**上海外国语大学 2020 –2021学年第一学期**

**期末考试试卷**

课程名称 中国文化概要

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**Please write an essay about 500-800 words in English, explaining a cultural phenomenon in China. A comparative perspective is encouraged.**

***Men Surrender While Women Do Not* (男降女不降)**

Since the Manchu conquest of Han-majority China in the 17th century, there has been a Chinese saying that (Han Chinese) men surrender (to Manchu rulers) while (Han Chinese) women do not. At first glance, it seems a praise to women’s moral courage and strong sense of dignity. But the facts behind the words tell another story.

After the Manchu established the Qing dynasty and began to rule previously Ming-dynasty people of Han ethnicity, they ordered the ethnic group to abandon its customs and adopt Manchu practices in an effort to conquer Han Chinese people psychologically and culturally. Among a series of orders, the most representative and most unacceptable to Han people are the queue order and the foot-binding ban.

According to the queue order, all Han males were required to wear the Manchu men’s hairstyle, shaving their forehead and tying the rest of the hair into a queue. Apart from a conspicuous symbol of surrender which comes with great humiliation, such hairstyle change is contradictory to Han people’s Confucianist belief that one’s body, including hair, comes from his parents and should never be damaged. However, faced with death threats, the vast majority of Han Chinese men shaved their hair or, in other words, surrendered.

For Han females, the most representative order was a ban on foot-binding. Such Han custom refers to the practice of tightly binding and mutilating young girls’ feet in order to make them small and sexually attractive. Despite repeatedly issued prohibitions, foot-binding was still popular among Han women. It even spread from upper-class families to the entire Han population after the ban was enforced. Arguably, the attempts at stopping the practice contributed to its prevalence instead. By refusing to abandon the Han custom of foot-binding, as the saying goes, Han women did not surrender.

Therefore, the statement “men surrender while women do not” means, in essence, men shaved their hair while women kept adopting the tradition of foot-binding. From modern perspectives, it is counter-intuitive that self-harm can be interpreted as unyielding and be highly praised. To understand this interpretation, we need to first examine the original purpose of the saying.

This expression came into existence along with nine other statements, including “adults surrender while children do not,” “gentry, merchants, scholar-officials and common people surrender while beggars do not” and even “living people surrender while dead people do not.” Rather than compliments to those who did not surrender, the set of sayings emphasizes that *not all* Han Chinese people surrendered to Manchu rulers and thus the Han identify and dignity were preserved. “Men surrender while women do not” is the most famous one among the ten and served as a slogan mobilizing the Han Chinese nation during the late Qing dynasty and, later, the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

Nevertheless, judging from the real meaning of “men surrender while women do not,” we can see mass atrocities against innocent little girls, as well as the cowardice and ridiculousness of men who interpreted foot-binding as unyieldingness of the Chinese nation and took comfort from it.

Rather than a symbol of disobedience, the failure to prohibit foot-binding reflects women’s subordination to men. On the one hand, in a then deeply patriarchal society, women enjoyed little bodily autonomy. Their bodies belonged to their patrilineal families or husbands. How should they treat their bodies were largely determined by men. It is therefore untrue and absurd to conclude that Han women chose to keep their custom by binding their feet. On the other hand, the foot-binding ban was not enforced as strictly as the queue order because of Han women’s inferiority to men. Fully aware of Han men’s firm control over women, Manchu rulers were much more relaxed about women with bound feet than men with unshaved hair. Just as children, beggars and dead people, women had little influence over politics, economy and the dominant culture. They were not perceived as potential threats to the Manchu reign, and were therefore allowed to “not surrender.”

To sum up, the Chinese saying “men surrender while women do not” means that, during the transition from the Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty, most Chinese Han men were forced to wear the Manchu hairstyle of queue while Han women continued to bind their feet despite the ban. Prone to misunderstanding as a compliment to women, the expression was historically used to praise the unyielding spirit of the entire Han Chinese nation. Such positive interpretation ignores the lack of agency of women who “did not surrender” and the unlimited pain and inhumane mutilations they suffered.