

Reflections on gender equality and gender antagonism

The late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said: “It is not women’s liberation, it is women’s and men’s liberation.” She believed that men’s rights and women’s rights are not opposed to but intertwined with one another, as they both are human rights.

Since ancient times, the evolution of humans and the development of society have depended upon the cooperation of both men and women. The Chinese character for “surname” (*xìng*; 姓) begins with the component “female” (*nǚ*; 女) for men were considered subordinate to women, who held authority and power among families in a matriarchal society. When a patriarchal society took over, the right to production and property transitioned to men. Women, on the other hand, became subjugated to their father before marriage and to their husband after marriage. Additionally, children would be given their father’s surname instead of their mother’s surname. Thus, the advancement of productive force resulted in not only social progress and development but also new relations of production. Given the social context in those days, it was reasonable and necessary to embrace the social division of labor.

French thinker Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her seminal work on sociology *The Second Sex*: “She [woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her.” However, with the development of society, material force is no longer the main productive force. Intelligence has started to play an increasing role in production and people’s lives. As a result, gender differences have gradually become less crucial in many aspects of modern society.

In fast-growing China, more and more women have benefited from living in a knowledge society, growing to be self-aware and economically independent. Gradually, men and women have come to be viewed as common humans rather than being distinguished solely on the basis of their biological gender. People no longer see just a man or woman but tend to view each person as an individual with unique characters.

Nowadays, people are passionate about feminism. Yet, both men and women are likely to be subject to inequality. Therefore, the goal is not to protect men’s rights or women’s rights in the narrow sense. Instead, what matters is equal rights and cooperation between men and women. This understanding of gender resonates with the love portrayed in *To the Oak Tree* (*zhì xiàng shù*; 致

橡树) written by Chinese poet SHU Ting: love is neither about one being inferior and clinging to the other nor about one praising and nurturing the other. Instead, love grows between two individuals who are independent and hold similar beliefs and attitudes. It is the same as that of oak and ceiba, independently standing together yet always sharing life and being respectful to each other; seemingly always apart, yet forever interdependent.

Everyone is born unique. The key to “being yourself” is by no means holding on to your own disposition and standpoint. The key is to understand your strengths and weaknesses through self-exploration and to use your strengths in pursuit of self-accomplishment and creating value for others and society.

Some people see “being yourself” in a self-centered way that you can do anything you want without care or concern for the opinions of others; indulging in one's own world. This implies the narrowness of the concept.

Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto believes the self cannot be seen, as it is not “out there” but fluid and colliding. Only when you come to a collision will you become aware of the boundary.

Constantly, in and of ourselves, the “self” can be sensed, returned, responded to, and accepted only when we are struggling with things that discomfort and scare us in the outside world.

Only when we have acquired the “self” can we have freedom and fearlessly love other people. And “love” is the most powerful yet underestimated revolutionary force. Because only with love can we exercise and balance rights well.

