

How are female gender and identity constructed in the works of classical chinese ...

[Literature](#)



Women in ical Chinese Literature. Chinese society was traditionally patriarchal where women were expected to be subservient to their fathers, husbands and sons. The oldest male member was the head of the family and therefore took all decisions regarding every family member. Women were taught from a young age that character was the most attractive side of a woman. The four virtues of integrity, pleasing appearance, modesty in speech and being skilled in artistic pursuits like needlework, spinning and weaving were very important aspects of a woman's upbringing.

The ancient Chinese did not think it was important to educate women.

However in a lot of Chinese classical literature, there are examples of the woman's ability to bear hardships and face difficulties resolutely and with courage. In Injustice to Tou O, also referred to as Dou E, the child bride who is not yet a woman courageously faces the many unscrupulous men who bully and offer her protection but are really interested in her womanly charms. Her courageousness in going to her execution rather than allow her mother in law to be implicated in a crime of which both women are innocent, speaks volumes for the mental strength of the young girl. Here she takes on the role of the male defender despite being a frail young child.

In traditional Chinese culture the women were considered inferior to men and were not given the power of decision making. However in Ode to Mulan, the young girl takes her father's place in the army. She is aware that her father is too old to fight and he can never come back alive. She is represented as the traditional Chinese woman weaving on a loom, but when the occasion demands she is able to do the job of a man with the same efficiency. She fights alongside males for twelve years and they are not

aware that she is a woman. Doing her duty by her father notwithstanding the fact that she is not a boy, she desires no rewards. When the Khan asks what she wants she only asks that she be allowed to return to her parents. Even in those times the poet contends that there is no difference between a daughter and a son when he says,

" Two rabbits running close to the ground,

How can they tell if I am male or female?" (Ode to Mulan)

Works Cited

Ode to Mulan

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