
On Gender Equality and Antagonism

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the late U.S. Supreme Court justice, once remarked: “men’s rights and women’s rights are not polar opposites but intertwined and mutually reinforcing. They are both human rights issues, simply from two sides.”

Since ancient times, human evolution and social progress have been dependent on cooperation between men and women. The Chinese character *xing*, meaning family name, consists of “women” and “birth”, indicating a child follows his or her mother’s family name, which was due to the then matriarchal society where women reigned supreme, and men were subordinate to women. That naming convention shifted when the management of production and property was transferred to the hands of men, and patriarchy, as a result, came to dominate the society and women became secondary to men before and after marriage. Therefore, apart from promoting social progress and development, continuous productivity growth also revolutionized the relations of production, making changes in the social division of labor both reasonable and necessary under that circumstance.

The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her sociological work *The Second Sex* that she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her. However, as society progresses, productivity growth is no longer solely driven by material abundance. Intelligence, instead, is playing a greater role in production and life, thus weakening gender differentiation.

Rapid development in China has allowed more women to benefit from the knowledge society, enabling them to become independent both consciously and financially. As a result, men and women have gradually gone beyond gender differences to common humanity. Instead of thinking from a single-gender perspective, people focus more on the uniqueness of *each person*.

Modern society is concerned with feminism, but in fact, men could all the same fall victim to gender inequalities. What we seek shouldn’t be one-sided men’s or women’s

rights, but equality and win-win cooperation. In her poem *To the Oak Tree*, Shu Ting, a modern Chinese poet, described what love should be: love isn't about one clings to, praises, dignifies, or nourishes another. Instead, love involves two equally strong and independent individuals who share the same beliefs and values. Just like a ceiba tree and an oak tree standing shoulder to shoulder, they are both independent, yet still respectful and sharing, seemingly always apart, but also forever interdependent.

Everyone is unique. To achieve self-actualization is not to remain obstinate about one's own personality and position but to grow into a better self by exploring one's own strengths, overcoming weaknesses, and use your advantage to create greater value for others.

Some people believe that to be oneself is to willfully indulge in one's own world to the exclusion of everything else. This in fact is a narrow view of being oneself.

In the eyes of the Japanese fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto, there's no such thing as self. It's invisible, fluid, and dynamic. You only get to know where your boundary is when you bounce into something.

It is in the process of constantly colliding and clashing with external things that may be uncomfortable, and even fearful that our self is recognized, responded, refined, and accepted.

Only after we have bettered ourselves, will we be free to love others. Love, in fact, is the most powerful, yet most underestimated force for change, for only with love, can we keep our rights in check and in balance.