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Q: If and when women in China define their place and status in society according to the family, to the "group", is there really room for any kind of individuality? Is there a place where a woman can be psychologically fully herself? And if so, who is the model?

A: I think being psychologically one's full self is a western ideal, which is very much appreciated by educated Chinese women today. It was certainly not a core value in Chinese tradition.

Q: I am interested in the Buddhist and Taoist nuns as women with some independence...Were they a tiny minority in Tang and Sung times or later?

A: A very small percentage. In the T'ang period, it was about 0.5%.

Q: I guess I was just cautioning against the Western urge to judge other cultures (and women's oppression) through our individualistic lens - where self-determination, self-growth, self-actualization is the most important thing and anything limiting that feels totally oppressive. I wonder if "indirect" power is more meaningful in a collectivist culture? Or, am I just romanticizing? Of course, I do think women would want authority over their own lives-I just wonder whether the sacrifice feels the same. For example, many in the US would feel it is a big personal sacrifice to have to "compromise" their individual lives to take care of an elder - where as in China while it would be difficult, it might not feel as oppressive because it is such an important value in a collectivist culture...just like we would feel offended being called by first son, second son instead of with a personal first name..

A: true, and I think in some sense it can be a positive energy, not sure it is meaningful though.

Q:I remember in India when I realized the sons in arranged marriages live with their mothers for the rest of their lives, whereas girls move to another family and take care of their husband's family -- it made me feel that perhaps in many ways, the primary love relationship might be between the mother and the son, as opposed to the man and his wife especially in a context of arranged marriage. Does this have any resonance in China during the T'ang Dynasty, or even today, perhaps more in the rural areas etc.? Is it also true in China as they say in India, "A woman is your daughter until she becomes a wife, A man is your son for the rest of his life?" (Interestingly, this is often in contrast to American's who have a saying which is about the man leaving to go off with the wife's family, but the daughter being the one to count on to take care of you in your old age). Are marriages still "arranged" in China? Is this only in rural areas or also in the cities? Or are modern families choosing their own mates as in India, etc.?

A: Most marriages are not arranged ones nowadays, but matchmaking is still a common

practice especially in rural areas. There is a Chinese saying describing the position of a married daughter: a married daughter is like spilled water. However, women's tie with their natal families was quite strong up until the Yuan dynasty. Several reasons for the change, a good book to read is Bettine Birge's Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China.