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## Gender Studies in Sociology: An Analysis of Sociological Studies in China

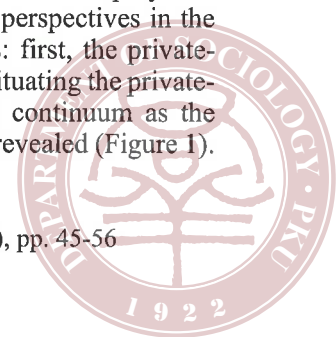
This paper proposes an analytical framework that combines the macro/micro and the public/private continuum. This is employed to examine papers on gender studies published in *Sociological Studies*, one of the top sociological journals in China. Gender studies have experienced fluctuating, but generally increasing visibility in the journal since the 1980s. Empirical studies published after 2000 were more inclined to focus on micro-level phenomena as research topics and public-sphere elements as explanations. There was also a trend towards multi-dimensional analysis after 2005, mainly in the macro-to-micro direction. The strengths and weaknesses implicit in these characteristics of sociological gender studies are discussed at the end of the paper.

The development of sociology as an academic field experienced some setbacks in China as a result of the nationwide structural adjustment of higher education in the early 1950s. Since the resurrection of sociology in 1979, gender perspectives have been gradually accepted and studies on gender have become a legitimate subfield in sociological research in China. Currently, the committee of sociology of gender is among the twenty specialized committees on sociology that belong to the Chinese Sociological Association. What are the features of applying gender perspectives to sociological research in China? In this paper, I first build an analytical framework that combines the macro/micro and the public/private dimensions of gender perspectives. This analytical framework is then used to examine the empirical studies on gender and women published in *Sociological Studies* - one of the top journals in the field of sociology in China. Drawing on the results of the analysis, the current status and trends of sociological gender studies are summarized, and several strengths and weaknesses are discussed.

### An Analytical Framework for Sociological Gender Studies

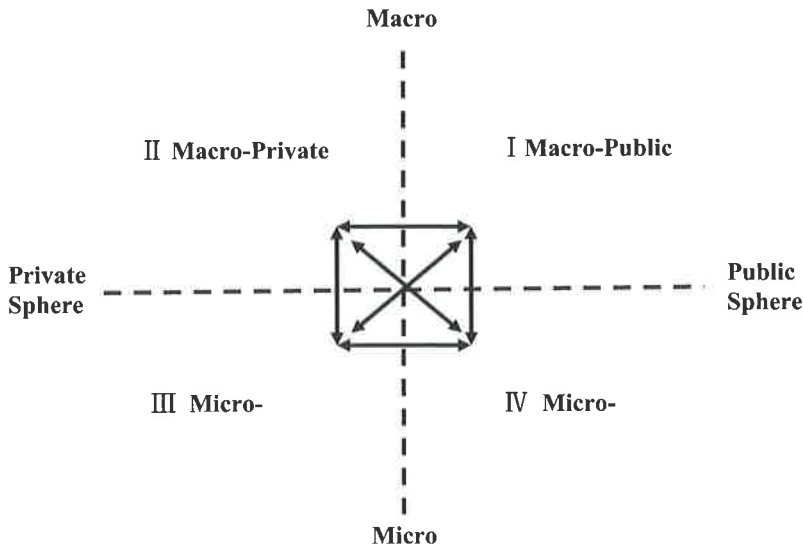
As in the case of sociology studies in general, gender studies in sociology do not have a dominant paradigm. Rather, the theoretical and methodological orientations of sociological gender studies vary greatly. The term “gender studies” is used to refer to a diverse array of gender-related issues and topics. The analytical framework therefore has to be designed in such a way that it can accommodate all the related issues, topics and approaches for sociological gender studies.

The framework that I present here is based on the sociological meta-theory proposed by George Ritzer (1988) for the analysis of sociological theories and was inspired by Paula England's (2000) conceptualization of women's empowerment as multi-dimensional as well as Risman's (2004) argument for conceptualizing gender as a social structure at individual, interactional and institutional levels. I employ this framework to categorize and analyze the application of gender perspectives in the field of sociology. The framework consists of two continuums: first, the private-public continuum, and second, the micro-macro continuum. By situating the private-public continuum as the horizontal axis and the micro-macro continuum as the vertical axis, four dimensions of sociological gender studies are revealed (Figure 1).

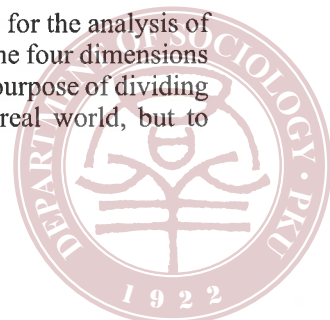


In Figure 1, the upper-right quadrant (Quadrant I) is the macro-public dimension of gender studies. Public spheres that have been institutionalized and structuralized at macro level belong here. Typical examples of macro-public phenomena include political, economic, educational, and mass media systems at global and national levels. The upper-left quadrant (Quadrant II) is the macro-private dimension of gender studies. This refers to macro-level institutions, structures and cultures that frame the lives of private spheres. The national, regional and ethnic institutions of marriage, family, reproduction and the “son preference” culture are good examples of macro-private phenomena. The lower-left quadrant (Quadrant III) shows the micro-private dimension of gender studies. Individual-level and interactional-level phenomena in private spheres belong in this quadrant. Family lives, intimate relationships, informal groups, individual identities and bodies belong to this dimension. The lower-right quadrant (Quadrant IV) is the micro-public dimension of gender studies. It includes individual-level and interactional-level phenomena in public spheres, such as community organizations, recruitment and promotion systems of corporations, the collective identities of social subgroups, individuals’ occupations and income. In addition to conducting an analysis of each dimension, an integrated approach to gender studies is employed to deal with the interactions and dialectical relationships between and among the different dimensions (represented by bi-directional arrows in Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Analytical Dimensions of Sociological Gender Studies*



It should be noted that, as with the dimensions of the meta-theory for the analysis of sociological theories (Ritzer 1988), the differentiations between the four dimensions of gender analysis are to some extent artificial and arbitrary. The purpose of dividing gender perspectives into four dimensions is not to depict the real world, but to provide a tool for analysis.



### **Characteristics of Gender Studies in *Sociological Studies***

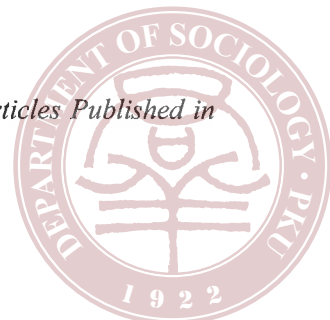
The research presented here was carried out on the studies on gender and women in the field of sociology in China. Previous research was mainly centered on the history and development of sociological studies on gender or women in general (Wang Jinling 2000, 2006; Wang Zheng 2001, Tong Xin 2008, Lin Xiaoshan 2011), or on the relationships between women's studies, gender studies and sociological studies (Zhou Yanling, Zhang Naihua and Wang Jinling 2004; Shi Tong 2010, 2012). Unlike previous research, this paper focuses on papers published in one specific journal, *Sociological Studies*, to examine the characteristics of sociological gender studies carried out in recent years, with the aid of the above-mentioned analytical framework.

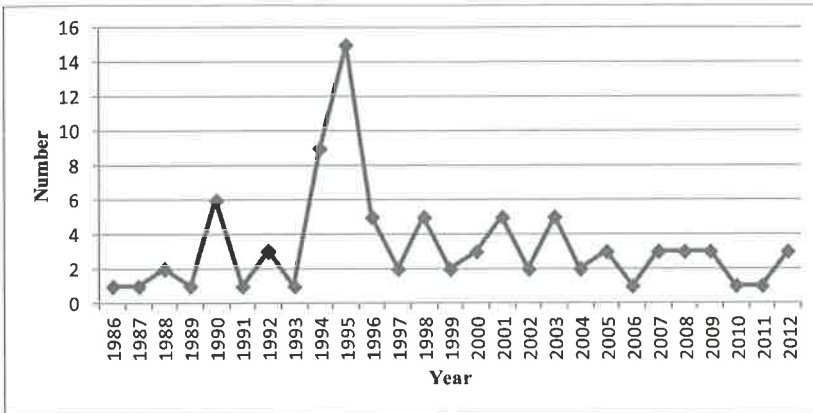
*Sociological Studies* is a bi-monthly academic journal sponsored by the Institute of Sociology, at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The journal was first published in 1986 and has become one of the most highly respected academic journals on sociology in China. Given the history and status of the journal, the analysis of the research published in the journal should reflect the trends and characteristics of gender studies that are of great importance in the field of sociological research. However, since the analysis is confined to one particular journal, there are precautions that need to be taken when interpreting the findings - these do not and cannot provide a complete picture of sociological gender studies in China.

### **Increasing Visibility of Gender Studies**

The number of articles published over a period of more than 25 years that include "gender" or "women" in their titles or keywords (Figure 2) is clearly indicative of a trend towards the increasing visibility of gender studies in *Sociological Studies*. In the 1980s, only five papers were published that dealt with gender-related or women-related topics, that is, one to two papers per year on average. The number of papers with a focus on gender or women increased tremendously in the 1990s, during which time, 49 related papers were published in the journal. The 4th World Conference on Women held in Peking in 1995 undoubtedly provided a major impetus for the increase in the number of the publications. In 1995 alone, 15 studies on gender or women were published in the journal. In 1994, one year before the conference, nine related articles were published and in 1996, one year after the conference, five related articles were published. Therefore, more than half the 49 papers with a gender-related focus were published during these three years. From the beginning of the 21st century to the end of 2012, 35 articles on gender or women were published in the journal. Although, since 2000, the total number of publications has decreased compared with the 1990s, three articles on gender or women, on average, have been published each year since the beginning of the new century.

*Figure 2: Number of Gender-Focused and Women-Focused Articles Published in Sociological Studies: 1986-2012*



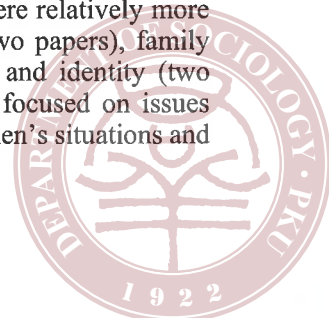


To sum up, the publication of papers on gender and women in *Sociological Studies* peaked in the mid-1990s, and then fell back. In spite of this fluctuation, the papers presenting gender perspectives have continued to be published at an average rate of about three articles per year since 2000, which is higher than that of the 1980s. The continuity and the stable trend in the number of publications of gender studies in *Sociology Studies* show that research on gender and women has its own place in sociology in China.

### Micro-Oriented Research Topics

What are the issues and topics that have interested sociologists on gender perspectives in China? According to the analytical framework of gender studies previously described, I have classified the topics (equivalent to the dependent variables in quantitative research) of 26 empirical studies on gender or women that were published in *Sociological Studies* between 2000 and 2012 (for the list of the 26 papers, see the Appendix), and determined the distribution of the topics according to the basic unit of analysis in the studies.

With the exception of two papers that involved multiple dimensions in their research topics, gender issues at micro-level were selected as the objects of study in 22 out of the 24 papers. Half of the 22 papers dealt with gender issues in public spheres, and the other half in private spheres. Specifically, the eleven papers dealing with the micro-public dimension fell into two subfields - employment (nine papers) and education (two papers). In the field of employment, the research topics included women's labor force participation, labor rights protection, and gender difference in occupation and income. Among these topics, the gender gap in income was given more attention. As for the two papers on education, one focused on women's levels of education and the other discussed the gender difference in environmental concerns. Topics emerging from the micro-private dimension were relatively more dispersed and covered a wide range of subfields - marriage (two papers), family (three papers), reproduction (two papers), body (two papers), and identity (two papers). Yet about two thirds of the micro-private topics still focused on issues within the family. Researchers have been more interested in women's situations and



experiences as daughters, mothers and wives, and have paid less attention to women's experience in other private spheres outside the boundary of the home. With regard to the two papers that took an interest in macro-level research topics, both of these chose to analyze women workers' collective experience as a social class. In general, the authors of empirical gender studies published in *Sociological Studies* since 2000 have displayed a preference for micro-level topics. At the micro-level, public and private spheres were of equal importance to the researchers. For the micro-public dimension, employment was the dominant topic, and within the micro-private dimension, women's family lives had some priority over other topics.

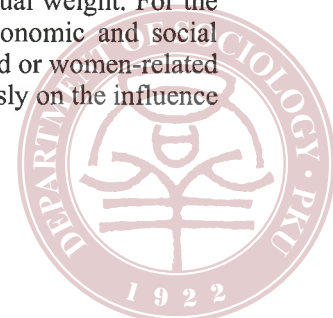
### **Public Sphere-Oriented Explanatory Approaches**

Specific characteristics of the explanatory factors (such as the independent variables in quantitative research) were also emphasized in the 26 empirical papers on gender or women. The analytical framework of sociological gender studies showed that the explanatory factors were more concentrated in the public spheres than in the private spheres, but were equally distributed along the micro-macro continuum.

Three papers provided multi-dimensional explanations, while fourteen papers used the factors in the public spheres as the explanations, which was over 1.5 times the number of papers utilizing the private-sphere factors. Of these fourteen papers, seven discussed economic, political and social parameters at macro-level, including the mechanisms of the global economy (two papers), the structure of the labor market (two papers), the economic and political strategies of nation-state building (two papers), and social disparities (one paper). And no preference was shown for either economic or political and social factors. The other seven papers discussed the elements in the micro-public dimension, and more weight was given to the economic aspect - five papers discussed the influence of individuals' employment or the productive role and characteristics of enterprises, and one paper shifted the attention from production to consumption by analyzing the impacts of individuals' consumption preference behavior. The remaining paper examined the effects of education.

Nine papers placed the emphasis on the explanatory factors in the private sphere. At macro-level, patriarchy (one paper), the culture norms and institution of the patrilineal kinship system (three papers), and the field and habitus of everyday life in rural communities (one paper) were highlighted as key underlying forces. As for micro-level factors, three papers focused on a single, but different, subject, that is, family strategies, the individual's experiences in marriage and the family, and reproductive behavior within marriage. The informal social network was treated as the influencing factor in the fourth paper. Obviously, the micro-private explanatory factors were centered on family life.

To sum up, empirical studies on gender and women in *Sociological Studies* over the past 12 years have searched for explanations in the public spheres, within which, macro-level and micro-level factors have been given almost equal weight. For the macro-public dimension, the global and national political, economic and social factors featured as common ground for explaining gender-related or women-related issues. In the micro-public dimension, the emphasis was obviously on the influence of economic factors.





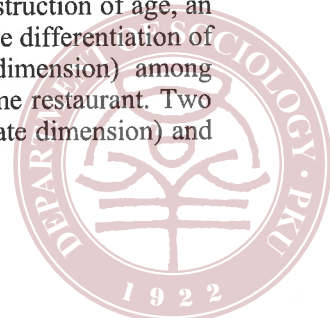
### Moving Toward Multi-Dimensional Analysis

Taking both the research topics and the explanatory approaches into consideration, one or more dimensions can be involved in research. In one-dimensional research, the issues addressed and the explanations offered are confined to elements within the same dimension. In contrast, a multi-dimensional analysis looks for answers beyond the dimension in which the to-be-explained phenomena belong. The empirical research published in *Sociological Studies* from 2000 to 2012 revealed a tendency to move from one-dimensional analysis toward multi-dimensional analysis. Among the 26 papers, nine included only one dimension in their analyses, and seven of the nine were published before 2005. In contrast, only three papers involving two dimensions in the analyses were published before 2005. The other nine papers that featured two-dimensional analysis and all five papers that featured three-dimensional analysis were published after 2005.

Further examination of the research that has incorporated multi-dimensional analyses revealed that the analytical approaches across different dimensions were concentrated in certain directions. Among the 12 papers related to two dimensions, eight papers were about the impact of macro-level factors on micro-level outcomes. Specifically, four papers focused on how the factors in the macro-private dimension, e.g., cultural norms, gender roles and habitus, could lead to phenomena such as the gendered division of responsibility for caring for elderly parents, “son preference” in fertility behavior, and domestic violence, in the micro-private dimension. Three papers examined the effects of macro-level factors on micro-level outcomes in the public spheres, centering on structural or institutional factors, such as the labor market and the political strategies of state building, and demonstrating their influence on women’s labor force participation and the gender income gap. One paper focused on the influence of the factors in the macro-public dimension on the micro-private dimension, to show how hierarchical social structures shaped the bodies and health of individuals.

In the case of the other four papers that included two dimensions, the analyses were limited to micro-level, but the direction of the analyses was two-way. Two papers considered the influence of factors in the micro-public dimension on phenomena in the micro-private dimension, that is, how women’s economic activities, including production and consumption, affected their fertility, desire and identity. The other two papers examined influences in the opposite direction: one investigated how declining fertility has led to an increase in women’s educational achievements, and the other dealt with women’s social networks and their impact on the gender segregation of occupation.

The macro-to-micro analytical approach was even more prominent in the papers involving three dimensions. One paper presented a discussion on how the integration of national economic policies and women’s liberation strategies (macro-public dimension) created and maintained the gendered division of labor in cotton production (micro-public dimension) and inside the home (micro-private dimension). One paper examined the way that the gendered construction of age, an element belonging to the macro-private dimension, resulted in the differentiation of labor (micro-public dimension) and identity (micro-private dimension) among female migrants of different ages who were working in the same restaurant. Two papers looked at the dilemmatic identity of women (micro-private dimension) and



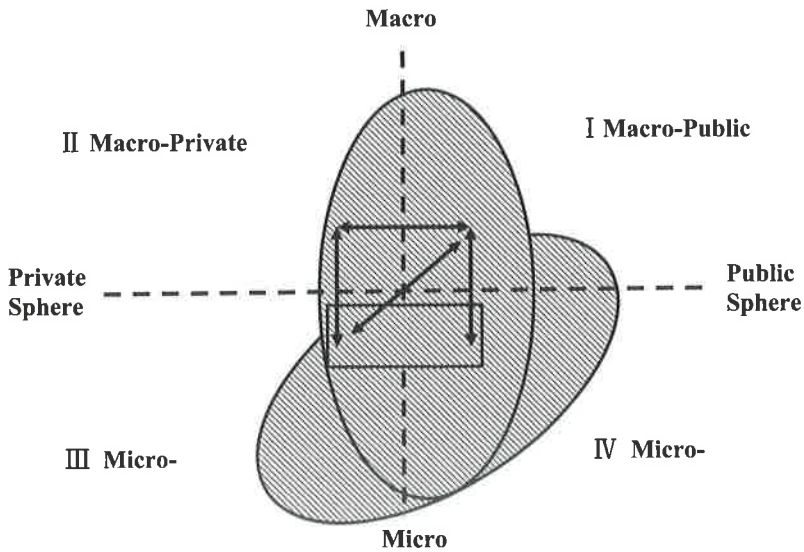
attributed it to the joint influence of factors in the macro-public dimension (i.e., the state or the career system) and those in the macro-private dimension (i.e., the cultural norms on women's roles within the family) or the micro-private dimension (i.e., family strategies). The fifth paper investigated the effects of labor market segmentation (macro-public dimension) and women's human capital (micro-public dimension) on the gender wage gap (micro-public dimension). All five papers targeted the micro-level phenomena and relied on macro-level factors to explain those phenomena.

To sum up, since 2005, multi-dimensional analysis has become more common in the papers published in *Sociological Studies*. Over two-thirds of the multi-dimensional research involved two dimensional analyses, and under one-third of the papers involved three dimensional analyses. Despite the increasing attention given to multi-dimensional analyses, most of this research was focused on the impact of macro-level factors on micro-level phenomena. In the few papers that examined the influence of micro-level factors, the scope was confined to the micro-level, i.e., the discussions were either oriented towards the influence of micro-public factors on micro-private phenomena or vice-versa. It can therefore be seen that the multi-dimensional analyses of sociological gender studies are mainly conducted in the macro-to-micro direction.

The analytical framework for sociological gender studies was employed to conduct a detailed examination of the empirical studies on gender and women that were published in *Sociological Studies* from 2000 to 2012 (when the number of such studies in the journal increased and stabilized) reveals specific characteristics of sociological gender studies. Generally speaking, current gender studies are not evenly distributed in terms of the four analytical dimensions and the interactions between and among these dimensions. Phenomena at the micro-level are more likely to be selected as research topics than those at the macro-level. More emphasis is placed on elements in the public spheres than those in the private spheres when providing explanations. While multi-dimensional analyses have outnumbered one-dimensional analyses since 2005, the impacts of macro-level factors on micro-level phenomena are given more attention than those in the other direction. These characteristics are illustrated in Figure 3. The grey ellipses in the diagram represent the areas that have been stressed in current gender studies. The arrows boxed in the rectangle represent the dominant directions in multi-dimensional analyses.



Figure 3: Characteristics of Gender Studies in Sociological Studies



### Strengths and Weaknesses of Gender Studies in *Sociological Studies*: A Summary

The displayed characteristics of sociological gender studies do, of course have their strengths. Firstly, due to the popularity of micro-level phenomena as research topics, the empirical studies are based on ordinary people's daily lives and experiences. Consequently, researchers are highly sensitive to newly emerging social factors related to gender. For example, some researchers noticed that, contrary to the traditional rules of the patrilineal family system, married daughters are becoming more involved in supporting their elderly parents in rural areas. This prompted the researchers to look into the process that constructed the new ethical principles governing daughters' provision of support for their parents. Second, the emphasis on the elements in the public spheres as explanatory factors shows how private troubles are virtually shaped by public issues. This is a helpful and powerful approach used to disclose the institutional and structural forces underlying topics related to gender and/or women. Third, the recent trend toward multi-dimensional analysis will deepen our understanding of the multiplicity, complexity and interactivity of gender systems in the context of China.

Nevertheless, some weaknesses can be observed in current sociological gender studies in China. First, there is a lack of direct inspection of macro-level gender issues in contemporary China. Macro-level topics that are considered worth examining include, but are not limited to, the gendered consequences of the apparently "gender-neutral" institutions and policies, especially those that actually place women in a disadvantaged position. Changes in discourses and attitudes on



gender and/or women also deserve more attention. Second, even in the case of the micro-level topics, current studies are largely concentrated on certain areas - employment, education, and the family. It is essential that future studies look beyond these areas and expand the scope of research topics at micro-level. Third, the direct influences of the private spheres, especially elements other than the family, are basically overlooked when analyzing gender outcomes. And last but not least, although the dominance of the macro-to-micro approach in multi-dimensional analysis underscores the constraints imposed by social structure or institutions, the agency of actors is given less attention. The dialectical relationships between and among the different dimensions of gender analysis are therefore far from precise. Those weaknesses also imply that there are many promising research areas for sociological gender studies in China in the future.

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**Appendix: The List of Empirical Studies on Gender Published in *Sociological Studies: 2000-2012***

Author(s)	Title	Year of Publication
Tong Xin (佟新)	Production and Reproduction of Unequal Gender Relationships: A Study on Domestic Violence in China (不平等性别关系的生产与再生产--对中国家庭暴力的分析)	2000
Xiao Dong (笑冬)	The Last Generation of Traditional Mothers-in-Law? (最后一代婆婆?)	2002
Xu Minmin (许敏敏)	Stepping out of the Private Sphere: Rural Women's Role in the Family-Factor and Their Social Status (走出私人领域--从农村妇女在家庭工厂中的作用看妇女地位)	2002
You Danzhen & Zheng Zhenzhen (尤丹珍、郑丹丹)	An Analysis of the Fertility Desire of Migrant Rural Women: An Empirical Study of Anhui and Sichuan Province (农村外出妇女的生育意愿分析--安徽、四川的实证研究)	2002
Huang Hemingxiong, Zhou Houping & Gong Shumei (黄何明雄、周厚萍、龚淑媚)	Gender in Provision of Family Care for Elderly Parents: A Case Study in Hong Kong (老年父母家庭照顾中的性别研究概观--以香港的个案研究为例)	2003
Huang Yingying & Pan Suiming (黄盈盈、潘绥铭)	Female Sex-Workers in the Labor Market in Northeast China (中国东北地区劳动力市场中的女性性工作者)	2003
Tan Lin, Susan Short & Liu Hui (谭琳、苏珊·萧特、刘惠)	"Double Outsiders": An Analysis of the Marriage Experiences of Migrant Women ("双重外来者"的生活--女性婚姻移民的生活经历分析)	2003
Tong Xin (佟新)	The Coincidence of Social Structure and Historical Event: A History of Chinese Female Workers (社会结构与历史事件的契合--中国女工的历史命运)	2003
Li Ruojiang (李若建)	Women Workers: The Replacement of A Social Class (女工：一个重生的社会阶层)	2004



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Liu Linping & Guo Zhijian (刘林平、郭志坚)	Enterprises, Local Governments, Collective Bargaining and the Protection of Rights for Immigrant Female Workers (企业性质、政府缺位、集体协商与外来女工的权益保障)	2004
Gao Xiaoxian (高小贤)	„Yinhua Match”: The Gender Division (of labor) of Rural Women in 1950s (“银花赛”：20世纪50年代农村妇女的性别分工)	2005
Wang Wenqing & Pan Suiming (王文卿、潘绥铭)	Reexamination of the “Son Preference” culture (男孩偏好的再考察)	2005
Jin Yihong (金一虹)	Re-thinking the “Iron Girls”: Gender and Labor during the Cultural Revolution (“铁姑娘”再思考--中国文化大革命期间的社会性别与劳动)	2006
Hong Dayong & Xiao Chenyang (洪大用、肖晨阳)	Sociological Analysis of Gender Difference in Environmental Concerns (环境关心的性别差异分析)	2007
Siumi Maria Tam (谭少薇)	Practicing Gender and Practicing Medicine: ‘Tradition’ and ‘Modernity’ in Post-Colonial Hong Kong (性别和医学的实践--香港后殖民时代的“传统”与“现代”)	2007
Zheng Dandan (郑丹丹)	The Shaping Process of Body and Its Gender Implications: The Phenomenological Analysis and Gender Interpretation of Awen’s Disease (身体的社会形塑与性别象征--对阿文的疾病现象学分析及性别解读)	2007
Li Chunling & Lishi (李春玲、李实)	Increasing Gender Income Gap and Its Dynamics in China: Market Competition or Sex Discrimination (市场竞争还是性别歧视--收入性别差异扩大趋势及其原因解释)	2008
Wang Tianfu, Lai Yangen & Li Bobai (王天夫、赖扬恩、李博柏)	The Trend towards a Gender Income Gap in Urban China: 1995-2003 (城市性别收入差异及其演变：1995-2003)	2008
Yu Xiaomin & Yi Pan (余晓敏、潘毅)	The Consumer Society and Re-making the Subjectivities of the New Generation of Dagongmei (消费社会与“新生代打工妹”的主体性再造)	2008



He Mingjie (何明洁)	The Labor Process and the Differentiation of Sisterhood: A Case Study on Female Migrants in China (劳动与姐妹分化: “和记”生产政体个案研究)	2009
Tang Can, Ma Chunhua & Shi Jinqun (唐灿、马春华、石金群)	Ethics and Fairness in Daughters' Supporting their Parents' Families: Gender Study on Intergenerational Family Relations in Rural Areas of Eastern Zhejiang Province (女儿赡养的伦理与公平--浙东农村家庭代际关系的性别考察)	2009
Wu Yuxiao & Wu Xiaogang (吴愈晓、吴晓刚)	Occupational Gender Segregation and the Gender Wage Gap in Urban China (城镇的职业性别隔离与收入分层)	2009
Ye Hua & Wu Xiaogang (叶华、吴晓刚)	Declining Fertility and the Trend towards Gender Inequality in Education in China (生育率下降与中国男女教育的平等化趋势)	2011
Deng Feng & Ding Xiaohao (邓峰、丁小浩)	Human Capital, Labor Market Segmentation and the Gender Income Gap (人力资本、劳动力市场分割与性别收入差距)	2012
Sun Ruiyi & Tao Shuangbin (孙睿谄、陶双宾)	The Expropriation of Body: A Research on Physical Training and Modernity (身体的征用--一项关于体育与现代性的研究)	2012
Tong Mei (董梅)	Social Networks and Female Occupational Segregation (社会网络与女性职业性别隔离)	2012

