resources, it also embodies many of the challenges faced by all Chinese secondary school educators as they approach the twenty-first century. Readers are therefore enjoined to question the generalizations about Chinese schooling contained in this study, at the same time they consider what might be learned about secondary education in general from one exceptional Chinese school.

The Context of Reforms in Chinese Secondary Schooling

Elsewhere I have argued that economic and educational reforms introduced in China

3. The interview materials contained within this study are from taped or directly transcribed formal and informal conversations collected daily in staff offices and classrooms at # 3. Student essays were selected from each home room classroom in all grades except for grade three of senior secondary school (grade twelve).

during the past decade have made secondary education the most problematic and crisis-prone level of Chinese schooling (Ross, 1991). Secondary school policy and practice since 1949 have embodied a contest between popularization and diversification which mirrors efforts to balance the demands for socialist equality and ideological rectitude with the needs of rapid economic development and social and political diversity. These tensions were heightened by the 1985 decision on Reform of China's Educational Structure which made junior high school compulsory, while promoting the continued diversification and institutional tracking at the senior secondary level.⁴

This simultaneous effort to increase access to and stratify educational opportunity, coupled with the expansion of the market economy and accompanying efforts promote efficient growth and management in economic and social institutions, has had unintentionally damaging consequences for educational expectations and participation of girls. 2.24 million school-age girls are out of school in China, 83% of the nation's total (Beijing Review 10-16 September, 1989: 26). Of primary and secondary school dropouts over 70% are girls. While the current official view is that female discrimination is a "special type of class oppression" which "is determined by their status in the work force" (Beijing Review 7-13 May, 1990: 40), this paper intimates how gender discrimination is a more complex phenomenon, both challenged and reproduced by formal education. To understand how gender discrimination is experienced by a small number of privileged young women who attend a prestigious key school in urban Shanghai, we first examine how concerns about equity and the provision of material resources are linked to the recognition by the Chinese government that "the children of Deng are not the children of Mao" (Chan, 1985: 225).

Chinese Adolescence and Moral Crisis

Despite fundamental differences in how the life stages of individuals are socially and politically constructed (Chin, 1988; Chan, 1985; Saari, 1990), Chinese and North American educators share the belief that, "A society that is concerned about the strength and wisdom of its culture pays careful attention to its adolescents" (Reed, 1987: 1). Chinese educators, like their American counterparts, believe that adolescence, which in Chinese evokes the hope and transformation of spring (*qingchunqi*), is a universal touchstone of the human experience

4. This trend began in earnest in 1980 when 18.9% of China's senior secondary school students attended technical and vocational schools. This number had risen to 40% by 1988. From 1978 to 1987 8,643,000 students graduated from technical secondary schools, 1.7 million more than during the period from 1949-1978.

(Song, 1985). Although Chinese educators, like an increasing number of their North American counterparts, generally reject that adolescence is a period of inevitable crisis (*weijiqi*), most practicing teachers eschew idealized versions of teenagers, and employ metaphors that liken teenagers to animals-- elephants which can't be budged, uncontrollable monkeys lacking in attention span, a tiger's behind which is decidedly dangerous to touch--or even slightly demonic or supernatural beings such as wild-footed Bodhisattvas (*luanjiao pusa*) (Chen, 1985).

How different generations of Chinese teachers perceive their roles as moral educators to such teenagers reflects how socially constructed a concept adolescence is. Teachers who experienced the Cultural Revolution as children or youths express a mixture of sympathy and frustration at the concerns of their students, even envious of their precocious abilities "to see through the system." An earlier generation, brought up or educated in the 1950s, are perplexed or even angered by their pupils' refusal to bow to a collective will. These veteran teachers, themselves likened in educational literature to flowers that grew at the tree line, hardy, capable of withstanding hardship, see their naughty, conscience-free charges as greenhouse plants, "pearls in the palm," or little emperors and empresses, polished, pampered, demanding (Cang and Cheng, 1988).

Regardless of their levels of sympathy for the children of Deng, many teachers acknowledge that despite the intrusive mechanisms at their disposal for insuring student alignment with the reified knowledge of the school and society, controlling adolescence has become increasingly difficult as alternate paths to social advancement undercut the school's ability to direct socialization (*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 2 February and 9 March, 1989; Ross, 1993) They share a general critique of adolescents which portrays them as arrogant youngsters whose lack of maturity, ethical standards, discipline, and clear sense of purpose are made up for only by a self-centered world outlook which derogates socialism, hard study, and political rectitude. Some teachers explain this constellation of characteristics as a product of Cultural Revolution reforms which "egalitarianized" schools at the price of weakening their power as socializing agents and failing to properly educate an entire generation of Chinese students who have now become parents.⁵ Others link selfish and unruly behavior to the one-child family policy and the inexorable forces of change which have arrived through China's open door (Bian, 1987; Wu and Tseng, 1985; Tobin, et al, 1989; Davin, 1991). Except, perhaps, in prestigious key schools like # 3, where academic success on adult terms still holds out clearer rewards, teachers must compete with an influx of foreign ideas, a pri-

5. This was an opinion shared unanimously in interviews conducted with teachers in ten academic and vocational Shanghai secondary schools in 1989.

vatization of values, a lack of respect for formalized schooling, and a diversifying economy to capture their students' attentions.

The composite image of adolescence in late twentieth century China is not a happy one if adolescence is taken, as Chinese leaders often imply it should be, as a metaphor for the good society (Li, 1990). A typical analysis of the younger generation, entitled "From 'I Do Not Believe' to 'I Have Nothing,'" contrasts a well-known poem written in 1976 by dissident Bei Dao to the title of a pop song fashionable a decade later:

This generation has absolutely nothing to worry about regarding food and clothing; they have the possibility of getting decent jobs and making money; and they have an enormous abundance and freedom of choice with regard to spiritual, mental, and material products-- something that this nation has never had. And yet, to the amazement of their parents, they yell: "We have nothing!" We call this generation of people the "new-birth generation" (xin sheng dai)" (Liu, 1990: 87-88).

In such portraits secondary school pupils, only an audience to the epic of the of the Cultural Revolution, reflect a post-modern disconnection from meaning, "the collapse of historical traditions, the absence of any basic awareness of a dominant guiding trend or direction, and a sense of bewilderment and frustration with regard to the unknowable and uncertain future" (Liu, 1990: 88). What separates them from their teachers is a different vision of self and collectivity. Their elders are wary of their "vagabond spirit," and unprepared for their judgment that morality is just a matter of taste: "I do whatever I feel is right" (Liu, 1990:91).

The unenviable charge of charting a moral course for students perceived as vagabonds has involved continuous efforts to insert into the secondary school curriculum increased moral and political training that can both speak to students' desires for relevance yet mitigate the threat of bourgeois liberalism. The most comprehensive of recent programs began in 1988 with the promulgation of new rules of conduct (richang xingwei guifan) for secondary school students. These forty regulations were accompanied by the image of the good adolescent as one with "four haves."⁶ While the "four haves" movement was designed to help teachers assist their students to define socialist ethics in terms of ideals (lixiang), morality (daode), culture (wenhua), and discipline (jilu), it was delivered with the criticism

6. It is ironic that the shift from the traditional "three good" (san hao) identification of merit to the four haves label is indicative of the infiltration of commodity consciousness even in what defines a good person. One is no longer good; rather one has goodness.

that schools and teachers had neglected moral training, according it at most lip service and at worst, particularly during the rush of examinations, no consideration at all. After June 1989, such criticisms sharpened, as China's leaders concluded that China's youth problem must be solved not by accommodation (an economic solution) but rather with control (a political one) (Burns and Rosen, 1986: 53). Linked to this understanding was the only slightly veiled implication that college students' misunderstanding of Chinese socialism was rooted in the failure of their earlier schooling.

Secondary school teachers who were chastised for treating schools as the "Land of Peach Blossoms" (Shiwai taoyuan), that is a haven from the turmoil of society, reacted with some bitterness at being made a scapegoat for failed political socialization (Zhongguo jiaoyu bao, 17 January 1989). Their own analysis indicated that it was the crushed democracy movement which would separate and already "consciousless generation" further from social responsibility (Zhongguo jiaoyu bao, 2 - 4 March, 1989). It is not surprising, therefore, that the writing on moral education by practicing teachers and researchers has been grounded not in the rhetoric of politics but in the theories of human development and psychology (Zhongguo jiaoyu bao, 5 November, 13 December 1988). Their concerns are also reflected in the expanding provision of media, social and judicial services designed specifically to protect, advise or rehabilitate teenagers affected by changing attitudes about sexuality, rising rates of crime and sexual abuse (Ross, 1991).

How secondary schools have begun to accommodate the changing concerns and attitudes of teenagers is examined below through an analysis of the increasingly explicit association in the formal school curriculum of issues of morality and puberty. The connections drawn between how gender is perceived by educators and the content of sex education programs begin to suggest the pervasive values and attitudes involved in the construction of female adolescence. Implicit in this exploration, of course, is the recognition that a more complete understanding of gender would require not only a thorough investigation of the persistent and controlled organization of student-life, but how this life is permeated by and reflects gender formation in other institutional settings.

Secondary Schooling and The Construction of Gender

Exploring from a comparative perspective the connections between Chinese schooling and gender (defined by this author as the ways in which any culture gives meaning to biological sexual difference) is complicated, because so much about Chinese schooling for girls

seems remarkably similar to the educational experiences of their North American counterparts (American Association of University Women, 1992). Schooling in China is central, as it is world-wide, to the social construction of concepts of intelligence, identity and success (Kelly and Slaughter, 1991; Wilson, 1991). Women in China have struggled valiantly and often in vain to embrace these concepts as competing cultural demands, specifically those involving interpersonal and family obligations, are separated from and discounted in dominant images of excellence (Honig and Hershatler, 1988; Rosen, 1992).

Yet subtle differences distinguish the way North American and Chinese educators talk about the academic consequences of gender, a differences illustrated by the Chinese word for gender (*xingbie*), which literally refers to physiological difference. # 3 teachers, like educators throughout much of China (Honig and Hershatler, 1988), conceive of gender primarily as a biological state, rather than a socially constructed category. Thus, examinations by # 3 educators of the relationship between gender and academic achievement commonly begin with the assumption that the "natural" and "special needs of girls" distinguish female education from an established (male) norm.

Of course, numerous scholars have noted the challenges of engaging in cross-cultural research on gender (Kondo, 1991; Kelly and Slaughter, 1991). Their advice to develop a multiple and inclusive definition is nowhere more appropriate than in studies where "Western" conceptions of gender, that tend to make natural and essential sexual opposition and are based upon assumptions of an autonomous human subject, are compared with conceptions of gender in China an autonomous human subject, are compared with conceptions of gender in China (Chin, 1988; Watson and Ebrey, 1991). For this reason, readers are asked to consider critically the limits as well as the possibilities of cross-cultural collaboration implied by the efforts of # 3 teachers to broaden their own definitions of excellent education for their female pupils.

Teachers' Perceptions of Gender

Despite its unique mandate to establish an environment conducive to development of young women, # 3's definitions of educational excellence rely often, if unintentionally, upon assumptions about human development and learning which derogate female students. One prevalent perception held by # 3 teachers is that "girls are at the top of the class in primary school, are at the middle of the class in middle school, and at the bottom of the class

in college" (xiaoxue jian, zhongxue ping, daxue cha).⁷ Teachers explain this "natural inclination" by pointing to the sociable and caring personalities of their students. This propensity to interact with others is "related to the failure of most girls to develop abstract and logical thinking skills." Girls excel in primary school because of the language skills they learn through early social interaction. Their descriptive capabilities in turn reinforce their ability to memorize. In short, their sociability predisposes them to be good students.

However, girls interpret being good students with getting good grades (to please the teacher), unlike their male counterparts, who are commonly described by their teachers as associating educational prowess with understanding (to please themselves).⁸ Thus, a girl's capacity to think logically and abstractly remains underdeveloped. Other teachers continue this analysis by cautiously suggesting that the propensity to care for others rather than oneself, and an associated tendency for girls to be petty and caught up in details, comes to a fatal and inevitable fruition with puberty. Girls are bound by their physiology to a holistic, "unfocused" view of the world which turns them away from the concerns of males--and science and mathematics and leadership --to thoughts of domesticity. Girls just can't seem to concentrate.

3 teachers feel responsible for attempting to counteract these perceived tendencies in their pupils by telling them, "What boys can do girls can do" (nan tongxue keyi zuo dao de, nu tongxue ye keyi zuo dao). Ironically, teachers reinforce the message that areas of achievement are biologically-fixed with their own pedagogy of nurturing female strengths and overcoming female weaknesses (yang qi suo chang, bu qi suo duan) (Han, 1985). Despite promotion of the "four selves of female education" (funu sizi jiaoyu) which includes self-respect (sizun) or self-love (zilai), self-confidence (zixin), independence (zili), and strength (ziliang), strengths and weaknesses are assumed to be gender-related, with strengths being defined by male characteristics:

In areas such as language study, we make use of the girls' love of reading and strong capacity for memorization and guide their skill in reading and writing. In

-
7. The responses from # 3 teachers and parents contained in this section of the paper were obtained in transcribed interviews and informal conversation with fifteen # 3 teachers and twelve sets of parents from 1988-1991. The assumption that female student achievement drops off in senior high school is widely held by Chinese adults. See Honig and Hershatter 1988; Hooper 1991; Rosen 1992.
8. This distinction between the sources of academic motivation and achievement for male and female students is cited by educators throughout China. See discussions in Zheng 1981; Honig and Hershatter 1988; and Shanghai Educational Examination Center 1989a and 1989b.

math, physics, and chemistry we not only require students to do problems, but also to organize their knowledge in ways that will allow them to use it in other contexts. In assisting students to evaluate their own study methods, and cultivate their powers of analysis, we help them overcome their tendency to be overly dependent on rote learning.⁹

3 teachers place their thoughts about biological destiny in the context of their brief experience during the Cultural Revolution teaching both male and female students in the 1970s. Boys didn't listen, were interested in things, fought constantly, but made up immediately. Girls are so much easier, so obedient, they pay attention to their elders, except when they get into insignificant squabbles and nurse grudges. Boys achieved higher test results than their female classmates in high school physics, chemistry and math, although the average total marks in all subjects were higher for junior middle school girls than boys. In the end, most teachers try to explain these results hopefully --by considering the impact of cultural patterns on behavior:

For thousands of years girls have heard that they must be locked up while boys can go out and see the world. Because boys have more contact with society they're more widely-read, their interests are wider, they have outdoor activities. In the past, we never really paid attention to the choices girls were making or why, so they studied indiscriminately, wasting time. Middle school is an important stage in the life of an individual. without solving this fundamental problem we're in for trouble. Female students are more conscientious in primary school. So teachers don't pay attention to developing their abilities. They're good, you see. But what happens is that teachers need to do more than be content with obedient work and memorization. The girls should be involved in problem-solving as well. Then maybe in middle schools the girls wouldn't have this erroneous study attitude. Girls are good students. Too good.

Some parents agree with this assessment, calling # 3 too conservative, a protective girls' boarding school that coddles "Shanghai misses" in a secluded garden. Others vie for seats in its first year class, wanting their daughters to be both well-educated and protected from "bad social influences." While most # 3 teachers feel strongly that an all-female environment is conducive to helping their students construct positive identities, they also maintain that a girls' school reflects the social patterns of Chinese society which work against female achievement:

9. All of the extended quotations included in the following sections of this paper are from transcribed interviews of # 3 teachers and students.

Now that we have an all-girls school again, the majority of girls realize they are in a famous girls school. They won't be interfered with by boys and they'll have a chance to practice more. When boys were here they seemed to react more quickly in class and thus the girls lost chances to respond. Perhaps they didn't want to stick out, to look as if they were trying to impress people, but they always ended up relying on the boys to be leaders. So now how do we help female students to be independent, to speak out, put their abilities for careful study and conscientious work to good use, to be less conservative, to worry less about their grades, to broaden their interests? They have a good unit mentality, they work well together. Yet, still they are sensitive to criticism, and sometimes they turn too early to social demands.

They must keep their minds on their studies. When the school was in a transition stage, it had two classes with only girls, and two coed grades. The girls in the coed grades did not want the boys to go. The girls felt they wanted to learn about boys, the boys' ways of thinking, to make up for their own shortcomings. This obviously proves that they have a negative self-image. I mean, they already feel inferior. The students in non-coed classes say that they still compete, but this is good; they say they no longer have an excuse, like, 'after all, I'm just a girl.' There is no doubt that the grades of the girls in all-girl classes are better than those in mixed classes. Also, we wonder if without boys the girls don't get more attention from their teachers. No one is advocating separate schools for all girls in China. But we are an experiment with a long and successful tradition.

As we see reflected in this teacher's concerns, # 3 teachers do encourage their pupils to be confident and in control. Yet encouraging students to follow their school motto, which admonishes them to "seek truth, think diligently, cherish time, and grow with health and grace" (qiu zhen qinsi, xishi, jian mei) does little to remove the powerful obstacles faced by female students in their efforts to continue study or begin a career. Efforts at maximizing productive efficiency in the home, at school and in the work place, have coupled with longstanding perceptions of female talent and a backlash against the Cultural Revolution model of the strong, "unfeminine" woman, to reinforce discriminatory practices in educational entrance requirements and hiring (Rosen, 1992). Such discrimination is perpetuated by school administrators who tolerate disproportionate enrolment of males in senior secondary schools and colleges, because work units consider women inefficient (because of their family obligations) and therefore undesirable workers. Training women for positions reserved for their male classmates would not only exacerbate educational inefficiency but mislead female students about their future options.

This message is received early, by girls barely into their teens. While they argue for their own equality, their own statements also indicate how "naturally" they take for granted female inequalities. Writing of her experience in # 3, one student muses:

Here we can do everything we want to and need^e not let the boys replace us. As girls we are all very shy and timid. In order to temper our character we make up our mind to get rid of the weak points and to make ourselves have the ability to be independent in the future work and life.

A recent study of female students in Shanghai's institutions of higher learning defined women's lives as "a war between the increasing sense of selfstriving and the mentality of self-inferiority" (Li, et al 1990: 4). Not only does the study present the women themselves as both obstacle to and champion of sexual discrimination, it also assumes as given rather than questionable that many of the major "obstacles" they face derive from their physiological and attitudinal differences from men. Dysfunctional characteristics of students, for example, are identified as paying too much attention to grades and getting nervous at examinations, relying on the teacher, text and parents as authorities, not daring to go abroad. Although the report concludes optimistically that female college students have overcome these characteristics of 'old-time females nurtured in the feudal ideology,' and praises them because "the attributes of an 'excellent student' are embedded in their heart, "the possibility that there may be other attributes equally valuable is left unexamined. In their advocacy of a change in female character the authors do nothing to dislodge the impression that women are by nature "closed and unilateral" compared to their "open and multilateral" male counterparts.

Is it any wonder that 13-16 year-old girls exhibit so-called "regressive" (huigui) behavior, described in Chinese handbooks on reproduction and sexuality for secondary school students as a peculiar affliction of girls who do not want to grow up (Yao, 1987; Li, et al, 1990)? The difficulties girls face in entering schools, becoming good students, and then finding and retaining employment steer them toward "safe, feminine, relatively closed" paths. This is not to suggest that their teachers do not recognize how female students are responding to schooling increasingly stratified by material resources and educational purpose. However, because they lack a political vocabulary for articulating how a decade of economic and educational reforms based on efficient management of resources have met the aspirations of women and men inequitably, they rarely challenge views of adolescent development which demand that female students achieve higher scores before being accepted into secondary and tertiary institutions. Consequently, their students are left to wonder if somehow they aren't to blame for their own failing.

In an essay entitled "Life without Boys" a Senior One student writes:

My school is a mystery to lots of people. Many times, When a person is told that I am a student in a girls' middle school he or she will look at me with wide-opened eyes and ask me many strange questions. Are the subjects in your schools the same as the others? They respond, 'My God, I can't imagine. Could you stand to live in a world without boys?' On these occasions I always feel very embarrassed. I usually reply to such troublesome questions only with "yes" or "no". In fact, I am the same as any other coed.

In fact, college students in Shanghai suspect that #3 students are not just like any other coed.¹⁰ #3 graduates are accused of having developed abnormally (xinli biantai) as a result of their stay in a girls' school. By some they are perceived as being too loud, extroverted, and independent. Others contended that they are boy-crazy, the first to get married in college. The greatest personal dilemma of the pupil who evaluated her life without boys was the "worriment" that:

I don't know whether my future will be good or not. I am told to be a warm-hearted, honest, brave, self-controlled, independent, and sympathetic person. In a word, I should be a good person.

Being a good person indeed is a worrisome proposition for #3 girls. They must learn to balance the characteristics of self-control, independence, sympathy and a caring gear without being "too much like boys or liking boys too much."¹¹

The Sex Education Program

The Shanghai #3 Girls School received its status as an experimental center for the study of female adolescent development during the early 1980s, just as the "battle of adult interference in courtship" had moved from a concern of post-secondary schooling to an issue of tremendous import in secondary schools (Honig and Hershatter, 1988). The "spiritual pollution" campaign of 1983 and 1984 crystallized official concern about the changes precipitated by the open door. Adults nostalgic for the "simpler" days of the 1950s worried about the

10. This characterization of #3 students is widely-shared throughout Shanghai.

11. This last phrase comes from an interview with a #3 teacher of English who used it to summarize her students' reputations among their counterparts in other academic preparatory schools in Shanghai.

construction of a youth culture driven by popular music, romance novels, foreign films and pornography. Such was the context for the founding in 1985 of the China Sex Education Research Association, and the initiation of discussions between political education instructors and specialists in adolescence regarding the development of materials for sex education in Shanghai's schools (Beijing Review 17-23 August, 1992)¹².

Teachers supportive of sex education, euphemistically called puberty education (qingchunqi jiaoyu), claimed that information about sexual development was crucial for the healthy development of children in an increasingly complex and urban society. In the face of rapidly increasing abortion rates and reports of sexual abuse, sexuality, obscured by misunderstandings and feudal superstitions and values, had to be de-mystified. The State Education Commission supported such programs for collective rather than individual goals. According to the commission, sex education was necessary to the promotion of a healthy spiritual civilization. Not only would it challenge feudal traditions which undermined state population control policies. It would also counter the influence of foreign traditions which were perceived as promoting the opposite extreme of sexual openness, identity confusion, and teenage pregnancy.

The lack of support for such programs among parents was indicated by the enlistment of the popular media in promoting the necessity of sex education (Beijing Review, 17-13 August, 1992). Sometimes such efforts were indirectly related to the school curriculum, as in the case of the most recent justification for sex education--Aids.¹³ Most media support, however, complemented formal school programs. The television had become an increasingly important significant other to urban adolescents, and the school and the public media worked hand in hand to produce modest but direct public service announcements which attributed formal sex education to a safer, more civilized urban environment.

Formal sex education is normally incorporated into junior and senior secondary school biology as biology and hygiene education (shengli weisheng jiaoyu). However, healthy sexual development is understood as a comprehensive process that must be the on-going and collective concern of political studies, biology, and homeroom teachers. A vice-principal of # 3

12. Special courses on sex education and sexuality are currently offered in over one-quarter of all of China's tertiary institutions. Despite some public opposition, formal sex education classes have been introduced on a trial basis in over 7,000 secondary schools in China since 1988. The majority of these programs are offered in schools located in coastal metropolitan areas.

13. Beijing Review, May 29-June 4, 1989. Note the date of this report from the Review, which ironically begins with a quote from Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

explained that the content of sex-education is:

wide-ranging and encompasses all aspects of a student's physical development, hygiene, morality, and interpersonal relations, with a special emphasis on developing an understanding of the difference between friendship and premature romantic attachments (zaolian). Students must understand how correct political thinking is linked to sexual matters. At our school this is especially important. Parents want to keep their girls safe, as well as well-educated.

A certain irony is apparent in these parents' fears when placed in juxtaposition with the preface of their daughters' sex education textbook, which encourages them to "be your own master" (Yao, 1987). Girls, in particular, are told that the feudal adage of equating ignorance with purity is a tactic of oppression which obscures the natural and healthy need that young women have for knowledge regarding their sexual development. Several of their lessons depict a gritty world of pain and suffering. Daughters are physically abused by parents, seduced by scoundrels and material wealth, spiritually polluted by pornography.

Most of the text resembles standard classroom textbooks, encyclopedic in its conception of knowledge, inexpensive, and meant to be studied from cover to cover. Chapter One encourages students to "diligently study the knowledge of puberty." While pupils are told that sexuality is "as natural as breathing," that they have a right and responsibility to understand their changing bodies, they are also warned that such knowledge must be guided by the firm hand of culture and of the objective views of science.

As students proceed through the text they learn in great detail the processes of fertilization and pregnancy and the male and female reproductive systems. Reassurance that puberty is a natural and joyous period is accompanied by precautions (reflecting traditional health practices as well as a hygiene of poverty) for girls against emotional upset, swimming, physical exertion, drinking cold liquids, or taking stimulants during the menstrual cycle. Boys are counselled to direct their energies toward study and rigorous exercise.

The adoption of sex roles is explained to students as a complex but "natural" process reflected in the names, clothing, and toys appropriate to boys and girls. As we have seen already in teachers' perceptions about gender, the developmental characteristics of boys and girls are likewise portrayed in this text as natural consequences of biological difference. Girls learn to talk earlier than boys and retain their verbal edge until puberty. Boys, on the other hand, develop keen analytical abilities. Girls' natural sensitivity and rich imagination

strengthen their memories and their interpersonal skills, while boys develop the capacity for abstract and independent reasoning and thinking. Although the text presents male and female development as generally equal, and denies the possibility that one sex is "more outstanding" than the other, it also concludes that because what boys can do, "most" girls can do, the strength of men should be complimented, as Marx suggested, by the gentleness of women (nan gang nu rou).

The stories presented in the second half of the book depict girls in all states of distress, normally as a result of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, or misplaced passions. Anorexic girls are blindly, dumbly seduced by "the Western fashion of being thin as a stick." A girl who believes she will ascend to heaven if she complies, is seduced by a preacher in a protestant church. In fact, the text remarks wryly, her soul was fine until she tried to save it by Western superstition. Foreign ideologies are not the only villain. In "watch out for the wolf" a naive girl is raped by a man who promised to make her a star in Hong Kong.

The list of troubled girls is endless. A young woman attempts suicide because of nose-y classmates who misinterpret a letter she has received from a boy with whom she has a purely platonic relationship. Girls driven by jealousy or inferiority complexes fail examinations. Others are abused by their parents. Others fall in love, with a silver tongued huckster or the boy next door. These girls trapped by premature love are most at risk, and they, rather than their male companions, are warned over and over again, "Girls, don't open the door of love too early!" "Young lady, beauty is both phsical and spiritual!"

From such books girls learn to listen and ask, rather than analyze their own feelings. They learn the contradictions of their task in growing up which calls for both strong independence, yet reinforces the perception that females are intellectually, phsically and emotionally inferior to their male counterparts. And, as we explore in the conclusion of this paper, perhaps they come to question the discrepancies between the formal school curriculum and the school's actual control over adolescent sexuality. Explains a once-strict homeroom teacher with patieect resignation:

It's normal, I think. Most of the students, they have normal relationships between themselves. But it seems that children are growing faster than before. Some students, girl students in the junior high, will like to make friends with the boys, she would like to have a boyfriend or something, one or two. The girl students will be eager yet the boy students don't know anything about this. But when they reach senior school, now, now, I don't know why, many, many students like to have boy

friends and girl friends. More, more, more.

In response to whether this makes her job more difficult she says:

Yes, but now we don't stop them because we find it is not good to stop them. Because if we try to set up some regulations that you can't make friends, they will go underground. On Sunday they will still do this. So we just warn them don't do something bad, you're still a teenager. We say, "With one eye open and with one eye shut." Before we were very strict, and we talked with the boy or talked with the girl and asked them to stop to develop this kind of relationship. But now we don't. We can't.

Notes from the Underground

The title of this paper was suggested by a recent study of female students who attended a private girls school in the United States (Gilligan, et al, 1989). In this study, Carol Gilligan and her colleagues extend their concern that traditional portraits of female adolescent development have omitted "certain truths about life" to include the possibility that for North American girls, adolescence, rather than being a problem of separation, might in fact be more appropriately cast as a problem of connection. This possibility suggested itself as researchers witnessed an unusual change occurring among girls who stood at the edge of adolescence.

"Adolescence seemed to pose a crisis of connection for girls coming of age in Western culture," a crisis girls are tempted to solve by excluding others and being selfish or by excluding themselves and being good (Gilligan et al, 1989:9). Stymied by the inability to find a solution to this dilemma, girls' ways of understanding the world and their places within it seem to disappear, just like the Chinese eleven year old girl whose sparkling talent and sharp wit in primary school wanes as she moves through junior high school and becomes fourteen, the politically symbolic age of entering young womanhood.¹⁴

I am cautious about suggesting that upon reaching adolescence girls' understandings of

14. Nearly all students between the ages of 7 and 14 in the Peoples' Republic of China belong to the Young Pioneers. Membership in the Young Pioneers has become formally identified with childhood. The rite of passage from childhood to adolescence is marked on Children's Day (June 1) in public school rituals, complete with sweets, birthday cake, and noodles, for pupils in their second year of junior secondary school.

their environment, social relationships, and selves in modern cultures as diverse as urban Shanghai and North America move underground in the same manner. Yet, the metaphor is a powerful one. The gateway to this world is marked by statements common to the public discourse of female adolescents in both China and North America, such as when they preface their answers to questions with the hesitant, "I don't know what I really think, but..." or "You'll really think I'm crazy, but..." --those markers which convey a sense of being unsure, disconnected, even living somewhere out of her mind where she could not possibly be heard (Gilligan, et al, 1989).

In a recent essay on what it means to be seventeen in Shanghai, a twenty year old female student who graduated from one of Shanghai's most prestigious secondary school complained that the opinions of young people in China were too often silenced. She wrote:

the voices of the insignificant little ones are so seldom heard or allowed to be heard... Shanghai is a place where like anywhere else in the world, good and bad, courage and cowardice mix. Only here one seems to be more willingly coerced into abandoning ones dreams. So while they still exist in the hearts of the young, a record of them appears all the more precious."

The notes from this young woman's underground are fundamentally about silence and lack of communication. Sometimes, this silence is employed willfully to hide knowledge, as in the case of a fifteen year old girl who cherishes her "cunning innocence," which allows her to "play the fool" with parents and teachers secure in her knowledge that, "Deep inside I know everything." In the same secretive manner, a seventeen year old keeps her "lust for enthusiasm" hidden away from classmates who are so:

internally oppressed with a sense of inferiority... [that] even the concept of friendship has stopped attracting them. We keep each other politely at a distance. A heavy mist pervades over our relationship, covering up our true identities and setting up obstacles against any possible communication.

The counterpoint to isolation, of course, is strength to maintain a sense of self-worth. A thirteen year old, tired of the sympathy of her parents who feel she takes herself too seriously, rejects connection, declaring:

their pity for me is indeed not something I need. Holding ones own counsel each one must go his own way. Those who are truly capable and truly independent always know what they want. I admire people who have their own ideas. That's real

individuality. Myself has become the only one I can rely on. This is the most precious thing I possess.

And finally, a seventeen year-old expresses frustration at having lost even the precious possession of her self:

What should my ideal be? The older I grow the more urgent grows my need to solve the problem. I turn to books for an answer, but the library does not help me make up my mind. I get anxious, like someone desperately looking for something who cannot find it, at the same time knowing it must be hiding somewhere.

Such attitudes, if voiced, might well be explained by a concerned teacher as "suspicionitis" (duoyibing), a common "psychological abnormality" among overly-sensitive adolescent girls. The cure for this potentially negative tendency is to become more like a boy, rough and ready and drawn outward from one's petty concerns to broader social interests (Honig and Hershtatter, 1988:18).

The greatest irony of all is that in an era where gender is being reasserted in popular culture, little discussion of gender as a category of analysis allows this student a complex way to evaluate goodness. The consequence will be that she will not be prepared for the gender discrimination she already knows and fears. In this context, the unveiling of student experiences becomes all the more valuable. Researchers in the United States remark that when they interview female adolescents for the first time, girls respond with knowing skepticism. "What in the world can you learn from us? Do you want to know what I think or what I really think? What would happen if what was inside us entered the world?" (Carol Gilligan, et al, 1989). The answer to this last question, as the words of # 3 pupils intimate, may be startling in its implications for Chinese education.

REFERENCE

Association of American University Women.

- 1992 The AAUW Report, How Schools Shortchange Girls. The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation.

Beijing Review.

Bennett, Adrian.

- 1983 Missionary Journalist in China (Young J. Allen and His Magazines, 1860-1883). Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Burns, John and Stanley Rosen, (eds.).

- 1986 Policy Conflicts in Post-Mao China, A Documentary Survey with Analysis. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Cang Gong and Cheng Yuanti, (eds.).

- 1988 Qingshaonian ziwo baohu [The Self-protection of Youth]. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press.

Chan, Anita.

- 1985 Children of Mao. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Changning District Education Bureau Educational Research Office.

- 1985 Jiaoyu keyan lunwenxuan [A Selection of Educational Research]. Shanghai: Changning Education Research Bureau.

Chen Danyan.

- 9-19 September, 1987. Xinming Wanbao [Xinming Evening News].

Chen Zicheng.

- 1985 Tansuo jiaoxue guelu tigao jiaoxue zhiliang [Explore Educational Laws, Raise Educational Quality]. Shanghai: Changning District Education Bureau Research Center.

Chen Zilong.

- 13 August 1987. "Nuzi rencai de yaolan" [A Cradle of Female Talent], Renmin Ribao [Peoples Daily].

Chin, Ann-ping.

- 1988 Children of China. New York: Alfred A Knopf.

China Education Translation Project.

1990 Women and Education in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Buffalo, N.Y.: SUNY Graduate School of Education Publications.

Davin, Delia.

1991 "Early Childhood Education of the Only Child Generation in Urban China," pp. 42-65 in Irving Epstein, (ed.), Chinese Education, Problems, Policies, and Prospects. New York: Garland Press, Inc.

Epstein, Irving, (ed.).

1991 Chinese Education, Problems, Policies, and Prospects. New York: Garland Press, Inc.

Fu Anqiu.

1981 "Zhili fazhan de xingbie tezheng yu jiaoyu" [Sexual Distinctions of Intellectual Development and Their Relation to Education], Educational Research, 12: 39-42.

Gilligan, Carol.

1982 In a Different Voice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, Carol, Nona P. Lyons and Trudy Hanmer.

1989 Making Connections, The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School. Troy, New York: Emma Willard School.

Han Shizhen.

1985 Bangzhu nusheng saochu chengcai daolushang zhangai de shiyan [An experiment to help female students remove the obstacle to achievement]. Shanghai: Changning District Education Bureau Educational Research Office.

Hayhoe, Ruth (ed.).

1992 Education and Modernization, The Chinese Experience. New York: Pergamon Press.

Honig, Emily and Gail Hershatter.

1988 Personal Voices, Chinese Women in the 1980's. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hooper, Beverly.

1991 "Gender and Education," pp.352-374 in Irving Epstein, (ed.), Chinese Education, Problems, Policies, and Prospects. New York: Garland Press, Inc.

Huang jianhua.

1983 "Wo qing shaonian xuesheng de daode renshi yanjiu baogao" [A Research Report

on the Moral Understanding of Our Students], Educational Research, 10:np.

Jiaoyu keyan lunwenxuan [A Selection of Educational Research].

1988 Shanghai: Changning District Education Bureau Office of Research.

Jiaoyu yanjiu. [Educational Research].

Kelly, Gail P. and Sheila Slaughter. (eds.).

1991 Women's Higher Education in Comparative Perspective. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Kondo, Dorinne.

1991 "The Stakes: Feminism, Asian Americans, and the Study of Asia," Committee on Women in Asian Studies Newsletter, 3:2-9.

Li Li, Xia Linying, and Zhang Xiong.

1990 "Shanghai Female College Students in an Open Culture: A Survey of Sixteen Higher Institutions," pp. 4-14 in China Education Translation Project, (ed.), Women and Education in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Buffalo, N.Y.: SUNY Graduate School of Education Publications.

Li Shaojun.

1990 "The Wave of Individualism," Chinese Education, 2:94.

Liu Qing.

1990 "From 'I Do Not Believe' to 'I Have Nothing': A Study Note on the Culture of the New Generation," Chinese Education, 1: 87-91.

Ma Boxiang.

1982 "Nu xuesheng de tedian he shehui xinxi de yingxiang" [The Special Characteristics of Female Students and the Influence of the Media], Shanghai Education, 7,8: 20-21.

Punch, Maurice.

1986 The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Rosen, Stanley.

1992 "Women, Education and Modernization," pp. 255-284 in Ruth Hayhoe (ed.), Education and Modernization, The Chinese Experience. New York: Pergamon Press.

Ross, Heidi.

1991 "The 'Crisis' in Chinese Secondary Schooling," pp. 66-108 in Irving Epstein, (ed.), Chinese Education, Problems, Policies, and Prospects. New York: Garland Press,

Inc.

Ross, Heidi.

forthcoming, 1993. Making Foreign Things Serve China: Teaching and Learning in a Chinese Foreign Language Secondary School. Yale University Press.

Saari, Jon.

1990 Legacies of Childhood. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Shanghai Educational Examination Center.

1989a Shanghaishi gaozhong huikao [The Shanghai Senior Secondary School Competency Examination]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.

Shanghai Educational Examination Center.

1989b Shanghaishi gaoxiao zhaosheng kaoshi [The Shanghai College Entrance Examination]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.

Shanghai Number Three Girls' Middle School.

1983 "Yanjiu nuzhong jiaoyu de tedian" [Research on the Special Characteristics of Education in a Girls Middle School], pp. 22-34 in A Collection of Shanghai Secondary School Educational Work Experiences. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press.

Shanghai jiaoyu. [Shanghai Education].

Shanghaishi zhongxue jiaoyu gongzuo jingyan xuanbian [A Collection of Shanghai Secondary School Educational Work Experiences].

1983 Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press.

Sizer, Theodore R.

1984 Horace's Compromise The Dilemma of the American High School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Song Chongjin.

1985 "Guanyu zhongxuesheng qingchunqi jiaoyu de diaocha" [An Investigation of Secondary School Student Sex Education], pp. 39-46 in Jiaoyu keyan lunwenxuan [A Selection of Educational Research]. Shanghai: Changning District Education Bureau Office of Research.

Tobin, Joseph, David Wu, and Dana Davidson.

1989 Preschools in Three Cultures. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ueda, Reed.

- 1987 Avenues to Adulthood: The Origins of the High School and Social Mobility in an American Suburb. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, Rubie and Patricia Ebrey.

- 1991 Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wilson, Maggie (ed.).

- 1991 Girls and Young Women in Education, A European Perspective. New York: Pergamon Press.

Wu, David Y. H. and Wen-hsing Tseng, (eds.).

- 1985 Chinese Culture and Mental Health. New York: Academic Press.

Yang Jingyun, et al.

- 1990 "Exploring the Question of College Students' Road of Growth," Chinese Education, 23: 6-36.

Yao Peikuan (ed.).

- 1987 Qingchunqi changshi duben [A Reader on Sexual Development]. Shanghai: Shanghai Peoples Press.

Zhang Zhiguang.

- 1987 "The Development and Present Situation of Educational Psychology in China," Canadian and International Education, 16: 15-22.

Zheng Jinhua.

- 1981 "Zhongxue nan nu sheng de chayi yu jiaoyu" [Individual Differences Between Male and Female Students and Their Relevance to Education], Educational Research, 12:np.

Zhongguo jiaoyu bao. [China Education News].

成長於上海第三女子中學 ——你知道她們的所思所想嗎？

*Heidi Ross**

(中文摘要)

中國大陸的市場經濟走向，以及隨之而來的加強效率管理和中學教育多樣化的努力，對城鄉女子教育造成負向影響。本論文以上海第三女子中學（中國唯一的女子重點中學）學生的經驗和期望，探討經濟、社會改革對教育上性別不平等所造成的影響；並就以下範疇來檢視該校學生關心的若干議題：教師們對性別及青少年成長的看法，中國中學課程中性教育的引進，道德教育日趨“心理化”觀點的教學方法，和中國人對女性青春期的看法，希望提供跨文化研究的實例。

本研究在 1988、1989 及 1991 年在上海進行了 18 週的四野訪問及觀察。這是一個仍在進行中的大型計劃的一部份。以浸信會在一世紀以前所創立的上海第三女子中學為研究場所，探討歷經晚清、民國和社會主義中國時期的中國及北美對女子教育、國內外壓迫、及中國社會變遷之間的關聯性。

關鍵詞：性別、中學、性教育、道德教育

* Assitant Professor, Education Department, Colgate University.

**Growing Up in a Chinese Secondary School for Girls:
"Do You want to know what I think or what I
really think?"**

*Heidi Ross**

(Abstract)

The shift to a market economy and accompanying efforts to maximize the efficient management and diversification of secondary schooling in the Peoples' Republic of China have had damaging consequences for the educational attainment and achievement of female students in rural and urban China. This paper explores the impact of economic and social reform on gender inequality in education by focusing upon the experiences and ambitions of students who attend the Shanghai Number Three Girls' School, Mainland China's only all-female key (zhongdian) secondary school. Their concerns are examined in the context of their teachers' conceptions of gender (xingbie) and adolescent development, the introduction of sex education in the Chinese secondary school curriculum, the increasingly "psychologized" approach to moral training practiced by Chinese educators, and the potential for Chinese perceptions of female adolescence to inform cross-cultural research on development. Interviews and observations for this study were conducted in Shanghai during eighteen weeks of fieldwork in 1988, 1989, and 1991. They are part of a larger, on-going research project in which the Shanghai Number Three Girls' School, originally founded a century ago by Methodist missionaries, provides the setting for exploring how North American and Chinese women in late-imperial, republican, and socialist China have perceived the connections among schooling for women, indigenous and foreign oppression, and the transformation of Chinese society.

Key Words: gender 、 secondary schooling 、 sex education 、 moral education

* Assistant Professor, Education Department, Colgate University