
Thoughts on Gender Equality and Antagonism

The late US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said, men's rights and women's rights are not antagonistic, one overriding the other, but in a state of mutual empowering and intertwining, constituting the two sides of the coin called human rights.

Since ancient times, human evolution and social progress have been reliant on the cooperative work between men and women. In Chinese, the character for “surname” features a radical meaning “woman”, the maternal side, linking its etymological origin back to the times of matriarchal society in which the mother's rights preceded everything else in a clan, while men were subordinate to women. Later came the patriarchal era when men took over production, social engagement and the full disposal of fortune, reversing the norm of surname adoption that consequently subordinated any woman to a male family member—her father before marriage and her husband thereafter. Indeed, the continuous improvement in social productivity at that time accelerated social progress and transformation, and revolutionized relations of production. Against such a backdrop, a changed social division of labor between men and women was reasonable and necessary.

In her sociological monograph *The Second Sex*, French thinker Simone de Beauvoir writes, “she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her”. True, though. But with the further advancement of the society, physical power has become less prominent in increasing productivity, while intellectual capacity is more frequently demanded in production and social life. The “difference” between genders is thus minimizing.

Thanks to the rapid development of China, more women benefit intellectually from the society and grow into an autonomous-minded and economically self-reliant person. Men and women, previously divided by gender difference, are gradually heading towards the commonality of humanity. The two sexes are no longer the only points of departures for any discussion. More attention is being paid to the individual “human”, each and every human of unique characters.

Modern society is keen on discussing women's rights, but inequality confronts both men and women. What we should be seeking is not rights for one particular gender group, but equality and win-win cooperation between the two sexes. This is exactly what Shu Ting writes about love in the poem *To the Oak*: in a relationship, no one clings to the other, idolizes the other, sets off the majesty of the other or supports the other by way of self-sacrifice. Instead, both the woman and the man are powerful and independent in their own way. While sharing a common

faith and attitude, they remain independent of each other, like the ceiba and the oak in the poem—standing side by side, saluting to each other, sharing moments of happiness and difficulty, and staying distinct but forever together.

Everyone matters in one way or another. The key to being oneself is not to blindly hold onto one character or stance forever, but to identify through self-exploration one's strengths and weaknesses, and then exploit the former for self-actualization and the benefits of others, while constantly working on the latter.

Some people take being oneself as doing whatever they want despite voices of objection from outside and getting hypnotized in their own world completely. This is a narrow-minded point of view.

Japanese fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto once said, “The thing ‘self’ is invisible. It hits something else and bounces back to understand ‘self’. Therefore, collide with something very strong, terrible, and high-level, and then you know what ‘self’ is”.

In a similar vein, our “self” is constantly being perceived, bounced back, responded to and accepted when colliding and confronting with external things that upset or even frighten us.

Only after we perfect our “self” in this way, can we obtain freedom and loosen up in loving others. Then love, the greatest yet most underestimated transformative force in the world, can help to resolve the dispute and ensure equal rights to both men and women.

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