“女人”-- 重新的定義 ("Woman"—A Re-definition): A Critical Conversation about New Feminism with St. Pope John Paul II and Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen in light of Chinese Women’s Experiences

by

Fiona May Kay Li

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Fiona May Kay Li
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University of Toronto and the University of St. Michael’s College
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Abstract
In this thesis, I address the question of whether New Feminism, as articulated by Pope John Paul II, is relevant and liberative for two particular groups of Chinese women: migrant Mainland women and working women in both Mainland China and Hong Kong. I argue that New Feminism, with its emphasis on the “feminine genius” and universal statements are unhelpful for the women in my two case studies. In order to present a theological anthropology that is liberative to the two groups of women, I place Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, a Catholic feminist virtue ethicist, in dialogue with John Paul II. By incorporating certain aspects of Yuen’s theology into New Feminism, a more responsible and empowering theological anthropology will emerge for the women in my two case studies.
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Chapter 1

Two Sides of the Same Coin?

In this thesis I will be exploring the question of whether New Feminism can be relevant and liberative for two groups of Chinese women: migrant Mainland women and working women in both Mainland China and Hong Kong.

In this chapter I will be establishing the context to the research question through a brief look at gender distinction in the Chinese culture and Catholic theology. Afterwards I will explain to the reader why a dialogue with New Feminism is necessary if the goal is to empower women. After establishing these preliminary contexts, I will present to the reader my thesis statement, followed by the working definition of “empowerment” for this thesis. I will describe my methodology for approaching this research question. I will conclude this chapter with an outline of the thesis.

1.1 Gender Distinction in Chinese Culture and Catholic Theology:

In contemporary times, Liu Xiaoqing notes that because Chinese women have already experienced “gender neutrality” in history with the Communist Regime, feminists feel it is necessary to focus on gender differences, thus making a claim over their gender identity.1 During the Cultural Revolution, the ideal image of womanhood was “iron girls.” As such it emphasized women’s participation in traditionally masculine jobs and roles, such as female tractor drivers.2 During the Cultural Revolution, women were, “depicted with desexualized or even ‘masculinized’ bodies, strong arm muscles and robust physiques.”3 According to Zhongxin Sun, this “gender neutrality” did not last long after the end of the Mao era, and the

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1 Liu Xiaoqing, “From Larva to Butterfly: Sophia in Ding Ling’s Miss Sophia’s Diary and Coco in Wei Hui’s Shanghai Baby,” Asian Journal of Women’s Studies 17, no. 4 (2011): 74.
3 Sun, “Worker, Woman, Mother,” 13-4.
pendulum swung hard towards the other end of the spectrum: towards gender distinction and emphasis on femininity.⁴

While historically Chinese women from Hong Kong did not directly experience the “gender neutrality” theme, as Hong Kong was part of the British Empire at that time, gender distinction can still be seen in the attitudes that people hold or expectations that are placed on women. Kara Chan and Yu Leung Ng in their article about Hong Kong girls and gender roles and expectations report about previous studies done about the adherence to gender stereotypes by adolescents (ages 10, 13, and 16). Those studies found that the participants,

perceived distinctly different desirable personality traits for girls and boys. Qualities important for girls included being kind and approachable, conforming to others’ needs, being generous, and being presentable. Qualities important for boys included being active, ambitious, brave, career-minded, and persevering.⁵

One can also see the adherence of these stereotypes in adults. Anne Marie Francesco and Margaret A. Shaffer argue in their study of adult women in the workplace in Hong Kong that there are, “perceived gender differences in working as a manager…”⁶ For example, female managers are expected to be, “less assertive. Women are also seen as less decisive than men in decision making and in some cases were considered to be ‘bitchy,’ emotional, and lacking drive and commitment.”⁷ Many of these distinctions, as I will discuss more fully in chapter 3 of this study, can be traced to the influence of classical Confucianism.

This theme of gender distinction is also seen in the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the writings of Pope John Paul II. In his November 21, 1979 General Audience, he argues that masculinity/man and femininity/woman are, “two complementary

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⁴ Ibid, 14.
⁶ Anne Marie Francesco and Margaret A. Shaffer, “Working Women in Hong Kong: Neiuh Keuhng Yahn or Oppressed Class?,” in Mainstreaming Gender in Hong Kong Society, ed. Fanny M. Cheung and Eleanor Holroyd (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2009), 316-7.
⁷ Ibid, 317.
dimensions of self-consciousness and self-determination and, at the same time, two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body.” This theme of gender distinctiveness is in other documents penned by Pope John Paul II, or written during his papacy. According to him, an inherent part of woman’s nature is her “feminine genius”. The “feminine genius”, which will be discussed in detail at a later time, is the innate ability that all women have by virtue of their gender, to love and accept the Other, and give herself as a gift to the Other. He further argues in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, which is the document for the Catholic Church on the theology of women, that women should avoid appropriating male characteristics. He writes:

In the name of liberation from male ‘domination’, women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’. There is well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not ‘reach fulfilment’, but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness*.10

While New Feminism has its positive aspects, such as highlighting the equal dignity of women and the value of motherhood,11 it also needs to be read against the unfortunate history of patriarchy in Roman Catholicism. In Roman Catholicism, women make up, in theory, half the population. Yet when one looks at the official hierarchy of the Church, one is struck by the obvious lack of women in positions of authority. And when one looks at what the Church has to offer to the world about women, one is further struck by the biased and, at times erroneous, statements about women, especially prior to the modern era. For example, Augustine writes, “Woman does not possess the image of God in herself….But as far as the man is concerned, he is by himself alone the image of God just as fully and completely…”12

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10 MD, part 4, section 10.
11 MD part 3, section 6; part 6.
It is within this dual context that I would like to investigate whether New Feminism can be empowering for Chinese women. This thesis will examine this question by placing John Paul II’s theology of women into dialogue with a theology that is attentive to the lived experiences of Chinese women. With its focus on gender role divisions, a society influenced by Confucianism becomes the most compatible society and culture for New Feminism. I argue that both New Feminism and Confucianism promote a particular image of womanhood onto Chinese women that can be used to inhibit their flourishing, instead of empowering them.

1.2 Why New Feminism?

I believe that one of the main reasons New Feminism needs to be critically discussed is that it is an authoritative teaching on the meaning, role, and the very being of women, which is often accepted without question because of patriarchy. According to Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is, “…a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”13 With regards to this discussion on the acceptance of New Feminism as authoritative, the “system of social structures”14 that is at play is the magisterial hierarchy. Those who are in positions of authority are ordained celibate males: the Pope, the bishops, and priests. Women have little position or status within this culture of magisterial hierarchy. As such, the majority of Chinese women and the stories that they tell would hold little or no authority in this system. In fact, Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, the feminist theologian I will be using in this thesis as an interlocutor with Pope John Paul II, as a lay woman would also not be seen as authoritative in this system or as a possible resource for discussion. Moreover, the idea that there needs to be a theology on women, implies patriarchy, if not male-centrism. When Pope Francis said “a theology of woman” in his interview back in 2013, Phyllis Zagano reported that many people were upset with his use of that phrase. “Most stated the obvious: Your Holiness, women are people, too. Theological anthropology fully covers both halves of the church.”15 And this statement can also be applied to Pope John Paul II as he was...

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14 Ibid
the author of *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the Church’s “theology of woman”. While it is appreciated that statements, documents, and letters, are written about women and their vocation, to have a separate theology on women demonstrates that women are inherently different from men, and that men are the norm, as they do not need such special treatment.

Ivy A. Helman notes that *Mulieris Dignitatem*, “…was ‘the first in the history of the church’ specifically to address what it means according to the official teachings of the church to be human, to be a female, and the nature of women’s divine vocation.” \(^\text{16}\) *Mulieris Dignitatem* is not only a document that speaks about womanhood, but needs to be correctly understood as the primary document in the context of magisterial teaching. As such it holds weight in any of the Church’s further discussions on womanhood. Furthermore, with the document’s author being the Pope, an office that many believe to be the highest authority on Catholic teachings, many would readily accept this document’s content without contention or hesitation.

Even though New Feminism has an official stamp of approval from the Vatican, in the sense that it is supported and propagated by a Pope, Pope John Paul II’s New Feminism, and the concept of gender complementarity, are no strangers to criticism. A more detailed analysis on New Feminism and the Pope’s writing, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, can be found in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

1.3 Thesis statement:

In light of Chinese women’s experience, in particular those women who are migrants from Mainland China to Hong Kong, and those women who are workers in both Mainland China and Hong Kong, I believe that Pope John Paul II’s articulation of New Feminism is insufficient to address their experiences of womanhood and personhood. I believe that by applying the thought of Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen in the area of theological anthropology, one can have a more empowering understanding of womanhood that will take into consideration the experiences of these and other marginalized Chinese women.

1.4 Definition of Empowerment:

In my thesis statement, I mention that a more empowering understanding of womanhood needs to occur for women. In this section, I would like to briefly discuss what I mean by “empowerment”. According to Suet Lin Hung, empowerment entails, “changes in the state of mind: feeling worthy and competent, perceiving power and control, a more positive and potent sense of self, knowledge, and capacity.”17

In connection to Hung’s argument that empowerment means that one knows the self better, Aristotle Papanikolaou argues that,

Empowerment implies a relational notion of the self, realized not through dominance or ‘self-definition vis-à-vis the proximate ‘other’, but through the mutual realization of subjectivity, of ‘coming ‘to’ oneself’ in relations that are open. Through relations of mutual empowerment, the self becomes ‘centred’.18

This is extremely important in this discussion because of the heavy emphasis on relationality and interpersonal relationships, primarily the marital relationship, that Pope John Paul II places in his New Feminism. As such, I believe that “self-knowledge”, “self-discovery”, and “one’s relationship with the self” are all integral parts of empowerment, and that actions or ideas that allow for such developments are seen in this thesis as “empowering” and a necessary part of theological anthropology.

1.5 Methodology

Fundamentally, this thesis will be employing the methodology of feminist theology. Elizabeth Johnson notes that, “…foundational to feminist liberation theology across the board is the specific experience of protest against the suffering caused by sexism and a turning to the flourishing of women in all their concrete femaleness.”19 She writes of three “interrelated tasks” of feminist theological methodology: “it critically analyzes inherited oppressions, searches for alternative wisdom and suppressed history, and risks new

interpretations of the tradition in conversation with women’s lives.” From these three general tasks of feminist theological methodology, the most pertinent one to my thesis is the second task: to seek the suppressed history. This recovery of the Chinese women’s stories and experiences will ground my thesis, and allow me to examine how New Feminism may be both liberative (compatible with their realities) and oppressive (promoting a rationale for their oppression). When New Feminism acts as the latter, then women cannot express their full humanity, become who they want to be, and find the meaning of womanhood in their experiences. Johnson writes that the goal of the second task is, “…to discover dormant theological themes and neglected history that will contribute to a future of full personhood for women.” Thus, the second task is necessary methodologically for my thesis, as by giving these women a voice, a fuller understanding of and the affirmation of their womanhood can be achieved.

While this thesis does incorporate aspects of Western feminism, it is also distinctively “Chinese” in its approach. An important quality of “Chinese feminism” is that it has, “taken great pains to stress that it has no wish to disadvantage or denigrate men or take men as main adversary, and in doing so, it seeks to distinguish itself from Western feminism and what it perceives as its oppositional stance”. This can be seen in not only the rejection of nuquan zhuyi (woman rightism) and the acceptance of nuxing zhuyi (womanism), but also in the 2015 Spring Festival Gala in Beijing. Zhaohui Liu and Robin Dahling explain that the former concept is a form of feminism that is transmitted from Japan to China, and is primarily focused on politics. In comparison, the latter concept is seen as, “a more egalitarian approach that was less antagonistic and set out to distinguish women strictly based on their sex.” The following account of the Gala is taken from Liu and Dahling’s article, “The Quieter Side of Chinese Feminism: The Feminist Phenomenology of Li Yu’s Films”.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
Described as a “sexist disaster”, the show came under fire from numerous quarters for its misogynistic treatment and toxic portrayal of Chinese women, notably comparing masculine women (nvhanzi) with ‘goddesses’ (nvshen), maligning fat women, and depreciating the value of left-over/left-behind women (sheng nv) and twice-married women. The discourse quickly became hostile, with women decrying the chauvinist nature of the programs and skits, and the opposition accusing them of over-reacting. In many ways, the reaction to the overt feminist backlash was possibly a reaction to the misunderstandings (or mis-associations) of traditional Chinese feminism as some saw it as a western kind of ‘feminist Orientalism’, with increasing calls to shun ‘Western values’. However, the response can be seen as anti-West as much as anti-feminist.

Thus, in order to present a response that Chinese persons would be acceptable of, it must not paint men as the enemy (which radical Western feminism does), and ensure that “no one loses anything and that only gains are made…”

Furthermore, as this thesis is an attempt to work with Asian women’s theology (feminist theology), I will also be using the Asian feminist theological method as written about by Chung Hyun Kyung. She explains that this methodology was developed by the Women’s Committee of EATWOT (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians), and it consists of, “listening to individual’s situations, social analysis, and then theological analysis.” I believe that the first step of the Asian women’s theological methodology is similar to the second task of Western feminist theology, discussed above, as they both speak of the need to listen to the context and lived experiences of women. Chung describes this first step as “women’s storytelling”. This oral transmission of story is a distinctly female way of knowing as, “the written, literary world has belonged to privileged males.”

An example of this method of “storytelling” can be found in Hung’s article “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong”, and one can see the effectiveness of this method; it is a method where women are given a voice to share their experience and their testament is treated with respect and seen as valuable. Firstly, the method of storytelling allows the storytellers, the women, to be recognized as “…‘whole persons’ who were shaped

24 Ibid, 3.
26 Chung Hyun Kyung, Struggle to be the Sun Again (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 104.
27 Ibid.
by their experiences since birth, thus exposing possibilities of alternative identities, recognizing their strengths, knowledge, and skills in the various aspects of their lives.”

In addition, Hung writes,

> Acknowledging life experiences of the immigrants before their migration can reveal their strengths and personal agency. Fostering mutual support by identifying commonalities among members is significant in challenging the internalized powerlessness. The dominant discourses about new-arrival women, shaped by gender and ethnicity, are identified and contested whereas discriminatory policy practices are challenged.

While not all of my sources are first-hand accounts/stories from Chinese women, the sources I will consult and depend on for my thesis are written by Chinese women about Chinese women. As such, while they are not primary resources, they do express the interests and concerns of Chinese women living within China and can ground my subsequent social and theological analysis.

I will also be using the method of comparison and contrast, primarily with the writings of Pope John Paul II and Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen. While a fuller introduction of Yuen and her writings will be done in chapter 3, I believe a brief introduction is necessary here. She is a post-doctoral fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her areas of research interest include feminist theology and virtue ethics. While she does not speak explicitly about theological anthropology, as a virtue ethicist she is concerned about and argues for a distinctive understanding of the human person. By looking at her arguments and writings, I will retrieve aspects of her theology that I believe will contribute greatly to theological anthropology.

Yuen’s virtue ethics and her contribution to theological anthropology are important for this discussion because of her particular context. She is a Chinese Catholic woman, situated within Hong Kong, and speaks about the experiences of marginalized women, such as migrant women or ethnic minority women. And she offers interpretations of both Catholic Social Teachings (CST) and Confucian teachings that can help empower and affirm these women’s dignity and value. In light of her context, her methodology, and her theology that

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28 Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 9-10.
29 Ibid, 14.
addresses the needs and concerns of these marginalized women, I believe her theology would demonstrate the aspects that New Feminism may be lacking and that these women need in order to feel empowered.

While noting that there are similarities between Yuen’s theology and Pope John Paul II’s theological anthropology, it will be argued that: Yuen’s holistic approach to the human person contrasts with John Paul II’s biblical and biological approach; Yuen’s emphasis on agency challenges John Paul II’s understanding of the two dimensions of women’s vocation (motherhood and virginity), and his argument that women are forbidden from becoming priests by virtue of their womanhood; Yuen’s methodology contrasts with John Paul II’s biblical and classical approach to theology; and Yuen’s acceptance of differences (what I will call the “this and that” option) challenges Pope John Paul II’s view of “womanhood” as universal. These different components of Yuen’s theology will open space for dialogue and a renewed feminist theological anthropology.

1.6 Procedure

My first chapter is the introduction of my thesis. It has laid out the methodology, and the importance of New Feminism. I have explained the necessity of studying the experiences of Chinese women, and of placing them in dialogue with New Feminism.

In chapter two, I present the concept of New Feminism, specifically through the writings of St. Pope John Paul II. Afterwards I present the criticisms Western feminist theologians have posed against St. Pope John Paul II’s theological anthropology.

In chapter three, I present the context of Chinese women. I will first explore the history of feminism in China, especially the Communist Party’s move towards “gender equality”. This

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31 MD part 6, section 18-21; MD part 7, section 26.
32 A critique of his approach, which unfortunately lacks the voices and experiences of women, can be found in chapter 3.
will also include a brief examination on how particular teachings of Confucianism such as filial piety have been used to oppress women. To highlight the current experiences of Chinese women, I will be highlighting two case studies: first, Chinese women who are currently employed (situated in both China and Hong Kong); second, women who migrate from mainland China to Hong Kong for various reasons. I will conclude this chapter by introducing Yuen as a Catholic virtue ethicist by looking at her theological writings and highlighting aspects of her theology that may contribute to theological anthropology.

In chapter four, I engage in a critical conversation with both Yuen and Pope John Paul II, by highlighting their similarities and their differences. It is through their differences that I will show how New Feminism is not entirely compatible with the experiences of Chinese women, and that Yuen’s writings provide a supplement—that is, possible remedies and areas of focus that need to be addressed by New Feminism when speaking about these Chinese women.

In chapter five, I draw my conclusions. I will be extrapolating from Yuen’s discussion on Catholic virtues and social teachings and applying those principles onto theological anthropology. I will be highlighting key aspects from Yuen’s differences with Pope John Paul II, as these aspects are what I believe these Chinese women need from theological anthropology. I will also be demonstrating how these aspects will empower these women and affirm their experiences of womanhood.

In chapter six, I conclude my thesis by summarizing the similarities and differences between the two authors, and my main argument that New Feminism as it currently stands cannot address the real experiences of this certain group of Chinese women, and thus cannot affirm their womanhood. I will also speak on the various implications that emerge out of my thesis.
Chapter 2
New Feminism and John Paul II

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church held a very negative understanding of women. While there was not a fully developed, distinct theological anthropology for women until modern Catholicism, early Christian thinkers’ negative views of women can be seen through looking at their discussions on Genesis 2-3, and on the topics of *imago dei* and sin. This can be seen in the writings of Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, Ambrose, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas.

This brief discussion on the historical view of women in the Roman Catholic Church is important, as it highlights and situates our current discussion. It demonstrates not only the negative stance and misunderstandings the Church held against women, but also how important and ground-breaking John Paul II’s writings about women are. According to Helman, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, “…was ‘the first in the history of the church’ specifically to address what it means *according to the official teachings of the church* to be human, to be a female, and the nature of women’s divine vocation.”

In this chapter I will be focusing on Pope John Paul II’s articulation of New Feminism. I will first outline some key aspects of the Pope’s theology through a close look at *Mulieris Dignitatem*. I will focus on: equality of all humans, the “self-gift-of-self”, marriage as the lens through which the Pope views humans and the man-woman relationship, the concepts of “feminine genius” and masculine-feminine complementarity, and women’s innate vocation as motherhood. This will be followed by an exploration of the criticisms Western feminist theologians have raised about the concept of New Feminism. They raise the following issues: New Feminism’s lack of relevance to women’s lived experiences, the use of gender

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34 This opinion is also reflected by Doris M. Kieser, as she writes, “The Roman Catholic theological tradition has long expressed an awkward distrust of females.” (Doris M. Kieser, *Catholic Sexual Theology and Adolescent Girls: Embodied Flourishing*, electronic copy (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 57).
36 Helman, *Women and the Vatican*, 100 [emphasis mine].
essentialism, New Feminism’s focus on motherhood, its promotion of the “self-gift-of-self”, and the continual perpetrating of negative dichotomies.

2.1 New Feminism according to John Paul II:

In this section I will be primarily looking at John Paul II’s *Mulieris Dignitatem* as this is the document many refer to when speaking about the Church’s “theology of woman”. I will also, however, be including in this conversation other writings from the Church, John Paul II, and supporters of New Feminism, which will help elucidate or expand on his arguments from MD. These secondary documents include the Pope’s 1995 *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*, several of John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* talks, and writings from Prudence Allen, a philosophical anthropologist and influential interpreter of John Paul II.

Before I begin analyzing John Paul II’s writings, I would like to reiterate that John Paul II’s writings did not exist in a vacuum. That is to say, John Paul II’s writings and thoughts are influenced by others before him, particularly Edith Stein and Hans Von Balthasar. Rakoczy

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37 MD.
notes that John Paul II’s anthropology is highly influenced by and is very similar with Von Balthasar’s essentialist anthropology.\textsuperscript{42} While John Paul II denies being an essentialist,\textsuperscript{43} his anthropology displays characteristics of essentialist thinking.\textsuperscript{44} In this case, as we shall see, the “underlying essence” under discussion is “femininity” and “the feminine.”

2.2 \textit{Mulieris Dignitatem} – On the Dignity of Women:

(a) Equality – Common “I”:

In all his documents pertaining to theological anthropology, such as \textit{Mulieris Dignitatem}, John Paul II always affirms the equal dignity shared by both genders, male and female, as created in the image and likeness of God. And as such, he roots the human person and his discussion in Genesis 1-3. A key point that he raises, and I believe is crucial for this discussion, is that the biblical narrative of Genesis 2:23 demonstrates that, “\textit{The woman is another ‘I’ in a common humanity.}”\textsuperscript{45} John Paul II believes that this common humanity entails our createdness, our innate rationality, and also, possibly the most important, interpersonal relationality.\textsuperscript{46} Allen argues that his assertion that members of both genders are “another ‘I’”, “defends the first premise of what I call ‘integral gender complementarity,’ namely the fundamental equality of dignity and worth of the two complement beings.”\textsuperscript{47}

(b) “Self-gift-of-self”:

Another key point of notice is that throughout \textit{MD}, John Paul II consistently reminds the reader that the person truly discovers him/herself through the sincere gift of the self.\textsuperscript{48} This sincere gift of the self is best exemplified, according to the Pope, in the spousal love between

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{MD}, part 3, section 6.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Allen, “\textit{Mulieris Dignitatem} Twenty Years Later,” 21.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{MD}, part 3, section 7.
a man and a woman. In his January 9th, 16th, and February 6th General Audiences, he speaks about this Eden-ic ability between the man and the woman to see one another as gifts and to give the self to the Other as a gift as well. This reciprocal gifting of the self to the other is part of the nuptial meaning of the body and the spousal love each partner is to have for the other. It is within this context that the Pope sees this, the ability to perform self-gift-of-self, as the meaning of being created in the image and likeness of God. It is also within this context that Michele M. Schumacher argues against the accusation of biological determinism and reductionism. She writes: “the ‘nuptial meaning’ of the body – its capacity to express self-giving love – ensures the self-determination of the human subject as implied by his or her consciousness and freedom. It is this consciousness…which allows the human person to make of himself or herself a gift for the other.”

(c) Marriage as an operative lens:

In connection to the “nuptial meaning” of the body, John Paul II focuses on the marital relationship. In fact, his Theology of the Body series begins with Jesus’ teaching on God’s originally intention for marriage to be indissoluble. Furthermore in MD, whenever he speaks of relationships, he speaks of the man-woman relationship, and the “unity of the two”. Allen affirms this interpretation, as she also notes that for John Paul II, “marriage is the first and most fundamental dimension of this call [to interpersonal communion].” As such, one can see the primacy of the marital relationship; it is the lens through which he speaks of man and woman’s proper relationship to one another, and the standard to which all other relationships must meet.

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51 Ibid.
53 Starting from MD, part 4, section 9.
55 For example: MD part 3, section 6.
(d) The “Feminine Genius” and “Masculine” & “Feminine”- two ways of being:

It should be noted that the Pope does not explain what he considers as (the) “masculine” or (the) “feminine”. For example, in MD part 3, section 7, he uses those terms without any definition, “In this history [of humanity]…there develops in humanity itself, in accordance with God’s will, the integration of what is ‘masculine’ and what is ‘feminine’.” That being said, one can deduce that one way in which the Pope is using these terms is to indicate the two ways of “being” human. This is seen in his November 7, 1979 General Audience as part of his Theology of the Body series. He explains to the crowd that, “The latter [original solitude of “man”] is based on masculinity and femininity, as if on two different ‘incarnations,’ that is, on two ways of ‘being a body’…”

This reading of Pope John Paul II is affirmed by Sara Butler who, in support of John Paul II, argues that, “When Pope Saint John Paul II writes about complementarity, he is not thinking only of personality traits; he has in mind the two different ways of ‘being a body’ that constitute a person as either a man or a woman.”

In his discussion on Original Sin and Eve’s consequence, “He shall rule over you”, he notes that there are many scenarios, both biblical and historical, where the woman is placed in a disadvantageous position because this biblical passage became reality. And while he reiterates his belief that both man and woman are created with equal dignity, he also has a warning for women,

Consequently, even the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words ‘He shall rule over you’ (Gen 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the ‘masculinization’ of women. In the name of liberation from male ‘domination’, women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’. There is well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not ‘reach fulfilment’, but instead will deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness.

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58 MD, part 3, section 7.
60 Sara Butler, “Some Thoughts on the Theology of Woman in the Church,” in Promise and Challenge: Catholic Women, Reflect on Feminism, Complementarity, and the Church, ed. Mary Rice Hasson (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc, 2015), 43. In this quote, one can also see that she affirms the reading that “motherhood” is the primary vocation for women.
61 MD, part 4, section 10.
62 Ibid.
According to Allen, there are two fundamental principles that govern “New Feminism”. The first principle is that, “the method of new feminism should not imitate what he [Pope John Paul II] called ‘models of male domination’ to achieve its goals….this precept harkens back to the call to overcome the effects of original sin in its particular male forms.”

This warning to women to avoid appropriating male (domination) systems is also seen in the CDF’s Letter to the Bishops. Interestingly, Allen asserts, “He [Pope John Paul II] did not then, nor did he ever, suggest that a man may have femininity or a woman masculinity.” As such, I would argue that the Pope’s warning to women is not simply about the appropriation of male systems of domination, but it is also about women appropriating male characteristics in their daily lives.

The second principle of New Feminism is that, “the method of new feminism should tap into women’s genius with its root of being predisposed to pay attention to the person in all circumstances.” While Pope John Paul II uses the terms “women’s genius” or the “feminine genius”, he does not explicitly state what he means by that in MD. In his Letter to Women, however, one catches a glimpse of its meaning. The Pope argues for the recognition of ordinary women, as they, “...reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation....women acknowledge the person....they try to go out to them and help them.” From this description, one can see that the feminine genius entails the gift of service to others, and the ability to see the person for who they are, in his/her entirety. On the basis of “service”, I would also add the concept of “self-gift-of-self”, as John Paul II sees that as connected to a woman’s ability to welcome and be receptive of the Other.

(e) Vocations – the “self-gift-of-self”:

As mentioned before, the Pope sees that the ability to offer a “self-gift-of-self” is clearly situated within the marital relationship. And it is within this context that he introduces

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63 Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity,” 104.
64 Letter to the Bishops, part 1, section 2.
65 Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity,” 97.
66 Ibid, 104.
67 Letter to Women, section 12; Allen, “Mulieris Dignitatem Twenty Years Later,” 30.
68 MD, part 4, section 11; part 6, section 18.
the two types of vocations for women: motherhood (physical marriage and biological motherhood) and virginity (spiritual marriage with God and spiritual motherhood). The Pope argues that these two “dimensions” of women’s vocation are perfectly found in Mary. When speaking about “motherhood”, the Pope links it back to God’s eternal generation: God’s “fatherhood”. As such he argues that,

Although it is not possible to attribute human qualities to the eternal generation of the Word of God, and although the divine fatherhood does not possess ‘masculine’ characteristics in a physical sense, we must nevertheless seek in God the absolute model of all ‘generation’ among human beings….Thus every element of human generation which is proper to man, and every element which is proper to woman, namely human ‘fatherhood’ and ‘motherhood’, bears within itself a likeness to, or analogy with the divine ‘generating; and with that ‘fatherhood’ which in God is ‘totally different’, that is, completely spiritual and divine in essence…

One can observe that the idea of “generating” is very important for the Pope’s theological anthropology. At the very foundational level, to be imago dei is to literally image God; humanity shares attributes with God that is not part of God’s divinity. And since John Paul II starts with this image of the “generating” God, it means that to speak about theological anthropology, one must first start with the concept of humanity having this innate nature of “generating” by virtue of imaging God. Allen also makes this connection as she locates John Paul II’s “call to (interpersonal) communion” in the context and imitation of the communion of the Triune God. Thus one can conclude that the idea and image of “generating” is crucial for John Paul II’s God-talk and theological anthropology.

When speaking about motherhood, he argues that, “Motherhood implies from the beginning a special openness to the new person: and this is precisely the woman’s ‘part’. In this openness, in conceiving and giving birth to a child, the woman ‘discovers herself through a sincere gift of self’.” He further asserts his belief that,

Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift….On the woman’s part, this fact is linked in
a special way to ‘a sincere gift of self’. Mary’s words at the Annunciation – ‘Let it be to me according to your word’ – signify the woman’s readiness for the gift of self and her readiness to accept a new life….Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman’s womb….This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings – not only towards her own child but every human being – which profoundly marks the woman’s personality.74

After looking at the biological motherhood, he turns to the second vocation of woman, which is also found in the person of Mary: virginity.75 He sees a woman’s decision to remain a virgin (for God’s Kingdom) as a way of “confirming” her personhood. And she manifests her “femininity” by giving herself to God as a gift (much like how a woman would give herself to her husband as a gift, thus connecting virginity to marriage).76 Furthermore, he also connects virginity with spiritual motherhood.77 Interestingly he states, “For virginity does not deprive a woman of her prerogatives.”78 This is interesting as he seems to see motherhood as a natural right that all women have, despite her sexual status. He states that just as spousal love between a man and a woman causes them to be open to love others, especially their children, the spousal love between the virgin and God also opens them up to others as well.79 Through spiritual motherhood, a virgin would still participate in a readily self-gift-of-self through the caring of the most vulnerable in society.80 In the CDF’s Letter to the Bishops, in light of spiritual and physical motherhood, the CDF reminds bishops of the great and crucial role women play in both the familial and civil realms, with regards to, “human relationships and caring for others.”81 Because of this, the CDF argues that it is important to not only recognize women’s work both in society and especially in the family, but also allow for women to work within the home.82

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid, part 6, section 20.
76 Ibid, part 6, section 20-1.
77 Ibid, part 6, section 21.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 MD, part 6, section 21; Allen, “Mulieris Dignitatem Twenty Years Late,” 33.
81 Letter to the Bishops, part 3, section 13
Lastly, John Paul II speaks of the “marriage” between Christ and the Church, and how this union is to be the example for all spousal unions. He argues that this vision of marriage liberates women from patriarchy as women are no longer solely subjected in the marriage; it is to be a mutual subjection.\(^83\) In his discussion on Christ the bridegroom, John Paul II emphasizes the maleness of Christ, and reiterates how Christ, the man, treated his contemporary women with proper dignity, “the originality which distinguishes women from men, all the richness lavished upon women in the mystery of creation.”\(^84\) John Paul II argues that it is out of this respect for women’s dignity and vocation that Christ did not choose women as Apostles.\(^85\)

In the concluding portion of the document, John Paul II reaffirms women’s dignity and role throughout history, and explains that, “…the dignity of women is measured by the order of love…”\(^86\) Women’s vocations are also rooted in love, and are affected by the fact that, “God entrusts the human being to her in a special way.”\(^87\) He ends the document by giving thanks to all the different types of women in the world and their contributions to the Church and society.\(^88\)

### 2.3 Critiques of New Feminism:

While there are many critics of John Paul II, I will be presenting here a small sample of the critiques theologians have raised against his New Feminism. The critiques are as follows: New Feminism’s lack of relevance to women’s lived experience, the use of gender essentialism, New Feminism’s focus on motherhood, its promotion of the “self-gift-of-self”, and the continual perpetrating of negative dichotomies. Through a look at these criticisms

\(^{83}\) ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html, part 3, section 23. Henceforth this document will be referred to in this thesis and in the footnotes as FC.

\(^{84}\) MD, part 7, section 24; Allen, “Mulieris Dignitatem Twenty Years Later,” 35-6.

\(^{85}\) Ibid, part 7, section 26.

\(^{86}\) Ibid, part 8, section 29.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) Ibid, part 9, section 31.
raised by scholars, one will see that while New Feminism has its positive aspects, such as affirming the goodness of motherhood, it also has deficiencies.

(a) Lack of relevance to lived experience:

Luke Timothy Johnson sees John Paul II’s theology as disconnected to the lived realities and experiences of both the body and sex as he writes, “John Paul II thinks of himself as doing ‘phenomenology,’ but seems never to look at actual human experience....Solemn pronouncements are made on the basis of textual exegesis rather than living experience.” He further argues that for a “theology of the body”, the Pope leaves much out about the body (such as our body as the mediator of experiences and relationships) and reduces the body and the “theology of the body” to (heteronormative) sexuality and reproduction. Elizabeth Johnson is of the opinion that the gender complementary model of theological anthropology that the Church currently employs is unfaithful to lived experiences as it,...

...rigidly predetermines the qualities each [gender] should cultivate and the roles each can play. Apart from naiveté about its own social conditioning, its reliance on stereotypes, and the denial of the wholeness of human experience that it mandates, this position functions as a smokescreen for the subordination of women since by its definition women are always relegated to the private, passive realm.

Anne E. Carr echoes such sentiments as she also notices how this type of anthropology, “denies the wholeness of human experience and the hopes of women themselves.” In questioning the “universality” of the Pope’s claims about women, especially about their “ontological nature”, Donal Dorr argues that, “We live in a world where gradation is of the very nature of things....This indicates that to speak of the ‘ontological nature’ of women

89 New Feminism’s alternative understanding of motherhood as important and inherent to women’s nature, affirms its value in light of societal view that only women’s work outside of the home should be praised. This sentiment is seen in FC part 3, section 23; Letter to the Bishops part 3, section 13.
91 Kieser, Catholic Sexual Theology and Adolescent Girls, 67.
93 Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is, 154.
simply does not take account of the complexity of reality.”

Moreover, Katie Grimes highlights the ways the Pope does not take science seriously in her article, “Theology of Whose Body?” She argues that the Pope does not start with (women’s) experience, and imposes a particular reality onto all women as a “must”.

(b) Gender Essentialism:

A common theme that these theologians highlight is the idea that John Paul II’s theological anthropology employs concepts from gender essentialism. Christine Gudorf sees the Vatican as operating within an essentialist point of view, as sexual complementarity is, “one of the more common forms that essentialism has taken.” Carr further demonstrates the complications that arise from operating with a “gender complementary” lens, “In this vision of humanity, the activities of each sex are rigidly limited, as is the scope of human freedom, judgment, and responsibility over nature.” As such, it can be interpreted that when operating within the lens of “complementarity”, both men and women are systematically oppressed: they are unable to fully express themselves because of the gender-appropriate roles and behaviours they must follow. When one is not able to fully be him/herself, the development of the self is stunted and one’s self-identity is skewed. Lisa Sowle Cahill argues, as do I, that this kind of understanding of men and women is problematic if it leads to arbitrary divisions of gender roles and behaviours/character traits. Rosemary Radford Ruether adds that,

There is no valid biological basis for labeling certain psychic capacities, such as reason, ‘masculine’ and others, such as intuition, ‘feminine.’ To put it bluntly, there is no biological connection between male gonads and the

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99 Carr, Transforming Grace, 123, cited in Gonzalez, Created in God’s Image, 113.
100 This was also noticed by Gonzalez, Created in God’s Image, 113.
capacity to reason. Likewise, there is no biological connection between female sexual organs and the capacity to be intuitive, caring, or nurturing.\textsuperscript{102}

As such the essentialist school of thought is dangerous as it legitimates the ascribing of characteristics onto people, even to all the members of the same gender, on the basis of what one perceives to be appropriate for that biology. Ruether also points to the fact that what is understood by a particular person as “feminine” or “masculine”, is influenced by one’s culture.\textsuperscript{103}

In section 14 of the CDF’s \textit{Letter to the Bishops}, the CDF argues that while the virtues that are deemed “feminine” in this and other documents are technically “human” values and virtues, it is women who are more “attuned” to them, thus these virtues are labelled as “feminine”.\textsuperscript{104} While this may not be the intention of the CDF, the drawn out implication of that statement is that women are expected to embody and exhibit these values, while men are not expected to do so because they are not naturally “attuned” to these values as women are.\textsuperscript{105} Interestingly, this idea that women are the “reminder” of these values, which they are naturally “attuned” to, is reflected in Romantic Feminism. In her book, \textit{Sexism and God-Talk}, Ruether outlines the different types of Feminism and critiques their approach to anthropology.\textsuperscript{106} She explains that in Romantic Feminism, woman, “represents, in a purer and less ambiguous way, the original goodness of humanity as \textit{imago dei}….Women…are \textit{less fallen} than men. They are more capable of altruistic, loving, self-giving life, less prone to the sins of egoism that are a sinful but necessary part of historical existence.”\textsuperscript{107} It should also be noted that John Paul II and the CDF also display another symptom of Romantic Feminism: they all articulate a theological anthropology that is rooted in gender complementarity.\textsuperscript{108}

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\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Letter to the Bishops}, part 3, section 14.

\textsuperscript{105} Dorr, “Themes and Theologies in Catholic Social Teaching over Fifty Years,” 149.

\textsuperscript{106} Ruether, \textit{Sexism and God-Talk}, 93-115.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, 105.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 104.
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Elizabeth Johnson also notes this connection as she argues that the Church views women as, “too good to get involved in the messiness of the public realm.”

Looking in particular at the Vatican’s *Letter to the Beijing Conference*, penned by John Paul II, Doris Buss notes a contradiction in the Vatican’s stance, “While rejecting the phrase ‘biological determinism’, the Vatican nonetheless uses ‘complementarity’ to signify a sexual division of labour in which women’s reproductive capacity means they will be ‘mothers’ and ‘wives’.” Interestingly, Buss points out how in the Vatican’s Letter, the Church was against the idea of “equal rights”, because, in Buss’s words, the Church found that, “Equality…undermined the important differences between men and women.” This stance is potentially dangerous, as it allows for communities to prohibit certain rights to women stating that it goes contrary to their “womanhood”, while affirming that they respect women’s special dignity, which is why they cannot allow for women to have “men’s” rights. Elizabeth Johnson argues that this dualistic theological anthropology, “functions as a smokescreen for the subordination of women since by its definition women are always relegated to the private, passive realm.”

(c) Motherhood:

Hilkert notes that most feminists applaud and see the value of the image of motherhood, but oppose the, “dualistic anthropology that reduces women to their maternal function….they recognize that the concept of motherhood is socially constructed and needs to be critically appropriated in a way that does not reinforce patriarchal roles and assumptions.” This could be interpreted to mean that while motherhood is part of a woman’s reality, the definition of motherhood, i.e. what motherhood “looks” like, how mothers should behave,
what motherhood means, etc., is defined by the particular culture, upbringing, and societal norms the person is within. I believe this principle can also be applied to “womanhood”. In light of this criticism, it can be seen that John Paul II’s universalization of women’s experience of both motherhood and womanhood as a man demonstrates not only the lack of context in his writing, but also the danger of his universalization. Women are now called to follow one model of womanhood and motherhood, whether it be spiritual or physical. As mentioned before, Dorr also calls into question the “universality” of the Pope’s claims about women, and argues that to speak about a universal “ontological nature” of women would not be reflective of women’s reality.\textsuperscript{114}

It should also be noted that this emphasis on the family, children, and home are not spoken about in terms of men; that is to say, while these prescriptions are mentioned in light of women, the Pope or the CDF never mention the role of men or fathers in the home and with their children.\textsuperscript{115} This theme of women’s “natural” connection with the family and the home is also noted by Gudorf in her critique of papal documents on the theology of women, “The emotionalism ascribed to women (understood as opposite male rationality) made them the heart of the family, the maker of the home, who needed to be protected from the inhumane society outside the home…”\textsuperscript{116} In connection to the role of “fathers”, Allen does note that the Church has not provided a “genius of men”, but argues that it would most likely follow in the example of St. Joseph: “adopting, protecting, and providing.”\textsuperscript{117} While this is a good step towards expanding the Church’s discussion on fatherhood and the “genius of men”, one can also see the continual perpetuation of stereotypes that play in this discussion. The concepts of “protecting” and “providing”, the latter will be particularly seen in the following chapter about Chinese working women, are words that have been traditionally and stereotypically used for men.

\textsuperscript{114} Dorr, “Themes and Theologies in Catholic Social Teaching over Fifty Years,” 148.
\textsuperscript{115} This claim is made more on the grounds of abstentia. That is to say, in the history of theological anthropology, the focus was never on the role of “fatherhood”, but rather how “man” is the image of God. While the topic of women need special discussion and documents, men do not “need” one as it is the “norm”: everything that has been said about theological anthropology throughout the history of Catholicism can be applied directly to men.
\textsuperscript{116} Gudorf, “Strategic Essentialism and Vatican Policy,” 233.
\textsuperscript{117} Allen, “\textit{Mulieris Dignitatem} Twenty Years Later,” 30.
(d) Self-gift-of-self:

Connected to the idea of motherhood, according to John Paul II, is the “nuptial meaning” of the body: the self-gift-of-self that women are called to perform. This is potentially dangerous for the woman as that makes her vulnerable to everyone; she is to not hold back when loving the “other” (giving her full self) and to not have barriers between her and the “other” (fully accepting the other without qualms) in a world that is post-Fall. Given that the world is not as Eden-esque, as John Paul II realizes when he speaks about the dangers women face in the real world, it is not entirely fair of him to ask women to behave as though everyone who is in a relationship with her will treat her as Adam treated Eve prior to the Fall. Kieser also questions whether a complete, “self-giving love is even possible (or wise/prudent).”

While Aristotle Papanikolaou does not deal with John Paul II’s New Feminism and the innate characteristic of “self-gift-of-self” in women, he does speak about kenosis, which I see as a similar concept with the “self-gift-of-self”. Kenosis, as defined by Papanikolaou, is, “self-emptying”. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as, “the unconditional love of God for creation manifested in the descent of the Son of the Father for the sake of salvation.” On the other hand, and this is one that feminist theologians tend to highlight, it can be understood as, “obedience, humility and self-sacrifice….the notion of kenosis as self-sacrificial love, emerged as an ethical imperative within the Christian tradition.” According to Papanikolaou, feminists have raised the point that the latter interpretation of kenosis has been used to keep women in disadvantageous positions, such as in abuse cases. “Less tragic uses of kenosis have denied women full dignity with men by relegating them to socially constructed, gender-specific roles.” I see a similarity between John Paul II’s argument that women (and on a less degree, men) should readily give themselves to others, and this latter

118 MD part 4, section 11; part 6, section 18.
119 MD, part 3, section 10; part 5, section 13-4 (one can see from the examples of biblical women the types of discrimination and oppression they experienced); part 6, section 19.
120 This is similarly discussed in: Kieser, Catholic Sexual Theology and Adolescent Girls, 67-8.
121 Ibid, 67.
122 Papanikolaou, “Person, Kenosis and Abuse,” 41.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
understanding of *kenosis*, because they both highlight the idea of self-sacrifice. In both cases, the woman is emptying herself; the woman is giving herself completely to be a gift to the other, effectively emptying herself, fully accepting the other and placing the other as the priority in her life. As will be seen in the following chapter, this is the reality of the Chinese women involved in this thesis. Despite whether they are employed or not, women are given the added responsibility of caring for the family and the home. Their time and energy are stretched thin; they are constantly showing an unconditional love and service for the other, at times at the detriment of the self. As such I agree with Kieser’s questioning of whether this requirement of women is wise or prudent in light of reality. As will be stated in the next chapter, I believe an adequate theological anthropology will advise and remind the women that they are of value, and that they need to care for the self as well. While loving and serving others are important, the self is just as important.

(e) Continual perpetrating of negative dichotomies:

While this may not have been John Paul II’s intention, as one has to remember that he can be classified as a Romantic Feminist, his belief that models of dominance are a “male” thing, while a feminine model of being would be one of acceptance and love, further perpetuates ill relationships between the two genders. In *MD*, he argues that, “It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more.” And in his *Letter to Women*, he also writes, “Perhaps more than men, women acknowledge the person, because they see persons with their hearts.” He effectively draws attention to the strengths of women, but unfortunately (implicitly) maligns men with his statements. It must be recognized that Allen argues that these statements should not be read in that light, and that one should take into

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126 *MD* part 6, section 18.
128 A fuller discussion of this can be found in Chapter 3, specifically in the case study of working women.
130 *MD*, part 6, section 18.
131 *Letter to Women*, section 12.
consideration John Paul II’s understanding of gender complementarity. Nevertheless, other scholars also highlight this problem.

Sara Butler, for example, writes,

Magisterial documents sometimes contrast the positive feminine with the negative masculine in a way that does not respect men. For example, women are exhorted, ‘Hold back the hand of man who, in a moment of folly, might attempt to destroy human civilization,’ or are told that without the witness of their lives and values ‘humanity would be closed in self-sufficiency, dreams of power and the drama of violence!’ Surely it is necessary to construct a positive account of maleness and masculinity if the collaboration of the sexes is expected to enrich the Church with the distinctive gifts of each.

Furthermore, it should be noted that women participate and perpetrate “male” dominance over other women and men. Allen provides an example from Mary Ann Glendon of this situation: women in the first world are imitating the male systems of domination, in the form of colonialism, onto third-world women. “Following this line of thought, Mary Ann Glendon has addressed the modern tendency of women in developed countries to impose their positions on contraception, abortion, and women’s reproduction on third-world women as a kind of new colonialism.” While it can rightly be said that such domination is best seen in history through the domination of men over women, I would argue that it is not strictly a “male” domination, as John Paul II seems to suggest with the aforementioned dichotomy.

2.4 Conclusion:

In summary, while John Paul II and his supporters see him and his writing as moving away from such an essentialist reading of gender, many scholars disagree. While he may allow for women to develop themselves, to take part in leadership positions and to have careers outside of the home, he places emphasis on women’s role in the family. That is to say, no matter what contribution women makes in this society, what matters is the family, and her position in it. For countries, communities, and cultures that are far from this sort of understanding of

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132 For greater detail on these four roots, please read Allen, “Philosophy of Relation in John Paul II’s New Feminism,” 67-104.
133 Butler, “Some Thoughts on the Theology of Woman in the Church,” 44.
womanhood, the Pope’s exhortation may seem harmless. But in a culture and nation that stresses the family and woman’s role in it, it is extremely dangerous, as it supports the nation’s ghettoing of women.

As will be seen in the following chapter, many elements of Chinese tradition and society also emphasize women’s role in the family. This focus can be traced back to certain teachings of Confucianism, which can be interpreted and used in an oppressive manner towards women. It is within this context that my research question emerges: Can New Feminism, with its particular emphases on motherhood and the “self-gift-of-self”, empower Chinese women who are situated in a context that already expects women to be self-less and be the sole bearer of familial responsibilities? This will be further explored in the following chapter.
Chapter 3

The Chinese Context, Chinese Women’s Experiences &

Mee-Yin Mary Yuen

In this chapter I will be focusing on the Chinese context. As I believe that there is a connection between Confucianism and some of the oppression that Chinese women experience, I will first present a brief description of Confucianism, and how I believe it can be used in an oppressive way towards women. Afterwards, I will briefly describe the recent history of feminism in China and Hong Kong individually, and then focus on the two main case studies: migrant women from mainland China to Hong Kong, and female workers in both China and Hong Kong. While this chapter may be rightly viewed as more sociological than theological, I believe that this discussion is necessary as it establishes the context of these women, and the history and culture of China and Hong Kong effectively demonstrates why this discussion of feminism, and in particular New Feminism, is necessary. In the latter part of the chapter I will formally introduce to the reader Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen and her contributions to virtue ethics, contextual theology and theological anthropology.

3.1 Confucianism

Confucianism is a branch of Chinese philosophy which grew out of the teachings of Confucius (born in 551 B.C.E), and his subsequent disciples and interpreters. Confucius was born and active during the decline of the Zhou dynasty (which started around 771 B.C.E, and effectively “broke” the unified “China” that existed under the Zhou dynasty into many feudal states), where he witnessed much political and social turmoil.\(^{135}\) As such, his teachings were responses to the violence and issues, such as sons overthrowing fathers, prevalent in his lifetime. While there are many important aspects to Confucianism, the aspect that has the most relevance to this thesis is “Filial piety”.

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Filial piety (孝) is described by Lee Dian Rainey as, “respect and reverence for one’s parents – this is then extended to one’s teachers and elders.”\textsuperscript{136} Filial piety can be completed by doing the following.

Confucius says, ‘A filial son serves his parents in the following ways: he offers them the utmost respect when at home; he serves them so as to give them the greatest joy; if they are ill, he feels the greatest anxiety; he is completely devastated at their funerals; when he sacrifices to them (as ancestors), he is completely reverent. If he can do these five things, we can say that he is able to serve his parents.’\textsuperscript{137}

While filial piety seems to be focused on the man-man relationship, Rainey points out that women have a role to play in filial piety as well. “Daughters too were expected to practice filial piety toward their parents and, once married, toward their in-laws…..sons owed filial duty to their mothers as well.”\textsuperscript{138} While theoretically these relationships are reciprocal and, “Each side of each relationship has mutual responsibilities”,\textsuperscript{139} in reality, “…over time all the privileges flowed to the first member of the relationships – father, older brother, husband, and ruler – and the responsibilities flowed to the second member – son, younger brother, wife, government minister.”\textsuperscript{140}

She also notes two minor problems with these five primary relationships: first, the key relationship is the father-son relationship, which becomes “a model for the others”; second, women are only implicitly present in one of these five relationships. The combination of these two aspects can lead one to view Confucianism as a male-centric system.\textsuperscript{141} This conclusion is also found in Chieh-Chen Bowen, et al.’s article, “Holding up half of the sky? Attitudes towards women as managers in the People’s Republic of China.” They write, “The clear and explicit preference for male children contained in his teaching remains a fundamental aspect of Chinese society.”\textsuperscript{142} This can be seen in the \textit{Book of Mencius}, where it

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 24.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 24.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 55.
is stated that, “There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the
greatest of them all.” While “posterity” can be interpreted to include daughters, the reality
is that only sons were considered to be heirs and descendants of a family. Historically, the
importance of a male heir can be seen in the practice of concubines. Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee
explains, “…taking a concubine when the original wife is infertile or fails to produce a male
heir is not just socially acceptable; it is, rather, a cultural imperative.” As such, one can see
that in both tradition and historical praxis that there is an emphasis on the male child, which
places women in disadvantageous positions. They are the less preferred children; their
importance is rooted in their reproductive abilities; their value is based on their ability to bear
male children for their husbands’ families. Sin Yee Chan echoes her agreement as she also
argues that patriarchy is rooted in Confucianism.

Looking at the five primary relationships, Sherry Mou argues that, “the only place for a
woman in this hierarchy is the role of a wife.” She notes that out of the 104 biographies of
women described by the first-century BCE Han Dynasty scholar Liu Xiang, only two of the
featured women are not married. Thus she concludes that, “the primary purpose of Lienu
zhuan (Liu Xiang’s book, The Biography of Women) is to reinforce the Confucian
hierarchy.” Rosenlee expands on this discussion as she states that in historical
Confucianism women’s sole place in society is as a wife, and marriage is her “rite of
passage” into personhood. As such it can be seen that traditionally and historically
“womanhood” has always been related to marriage in Confucian tradition. It is through
marriage that Chinese women gain an identity.

University Press, 2008), 75; Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee also cites this passage as the Confucian text that is
connected to the need and importance of a male heir. Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, Confucianism and Women: a
Philosophical Interpretation (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 123.
144 Rosenlee, Confucianism and Women, 122.
145 Rosenlee, Confucianism and Women, 123
146 Sin Yee Chan, “Gender and Relationship Roles in the Analects and the Mencius,” Asian Philosophy 10, no. 2
147 Sherry J. Mou, Gentlemen’s Prescriptions for Women’s Lives: A Thousand Years of Biographies of Chinese
148 Ibid.
149 Rosenlee, Confucianism and Women, 126-127.
Another important note is that many Confucian texts present the ideal that women are to be virtuous mothers. Mou agrees with this judgment as she writes that, in general, “By placing exemplary mothers in the first chapter, Lienu zhuan elevates motherhood to the highest ideal for Chinese women.”\footnote{Sherry J. Mou, Gentlemen’s Prescriptions for Women’s Lives, 38.} One quality that Mou notes about Liu Xiang’s description of a virtuous mother in his introduction to the first chapter, is that he uses language that would typically be used on “teachers” or would project the image of a “teacher”, on mothers.\footnote{Liu Xiang, translated by and cited in Mou, Gentlemen’s Prescriptions for Women’s Lives, 34.}

This equation of mothers as teachers is significant for this discussion as it depicts, “the mother’s essential role in a child’s education.”\footnote{Mou, Gentlemen’s Prescriptions for Women’s Lives, 35.} This will be further discussed in a later section of this chapter, but it is important to note that one can see a connection between Chinese tradition, history, and expectation of women with the contemporary women’s focus on their children’s education and the perspective that childrearing is the mother’s job. While these writings are historical, it is still important to look at these teachings as it demonstrates how Confucianism can be used as a tool to oppress women, such as the practice of allocating familial responsibilities to women.

3.2 Setting the contexts

To recap, I have outlined some of the ways Confucianism can be used to oppress women. In the following sections, I will be laying out the context for both Mainland China and Hong Kong in terms of women’s involvement in labour, and a brief look at some unique facets of “feminism” in contemporary China and Hong Kong.

a) Mainland China

Prior to the Communist party’s take-over in 1949, women were typically confined to more traditional roles, such as caring for their families. Jamie Burnett notes that these roles were, “enforced for centuries by Confucian teachings that instructed ‘it is a virtue if a woman has no ability’ and generally taught women to be subordinate to men.”\footnote{Jamie Burnett, “Women’s Employment Rights in China: Creating Harmony for Women in the Workplace,” Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies 17, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 292.} Even though things
improved for women when the Nationalist government took over the Dynastical government after the 1911 Revolution, it was still very difficult for working women because of three factors: first, there were fewer job opportunities for women, as many jobs were considered “not suitable” for women; second, women were generally paid less than their male counterparts; and third, women who pursued job opportunities outside the “home” were discriminated. Burnett explains that, they had to, “face overwhelming societal disapproval and were considered to be little better than prostitutes.”

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party came into power over China, and, “attempted to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and premature mortality, through modernization, land reform and abolition of private ownership.” One of the concerns of the Communist Party is the liberation of women from oppression and patriarchy. In fact, it is part of the Party’s constitution, Article 91, that women are equals in all aspect to men. And in 1954, the Communist Party gave women “full citizen” status. The Party’s stance on women can be summed up by a famous line from Mao Zedong, and subsequently a slogan for the Party: “Women hold up half the sky.” The Party saw that it is, “only through participation in social production would women achieve liberation”. That being said, it should be noted that while women participated more in the labour market after these positive political reforms, their participation was contingent on the “mood” of the Party. For example, during 1953-1957, China experienced an increase in unemployment, and so the Party advocated for women to return home. However, in 1958-1960, the Party encouraged women to participate in the labour force. Burnett argues that this was so that, “they [women] would take unskilled work and free male workers for skilled projects.”

Furthermore, there are also the less positive implications of the Communist Party’s assertion of women’s rights. Chen Yanru suggests that perhaps it is out of a need to respond to the

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154 Ibid, 293.
157 Ibid, 294.
oppression of women and traditional society, that, “during the Maoist era women were pushed to another extreme of being portrayed merely as instruments of the Socialist revolution and construction, in a sense forgetting their gender or that they were women.”  

Furthermore, Chen explains that the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) has been dubbed the “gender-less age”, because both men and women wore the same, “uniform-like outfits with baggy trousers that totally concealed the physiological attributes of the female gender.” Burnett also notes this “defeminisation” of women during the Cultural Revolution, and calls it, “socialist androgyny”. Interestingly, scholars have noted that this placement of men and masculinity as the norm is still present in contemporary China and its labour market, “Due to a lack of sustained feminist discourse, it is taken for granted that equal rights means sameness, with men and masculinity as the norm, which reinforces the superiority of men.”

After the death of Mao Zedong, the Chinese government, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, opened China’s economy to the world. The economic reform led to the destruction of the “iron rice bowl” where the government, “compensated both men and women for their work with a salary, medical care, housing, childcare, and even education.” According to Bowen et al, who examined official state statistics, during the 1990s, 63% of all those who were laid off were women, and that these women, “had only a one-in-three chance of finding a new job…” These women were told that they were helping the State by staying home and tending to their families. Furthermore, quoting Bulbeck and Zhu, Arianne Gaetano affirms that the economic reforms, “strengthened institutions of marriage and family, as well as women’s traditional place in the domestic sphere and their traditional

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161 Ibid.
165 Ibid, 295.
According to Burnett, the types of jobs available to women decreased, as certain jobs were deemed “dangerous” and unfit for women. This was supported by people’s critique of the, “Maoist disregard for ‘natural’ sex differences.” Job fields which remained available for women include textiles, and healthcare. Furthermore, many women who were in leadership positions lost their jobs. They were, “often forced to transfer or retire, or were otherwise marginalized.” Interestingly, Gaetano notes that in contemporary China, “femininity” is often (still) related to “tenderness” and “nurture”, which affirms the traditional views of womanhood, gender roles and relationships.

While things are definitely improving for women, in terms of education and the types of jobs they are able to apply for, feminism in China is still an issue. According to Liu and Dahling, the (Mainland) Chinese society has differentiated two main types of feminism: (1) nuxing zhuyi and (2) nuquan zhuyi. As one can see the main linguistic different between these two forms of feminism is the second character, xing and quan, which is highly important for the Chinese. Nuxing zhuyi is translated by Liu and Dahling as “womanism”, and they note that this movement is seen by the Chinese as, “a more egalitarian approach that was less antagonistic and set out to distinguish women strictly based on their sex…” This form of feminism is accepted by the Chinese society as it does not, “disadvantage or denigrate men or take men as main adversary”, which to the Chinese society, makes the movement different from “Western feminism”. Nuquan zhuyi is translated by Liu and Dahling as “woman rightism”, which is typically connected to and “dealt with political desires and demands”, and is not popular with the Chinese society. And while the Chinese government has the principle of gender equality within their Constitution, this is not the reality for women. In her

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170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
173 “Nu” is the character for “woman”, “zhuyi” are the characters for “-ism” or “movement”, “xing” is the character for gender-sex, and “quan” is the character for power.
175 Ibid.
176 I have placed “Western Feminism” in quotation marks as I don’t believe that all forms of Western feminism place men as enemies, but I recognize that this is the perspective and understanding that the Chinese society has of Western Feminism.
article, Cai Yiping notes some general ways in which gender discrimination still occurs, including: “son preference that results in sex selection and female infanticide, inequality in education, employment and income, political participation, retirement age, access to health care and social welfare, and unequal rights to land and property.”¹⁷⁷

From the examples presented above, one can see that while China experienced development, especially in gender equality, in its recent history, gender inequality is still an underlying theme in the experiences and reality of Mainland Chinese women.

b) Hong Kong

As mentioned before, the development and history of Hong Kong differs quite a bit from mainland China’s history and development due to Hong Kong being a colony of the British Empire between the years 1841-1997. With the industrialization of Hong Kong, during 1960s-1970s, many young women, also known as the “working daughters”, joined the work force as factory labourers to serve the growing manufacturing industries. However, with China’s “Open-door policy”, many of these manufacturing industries moved north into Southern Mainland China, “where cheap (female) labour abounded”¹⁷⁸, and the factories in Hong Kong gradually diminished. Replacing this industry was the service industry. While this meant good news for “educated women”, as the rise of the service industry meant that there would be a need for professionals, it also meant that those women who are “uneducated” were no longer needed as labourers and their job market had shrunk substantially.¹⁷⁹ This is very much the state of affairs for contemporary employment; Hong Kong’s labour market is service industry heavy.

In 1984, Britain and China decided that Hong Kong should revert back to Chinese sovereignty, under the guise of “one country, two systems.” As a response to this political change, one can see in Hong Kong the, “production of oppositional discourses on the real

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 6.
meaning of being Chinese and patriotic, and the proliferation of a local Hong Kong identity.\textsuperscript{180} It was also during the 1980s that Hong Kong witnessed an increase in “women’s movements”.\textsuperscript{181} What is interesting to note is that in several recent articles on Hong Kong women, the theme of “complacency” shows up; that is to say, they are active participants in what others may deem as oppressive views of women.\textsuperscript{182} One student from Dr. Norman Owen’s class writes,

> It is true that Hong Kong women still suffer from the double burden of job and family. It is right to say that women are still subordinated to men (especially less educated lower class women). Some can’t even get a share of property after marriage and they are under the command of husband, father, and son. However, one has to understand that Hong Kong women feel no problem on these issues. For me, after university education, it is right to marry a man and make a family in the future if I can. If my future husband can afford our lives, I do not mind quitting my job to take care of my family. What I mean here is that many Hong Kong women are willing to take an inferior role in the society. I accept traditional views on patriarchy, which still exist in Hong Kong.\textsuperscript{183}

In summary, one can see that China and Hong Kong have different histories and developments, which contribute to the differences between these two entities. While both parties have different approaches to “feminism”, there is an underlying similarity between their responses to “feminism”: the general public seems to believe that feminism is not needed in their particular context. For China, there is a sense that “feminism” goes against the values of the East.\textsuperscript{184} And for Hong Kong, “feminism” is unnecessary because women actively participate in patriarchy and accept their “inferior role in society”.\textsuperscript{185} It is within

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, 13.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Owens, “‘Why I Am (Not) a Feminist’,” 88.
\textsuperscript{184} Liu and Dahling, “The Quieter Side of Chinese Feminism,” 2-3.
\textsuperscript{185} Owens, “‘Why I Am (Not) a Feminist’,” 88. It should be noted here that this theme of “complacency” is mentioned as it is something of interest, but is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is used here to demonstrate how some Hong Kong women view their relationship with patriarchy.
these two distinct contexts that I will be looking at my two case studies: Mainland migrant women and working women in both China and Hong Kong.

3.3 Case Study #1 - Migrant women from Mainland China to Hong Kong

The first case study I would like to explore is the issue of migrant women from Mainland China to Hong Kong. Hong Kong has always been a migrant city. Prior to the 1970s, most of the migrants from Mainland China to Hong Kong were illegal, single men immigrants looking for work. In recent years, the migrant population has shifted: most of those who are migrating from Mainland China to Hong Kong are legal migrants and are married women and their children, hoping to reunite with their husbands/fathers. These cross-border families exist because, “For some time, workers from Hong Kong…believe that women in Mainland China demand less in financial terms than those in Hong Kong…” However, because of, “Hong Kong’s restrictive immigration policies…these Mainland wives and children [have] to wait for ten years or more before they can migrate to Hong Kong.” Hung reports that in a study she performed, many of the migrant women explained that their marriages were arranged by their families or clans, which might have included a short dating period.

As shown above, while Hong Kong is technically part of China, these two areas are quite different from one another. It is thus to be expected that these women will experience a multitude of difficulties when they enter and subsequently live in Hong Kong.

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190 Ibid.
191 Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 6. I will be using Suet Lin Hung’s article to supplement Yuen’s discussions on self-help/support groups, and their benefits, as Hung also participates in this discussion and can provide further detail of the processes these groups may take (such as storytelling, discovering the self, etc.), and can validate the necessity of having these groups for marginalized persons.
Tang and Vivian W.Q. Lou offer the following list of difficulties, according to the studies that they reviewed: these migrant women experience a language barrier, a lack of knowledge about the social services that Hong Kong provides, a lack of financial support, a lack of social support, and also discrimination. In addition to this list, in some local studies done on migrant women, they reveal that these women also suffer from, “a poor self-image.” Furthermore, Ngo and Ngai note how these migrant women are typically, “…young and had a lower educational attainment than their local sisters.” All these factors make these women especially vulnerable.

Speaking on the issue of discrimination, many authors have noted that there is a strong bias against these migrant Mainland Chinese women. One area of misunderstanding is that Hong Kong people view these women as abusers of the system; that they are draining the resources (social service and welfare). In Hung’s article, she recounts one of the stories a migrant woman told her, “One group member mentioned being harassed by a neighbor who scolded her every day outside her living unit for relying on welfare and burdening the government.” Another misconception is that these migrant women marry Hong Kong men so that they can move vertically economically, as these migrant women are from poorer, rural areas of China.

As parents, Hung reveals that these migrant women experience terrible guilt and self-blaming. They feel guilty for not being a “competent” mother, as they experience difficulty parenting their child. And they see these difficulties and the Hong Kong citizens’ criticisms about their parenting, as their own fault; it is because of their status as migrants and their

193 Ibid.
194 Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 6-7.
196 Along with the scholars referred to in this section, there are also local studies done on this topic: Caritas Community Centre – Tsuen Wan, “Survey Report on Hong Kong Citizens’ Impressions Towards Immigrants” (Hong Kong: Caritas Community Centre- Tsuen Wan, 1998); International Social Service, “Research on Mainland Immigrants in Hong Kong” (Hong Kong: International Social Service, 1997), both quoted in Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 6.
197 Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 6.
198 Ibid, 10.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid, 11.
low-education that they are experiencing such difficulties. It must be noted that according to Hung, “Their [the women] personal needs were not mentioned.”

3.4 Case Study #2 - Female workers in both China and Hong Kong

a) Rural migrant workers

Unfortunately, while the urban areas of China experienced positive development after the economic reforms (1979), the rural areas did not. As such many rural migrants flooded the urban cities of China, especially the ones in Southern China, in hopes of finding work. But even within Mainland China, these rural migrant workers still experience discrimination. One form of discrimination is the government’s *hukou* or residency system. In this system, people are labelled as either urban or rural, and migrants are prohibited from becoming permanent residents of the city they are working in. This is a form of discrimination because the *hukou* system promotes greater “labor-market returns” for the urban “native” workers. As such, rural migrants are paid lower wages than their urban “native” counterparts.

Rural migrant women are especially vulnerable as they experience double discrimination: as women and as migrants. In comparison to their urban counterparts (who typically have higher level of education and work experience, and are employed in the managerial positions), rural migrant women, similar to their Mainland migrant counterparts in Hong Kong, work in the lower-end of the job sector, typically “repetitive, unskilled jobs”, and are paid very little.

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201 Ibid.
202 While I am cognizant of the difference context may have on women’s experience of the labour market, I chose to group both Mainland and Hong Kong female workers into one section because of their similar experiences: the influence Confucian and essentialist understanding of the two genders play in the treatment of women. For example, because of certain views of women, women experience biased views about them which impact their employability.
208 Ibid, 231.
Interestingly, in their study about the employability of rural migrant women in Southern China’s factories, Chunlan Guo and Jianfa Shen make an important distinction between rural migrant men and women, and between urban native men and women. They argue that the preference for men over women in employment only corresponds to the reality of urban native men and women. In their survey to rural migrants, 75% of them believed that it is easier for women to get employed, on the basis of their own experiences working in factories. It is in this context of factories in Southern China that Guo and Shen finds that rural migrant women have an advantage over rural migrant men. The reason for this boils down to the Confucian/essentialist understanding of the two genders, “The advantages for rural women are due to the factories and their employers’ preferences, based on the ‘virtues of femininity,’ while the disadvantages for male rural workers are because of the ways in which masculinity is framed as a problem by employers.”

For example, the factory managers indicated to Guo and Shen that since the jobs in the factories are, “repetitive, delicate, and require meticulous attention,” they would prefer to hire women to do those tasks, as women, “are better at dealing with microscopic operations than men, since they [the managers] stand by the discourse that femininity is ‘naturally’ more ‘careful’ and ‘attentive’ than masculinity.” Additionally, these factory managers explained that for jobs that can be performed by both men and women, they would hire a woman. They believe that men would cause trouble, especially migrant men who are seen by society as degenerates, and make the workspace unsafe. As such, one can see the essentialist perception of the two gender underlying employment decisions. It should be noted that while women are the preferred candidates for jobs in the factories, it is men who are hired to watch over the employees, not women. In agreement with Guo and Shen, it can be seen that, “Women’s gender subordination to men in the household was thereby replicated by factory owners…”

b) Urban women

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209 Ibid, 240.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid, 235.
213 Ibid, 237.
214 Ibid, 238.
215 Ibid.
Looking at the narratives of women interviewed by various authors and studies done on working women in both China and Hong Kong, one main common theme emerges: the tension between career and family. Interestingly, both Hong Kong and China have a specific caricature that the media presents as “the” epitome of womanhood for working women. In Hong Kong, this caricature is called the “superwoman” (女強人), and in China it is the “white-collar beauty”. These types of women succeed in both the “career” and the “family” realms, without sacrificing any of the two at any point. According to Zhongxin Sun, the Mainland Chinese media believes that, “Married and successful white-collar women, when it comes to choosing between work and family, are often thought to sacrifice family. Through the lens of mass media, those women are viewed as too career centered to be good women, not to mention good mothers.”

As mentioned before in the discussion on Confucianism and the Chinese culture, marriage and family life are important to Chinese women. Bowen et al. argues that, “Family becomes an integral part of women’s identities. It is socially unacceptable for a woman to refuse taking on family demands, such as cooking, cleaning, raising the young and tending to the old.” This is because the Chinese culture and society still places much of the emphasis on women’s responsibility to the home and family, while men deal with external affairs, such as having a successful career.

These women experience the “double burden”: the stress from work and trying to succeed in her field, while being present and attentive to her family and bearing the responsibilities of the home. This can be seen in Francesco and Shaffer’s discussion on Hong Kong society, “As a masculine society, Hong Kong people maintain very strong gender role stereotypes; they believe males have the responsibility to work and to improve the family welfare while females are primarily responsible for caring for family members.” Carrie Liu Currier adds

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216 Francesco and Shaffer, “Working Women in Hong Kong,” 320.
217 Sun, “Worker, Woman, Mother,” 29.
218 Ibid.
that women, “are socialized not to expect men to help in the private sphere.”

While it is true that working women, “spend less time on housework and childcare than non-employed women,” and more well-off couples/women can choose to employ a servant to help with the housework-load, or have family members help around the home, housework is still considered the women’s responsibility, and they still have to bear the brunt of such responsibilities. As such, “familial responsibilities” such as housework, childrearing, and caring for family members, are still expected of the woman.

Studies have shown that for those women who maintain their own career while having a family, “familial responsibilities” negatively impact their career. Wei Wang and Taejun Cho find that since women tend to spend more time on “familial responsibilities”, such as household chores and childrearing, they will have “fewer resources [time and energy] to invest at work, women’s performance may suffer and in turn their ability to earn promotions and financial rewards.” If a woman takes seriously her role as mother or wife, she may be required to schedule herself around the needs and routines of her children, which makes it hard for her to meet up with potential clients outside of the work hours, show up to networking opportunities after work, or to enroll in night courses for promotion eligibility. Especially for Hong Kong mothers, their children’s performance in school is a priority, given

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226 This sentiment is echoed by: Cho and Wang, “Work-Family Conflict Influences on Female’s Career Development through Career Expectation,” 44.
227 Francesco and Shaffer, “Working Women in Hong Kong,” 311.
228 Wang and Cho, “Work-Family Conflict Influences on Female’s Career Development through Career Expectation,” 44. On page 43, Wei Wang and Taejun Cho specifically notes the following resources: “The demands of family have been shown to reduce women’s personal resources of time, energy, and commitment available for work...” [Wang and Cho, “Work-Family Conflict Influences on Female’s Career Development through Career Expectation,” 43.]
the competitiveness of the system. Furthermore, in a study performed by Yuk-King Lau, Joyce L.C. Ma, and Ying-Keung Chan in 2006, 64.2% of the women in their study, “agreed that the mother’s employment would cause harm to the children’s development and 63.8% agreed that full-time employment of the mother would cause harm to the families.”

These numbers demonstrate that there is a wide perception that the mother’s involvement in the child’s growth is beneficial, and that her career will only place her child and her family’s happiness in jeopardy. Because her time is stretched thin between (primarily) the family, and (secondarily) her work, she hardly has time and energy left for herself to explore other avenues of interests, strengths, and general self-knowledge.

3.5 Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen and her work

It is against this backdrop of China-Hong Kong political tension and latent Confucianism that Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen operates. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen is a Chinese Catholic feminist theologian, situated in Hong Kong. She studied at Graduate Theological Union for her doctoral studies in Christian ethics and Chinese social thought. Afterwards she returned to Hong Kong and is a postdoctoral fellow at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a guest lecturer at the Hong Kong Holy Spirit Seminary College of Theology and Philosophy. From her writings, it can be seen that her research interests lie in Confucian virtue ethics, Catholic Social teaching, and women’s experiences. She is also currently on the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

While Yuen does not explicitly present her theological anthropology in her writings, I believe this can be teased out through a look at what she does say about ethics. In this section I will first provide a general description of her trajectory through a look at some of her articles, and then proceed to demonstrate different aspects of her theology that can contribute to theological anthropology. As I am looking at the specific context of Chinese women, Yuen’s work helps highlight the lived experiences of these women, gives them a voice, and

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233 Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrants Workers in Hong Kong,” Asian Horizons 8, no. 4 (December 2014): 738.
highlights what is needed in order that these women’s dignities are respected. As she is also situated in a Chinese context, her voice will balance out the papal, male, European voice.

a) General Trajectory:

Yuen’s articles, papers and chapters can be sorted according to three major themes: the issue of gender within Catholicism, Confucianism, and the secular Hong Kong society, political commentary, and the development of East Asian contextual theology.

A major theme that Yuen deals with is gender inequality. In most of her articles about gender, she incorporates case studies into her writing, which allows for the reader to see these marginalized women as real persons, and allows for the women to express their own stories. For example, the reader meets Siu Fong in Yuen’s article “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China”. As will be noted in chapter 4, this demonstrates a methodological shift from a classical approach to theology, which starts with dogma, to one that starts with people’s experiences.

This shift towards one’s particular context can be seen in Yuen’s development of contextual theology, in dialogue with the writings of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, or FABC. In her article, “Doing Local Theologies in the Asian Context”, for example, Yuen speaks about the development of Asian theology under the Second Vatican Council’s

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235 Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 1-5.
teaching on inculturation. The Church no longer advocated for conformity but recognized differences in unity, which in itself demonstrates a shift in the mentality of the Church. In order for Catholicism to mean something to Asian Catholics, the council recognized, it must belong to them; that is to say, it has to be contextual and involved in their culture and traditions.

As a Catholic ethicist, Yuen relies heavily on Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The most foundational aspect of CST that Yuen consistently refers to is the inherent dignity and equality of all humans. When speaking about migrant workers, for example, Yuen will draw on CST to argue that the focus of work should be on the person, as a subject, who is completing the work, and that the human person always comes before profit. She further asserts that women workers should be treated as equals with male workers, and should be entitled to having good wages and working conditions. When using CST in her political commentaries, she focuses more on conscience and freedom of expression and religious rights. Thus, Yuen in her newspaper article, “Justice and Peace”, argues that the people should not have to do or agree with anything that goes against their conscience.

Some other aspects of CST that Yuen relies on are the ideas of justice, hospitality, and solidarity. In her article, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrants Workers in Hong Kong”, one can see the relationship between justice, hospitality, and solidarity very clearly. First and foremost, Yuen argues that justice seeks to restore right relations between persons and shows concern for the weak and vulnerable. The virtue of hospitality, on the other hand, is centered on the story of Christ. Yuen sees that Christians must take up the mandate of welcoming the marginalized as Christ taught (Mt 10:40; 25:35). Quoting Amy G. Oden, a Church historian, Yuen argues that hospitality is “…an orientation that attends to otherness,

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237 Ibid, 134-140.
238 Ibid, 127.
239 Ibid, 128.
listening and learning, valuing and honouring. The hospitable one looks for God’s redemptive presence in the other. It is always a spiritual discipline of opening one’s own life to God’s life and revelation.”242 And the virtue of solidarity accompanies hospitality as it also emphasizes the need to listen to the Other and treat the Other as an equal. But it also moves beyond hospitality in the sense that it is focused on “structural change”. For example, advocating for policies that will protect the rights and dignity of migrant workers. As such, the virtue of justice provides the individual with a certain disposition towards issues such as the mistreatment of migrant workers; the virtue of hospitality informs the individual in how they are to interact with migrant workers; and the virtue of solidarity encourages the individual to pursue and support structural changes in light of the migrant workers’ plight.243

However, Yuen is also cognizant that CST has its limits. In her paper entitled “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China”,244 she proposes the use of Martha Nussbaum’s list of capabilities to complement CST. Yuen proposes the use of Nussbaum as a way to fill the gap. That is to say, Nussbaum’s list can help highlight what these women need in their life in order to flourish as women.245 As such, the incorporation of Nussbaum’s list of capabilities to CST will assist with the important objective of “affirming women’s moral agency…”.246

One specific critique that Yuen raises about the Church’s current social teaching is the idea of gender complementarity. In her paper “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China”, she questions whether this teaching holds in light of these marginalized rural women’s experiences.247 And in her chapter “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong”, she argues that an overemphasis on the “feminine genius” can lead to the exclusion of women in leadership positions.248 She argues that,

the crucial issue is whether women have freedom to choose their roles and not be restricted by traditional values as they try to develop their potential. Moreover, the papal teachings do not discuss how to nurture the capabilities

242 Oden, And You Welcomed Me, 114-5, cited in Yuen, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrants Workers in Hong Kong,” 749.
243 Yuen, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrants Workers in Hong Kong,” 750-1.
244 Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 1-5.
245 Ibid, 5.
246 Ibid.
247 Ibid, 3.
248 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128.
of women, which is important factors for women to exercise their agency. There is also a lack of women’s voice in the social teaching.\textsuperscript{249}

This issue of gender complementarity is also seen in Yuen’s paper on Edith Stein, where she argues that Stein can be a model of resistance against gender inequality for contemporary women.\textsuperscript{250} Looking particularly at Stein’s understanding of the man-woman relationship, Yuen explains that the Genesis story informs Stein’s belief that the original man and woman were in a harmonious relationship with one another, where, “they complement each other as one hand does the other.”\textsuperscript{251} While Yuen is sympathetic to Stein’s argument about the necessity of recognizing gender distinction, in fear that gender neutrality would lead to the neglect of women’s needs, she is also sympathetic to the argument posed by black womanists and post-structuralist feminists. They argue that the “social location of woman should be stressed rather than stressing a universal feminine value.”\textsuperscript{252} As such, Yuen seems to argue for what I would call a “this and that” option, where both are emphasized. It can be interpreted that at least from a pastoral point of view, Yuen would lean more towards gender distinction, as women’s abilities and needs need to be addressed in those situations.\textsuperscript{253}

The “this and that” option can be further seen in Yuen’s proposal of combining Confucian virtue ethics with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). In her article, “Social Virtues in the Hong Kong Catholic Community: Examining Catholic and Confucian Ethics”\textsuperscript{254} she describes how Confucian virtue ethics can complement CST by providing a more holistic approach. She argues that the Confucian virtue ethics model can help enhance the Christian social ethics by advocating for an interior change and addressing the neglected “dimensions of morality”, namely affective, volition, and behavioural. This is important, she suggests, as CST is predominantly a principle-based and cognitive approach.\textsuperscript{255} From here, one can see how the combination of Confucian virtue ethics with CST is a form of the “this and that” option:  

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{250} Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, “The Life of Edith Stein: A Jewish Woman Saint Resisting Gender Inequality,” paper, 1-25.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid, 22.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid, 22-3.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, 27.
\end{flushleft}
when speaking about ethics one need not be confined to principles, it can be performed as well. According to Yuen, virtue ethics revolves around the person and an inner transformation of inclinations and dispositions. Confucianism, with its emphasis on virtue ethics, views that it is possible for one to learn from moral exemplars “the way” (Dao) of being. Through following the moral exemplar one transforms one’s flawed habitus to one that imitates the moral exemplar. The interior motives are just as important as the exterior performed actions of the person. It is through such acts of self-cultivation that one becomes virtuous or ren.

By applying the Confucian virtue ethics model onto Christianity, Yuen sees Jesus as the moral exemplar for Christians. She sees the Christian concept of “discipleship” to mirror the Confucian “moral exemplar” concept: in both cases, it is not about imitating every element of the historical life of the exemplar, but rather his or her habitus. It is about being able to respond to the issues of in one’s particular context in a way that aligns oneself with the exemplar. She then provides the reader with practical ways that a Christian can perform moral cultivation, which Yuen believes that this is a key aspect that is missing from CST. It is through the involvement of the emotive and practice that these virtues stick to the person and there is an actual transformation of the person.

In her writings, Yuen looks at Confucianism, Catholicism and their compatibility with feminist ethics. Interestingly, in her article, “Religious/Cultural Ethics as Living Traditions: Gender Equality in Catholic and Confucian Traditions”, she argues that “…we should not just focus on a few particular texts of a tradition that are regarded as sexist and argue that that tradition cannot support gender equality.” One can see her operating within this framework as she suggests taking an alternative approach to reading Confucianism and Catholicism: instead of looking at particular texts, one should look at the overall themes and values of that particular tradition, and see if they are compatible with feminist ethics. She highlights the

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257 Ibid, 30-1.
259 Ibid, 34-5.
260 Ibid, 35.
261 Ibid, 27, 37.
262 Yuen, “Religious/Cultural Ethics as Living Traditions,” 114-5.
fact that these two traditions, much like other traditions, are “living” traditions; that is to say, interpretations of the teachings can change.263

As mentioned before, in addition to her scholarly contributions, Yuen partakes in political commentary. In her news articles about Hong Kong’s political sphere, she speaks about the “Umbrella Movement”. The “Umbrella Movement” first started as a week-long strike by the Hong Kong Federation of university students, against the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress’ proposal for electoral reform. The students, who as the strike progressed were joined by many other Hong Kong citizens, desired self-determination and democracy in their government, and did not want Beijing’s interference in Hong Kong matters.264 This call for self-determination and democracy is further seen in the 2016 election of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong. In her article, “Hong Kong Election: New Generation, New Political Agenda”, Yuen argues that this election “is considered to be the most important legislative poll since the handover of sovereignty from British to Chinese rule in 1997.”265 She connects these sentiments with Catholic Social Teaching regarding the inherent dignity of all humans, the right to self-determination, and “social responsibility and participation”.266

One theme that draws together all of Yuen’s work is her focus on the question of moral agency; that is to say, the ways that people take responsibility for their situation and take the initiative to transform their situations. In “Justice and Peace”, Yuen notes that while the citizen recognize that their protest may lead to consequences, they were still willing to participate, “They are willing to take responsibility and even sacrifice their future.”267 And in when speaking about migrant women, Yuen argues that, “They find their own ways to resist oppression and bring transformation to themselves, to others and to the society.”268

3.6 Implications for Theological Anthropology:

263 Ibid, 107-8, 114-5.
265 Yuen, “Hong Kong Elections.”
266 Ibid.
267 Yuen, “Justice and Peace.”
As mentioned before, Yuen does not work directly with theological anthropology as she is a virtue ethicist. But I do believe that a connection can be made between virtue ethics and theological anthropology, as one’s actions and dispositions are informed by how one understands the self and the other as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. As such, I will be drawing out some aspects of Yuen’s work that will contribute to a discussion on theological anthropology.

a) Agency/Self-Determination:

An interesting point is the idea of the human person as self-determining. Looking specifically at her article about the Hong Kong Election of 2016, she highlights the prevailing call for self-determination from Hong Kong citizens, which first started with the 2014 Umbrella Movement. According to Yuen, “Protesters were demanding greater democracy in Hong Kong and concerned that Beijing was increasingly interfering in the politics of HK, thus, breaking the ‘one country, two systems’ agreement.”269 And at the 2016 Hong Kong elections, there were a lot of “self-determination” rhetoric spoken by politicians.270 In light of this political situation, I believe that Yuen would see “self-determination” as a criterion for theological anthropology.

I would argue that this aspect can also be seen in her article “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China”. In her article, she uses Martha Nussbaum’s list of capabilities as a lens through which she views her two case studies (Siu-fong and Mudan, who are both migrant rural women). Using Nussbaum’s list, Yuen highlights which capabilities she believes to be lacking in each situation, and how the inclusion of that particular capability would enhance and empower these rural women.271 For example, she notes, “In the case of Siu-fong, since she was not respected by her husband, and was not economically independent before she joined the handicraft association, her capabilities of emotion, practical reason, affiliation, and control over the environment (material) were especially in need of enhancement.”272. It is through building up the woman, and allowing her to exercise such

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269 Yuen, “Hong Kong Election.”
270 Ibid.
271 Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 3-5.
272 Ibid, 4.
capabilities that she is able to properly exercise her self-determination. She cannot decide her future without the ability to exercise her “capabilities for practical reason[ing]”, or if her “imagination” is hindered in any way.\textsuperscript{273}

In her chapter “Promoting Women’s Dignity in Church and Society of Hong Kong”, the issue of agency is raised through her criticism on the Church’s view of gender roles. She notes that while the Church recognizes the equality between both genders and invites everyone, especially women, to the different ministries within the Church, praxis does not match up with the Church’s theology.\textsuperscript{274} That is to say, women are lacking in decision-making and leadership processes and positions, and,

the crucial issue is whether women have freedom to choose their roles and not be restricted by traditional values as they try to develop their potential. Moreover, the papal teachings do not discuss how to nurture the capabilities of women, which are important factors for women to exercise their agency.\textsuperscript{275}

As one can see from this quote, and from her highlighting the ways that women are not included in the life of the Church, Yuen argues for the Church to respect women’s agency and autonomy. Women need to have the chance to make decisions for themselves, and it is through participating in various ministries within the Church (and in the world) that their abilities develop and women flourish.

This aspect of “self-determination” can also be seen in Yuen’s discussion of the importance of self-help groups for migrant women. For example, Siu-fong joins the Peasant Women Handicraft Association (PWHA), where she gains a different perception on gender equality and self-confidence and value. She also becomes the chairperson of the organization and helps organize workshops and seminars for other women.\textsuperscript{276} One can see that these women are agents of change for themselves, for their families, and for others in similar positions. In being agents of change, these women are exercising self-determination; they take charge of their situations, they seek help, and they advocate for a different reality/future for others.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{274} Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{276} Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 1-2.
b) Holistic View of the Human Person:

Another aspect that one can be teased out from Yuen’s use of Nussbaum is her holistic view of the human person. Nussbaum’s list of capabilities include: “life; bodily health; bodily integrity; capabilities relating to the sense, imagination, thought, and to emotions and emotional attachments; and capabilities for practical reason, social affiliation, and political engagement.”277 One can see that Nussbaum’s list has a mixture of cognitive, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social capabilities.278 For example, Yuen’s holistic view of the person can be seen in the discussion about Siu-fong’s capabilities. She writes, “In the case of Siu-fong…her capabilities of emotion, practical reason, affiliation, and control over the environment (material) were especially in need of enhancement.”279 One can see that Yuen has a holistic view of the person as she considers Siu-fong’s emotions, intellect, social, and exercise of control.280 And if one believes in the flourishing of the whole person, then one may argue that all aspects of the person, including different traits and skills of the person, should be developed.

This holistic view of the person can also be seen in Yuen’s writings about the importance of the Confucian moral exemplar. When speaking about Confucian virtue ethics, Yuen argues that for Confucianism it is not simply about doing the right thing, but that through self-cultivation, one will develop to have the right disposition.281 And one way for one to cultivate the right disposition is through the concept of “moral exemplars”, where one identifies a particular person and imitate them.282 This imitation is not just about the way that figure acted in the world, but also the motivations behind such actions and the figure’s disposition.283 It advocates for the transformation of behaviours, actions, words, and dispositions.284 In a sense it is a change in the way one is in the world; it is a change of one’s way of being.

c) Particularities of the Person & Her Context

277 Ibid, 4.
278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
282 Ibid.
283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
The last key insight offered by Yuen for theological anthropology is taking into account the person’s particularities and her or his context. She writes in “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong” that, “To understand the situation of women, we must look into the particular context of each of these women and respect each of them as an individual.”285 This can be seen in her listening to and subsequent relaying of the women’s narratives. Yuen writes the following about migrant domestic workers, which I believe would be applicable for all types of persons: “If we look at them as numbers without attending to the complexities of each life, we may neglect a special need, without affirming them as human persons with dignity.”286 It is only when one listens to the stories of women that their contexts are fully expressed. For example, if one does not listen to Mei Ting’s plight (inability to support herself and her daughter after her divorce, and had to rely on her daughter’s social welfare), one would hold a false perception of her as a Mainland migrant woman.287 As such, I would argue that Yuen’s work entails a shift in methodology: one should approach the other person with an open heart and mind, to hear his/her story, and to acknowledge his/her particular context and individuality. Furthermore, it would recognize the differences and uniqueness of each person, and start with the person’s experiences and story as that would provide a more holistic view of the person.

In her article, “Between National and Local Identity: Possibility of Solidarity between Women of Hong Kong and Mainland China”, she reiterates the need to recognize the differences between Mainland migrant women and the native Hong Kongers.288 And that this acceptance and recognition of differences within unity is rooted in the Trinitarian God. As imago dei, “to be human is to be different, equal and connected to other persons.”289

While Yuen does recognize the particularities and context of a particular person, she does so in a very balanced manner. In Yuen’s discussion about Gaudium et Spes (GS), for example, she spoke about the document’s call for inculturation. While she argues that inculturation has negative connotations, it did spur a lot of theological developments in Asia, as the FABC

285 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 127.
286 Yuen, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrants Workers in Hong Kong,” 747.
288 Ibid, 9.
289 Ibid, 10.
argues that inculturation is, “the creative embodiment of the Word in the local church.”

This call from GS is reflective of the Church’s recognition of the differences between the local Catholic churches, but still arguing that all the churches share a common Catholicism. This stance is what I call the “this and that” option, which Yuen exemplifies with regards to theological anthropology. As explained in chapter 1, the “this and that” option can be summarized as the recognition of a universal element that bonds the parties together (the universal teaching of the Church, an underlying “feminine” essence), while recognizing that each party is distinct from one another and thus context, individuality, and differences must be recognized and taken into consideration.

3.7 Conclusion:

To recap, in this chapter I have briefly demonstrated the ways in which Confucianism can be used negatively to oppress women. Afterwards, I described the different contexts of China and Hong Kong. It is within these contexts that my two case studies, migrant Mainland women and working women in both China and Hong Kong, operate. Lastly, I introduced Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen and highlighted aspects of her work and theology that would be beneficial for theological anthropology: her discussions on Hong Kong citizen’s desire for self-determination; her methodological focus that leads to a holistic view of the person; a person’s right to flourish, as seen in her use of Nussbaum’s list of capabilities; and her affirmation that the particular must be attended to, as seen in her “this and that” approach. I believe these four aspects will supplement Pope John Paul II’s theological anthropology and address the main issues of the women in my two case studies. This discussion will continue in the following chapters.

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Chapter 4
West Meets East – Placing Pope John Paul II in Dialogue with
Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen

In this chapter I will be drawing out the similarities and differences between the emphases of Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen and Pope John Paul II. The idea behind this chapter is to demonstrate how Yuen complements but also challenges the thought of John Paul II.

4.1 Similarities:

The main similarity that Yuen and Pope John Paul II share is their view and emphasis on the equality between genders and inherent dignity of each person. From this common belief stems three other aspects: the recognition of historic and current oppression of women, the call for women’s participation in the world and in the Church, and the concept of gender distinction.

a) Equality and Dignity: Created in the Image of God

In all his writings about women, Pope John Paul II always emphasizes the inherent dignity and value of women on the basis of their createdness; that they are created in the image and likeness of God. In *Mulieris Dignitatem*, one reads, “both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God’s image.”[^292^] It is out of this common origin that humans are equal with one another.

When speaking about the equality between each person, Yuen refers to the Trinity. “Since human beings are created in the image of God who is Trinitarian, to be human is to be different, equal and connected to other persons.”[^293^] As an ethicist, Yuen’s understanding of fundamental dignity is connected to Catholic Social Teaching. In her article, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” she states that the concept of the fundamental

[^292^]: *MD*, part 3, section 6.
dignity of all human beings, “is the foundation of Catholic social teaching”. As such, I believe that this is her starting point from which she theologizes.

b) Recognition of historic and present oppression

It is out of this common foundation that other minor similarities emerge. Both John Paul II and Yuen acknowledge the on-going oppression against women, especially within the Church. While Pope John Paul II does not state the types of oppression women face explicitly, he does acknowledge that women have been oppressed. With Yuen, her acknowledgment can be seen in her identification with and explanation of feminist theology.

In her articles, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong” and “Using Feminist Liberation Theology as an Angle to View Belief and Justice”, she articulates the types of oppression that women experience in the Church. For example, she mentions how feminist theologians challenge the Church’s teachings on gender complementarity, as it leads to the exclusion of women from leadership positions. Furthermore, she argues that the teaching goes against the principle of equality: gender complementarity infringes on women’s freedom of choice, autonomy, and self-determination.

c) Participation in both the Church and the World

Both authors agree that women should be involved in both the Church and the public realm. In Familiaris Consortio, the Pope argues that women should not be limited to the roles of wife and mother, and that they should be allowed to participate in the secular world as well. In Ecclesia in Asia, he continues to argue that women have a gift of spreading the faith, and as such they should be given more opportunities to learn theology and participate

294 Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 2.
295 Letter to Women section 3; MD part 4, section 10; FC, part 3, section 24. This is also noticed by the feminist theologians cited in Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128.
296 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128. This was also echoed in Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 3.
297 Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, “從女性主義解放神學角度看信仰與正義 (Using Feminist Liberation Theology as an Angle to View Belief and Justice),” 神思 82 (2009), copy of article found on author’s blog, last modified February 26, 2014, accessed May 9, 2018, http://yuenmeeyin.blogspot.ca/2014/02/blog-post.html.
298 FC part 3, section 23.
in the different types of ministries within the Church.\textsuperscript{299} The CDF roots women’s right to participate in the World on the basis of her “feminine genius”. They believe that women should be allowed to take part in society, such as policy-making, as they can transform society to one of love and respect.\textsuperscript{300}

While Yuen does not explicitly advocate for women’s participation in the Church or in the public sphere, one can deduce that she would be in favour of such an idea through her discussions in “Between National and Local Identity”, particularly on the virtue of solidarity.\textsuperscript{301} With regards to the Church, Yuen does note positively in her article that the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference, as well as John Paul II, advocates for women’s involvement in the different ministries of the Church, and for their enrollment in theological courses.\textsuperscript{302} In her article, “Morality and Spirituality”, Yuen further notes that the FABC believes that women should take a greater role in ministries and, “decision-making processes of the Church.”\textsuperscript{303} She also expresses the belief of the Church that all men and women must participate in the mission of evangelization.\textsuperscript{304}

In “Between National and Local Identity” she speaks about six ways that one can participate in solidarity. While all the ways are equally important, I would like to draw attention to the fifth way: “Solidarity as Advocating for Social Transformation”. In this section, Yuen argues that to be in solidarity with the marginalized one must stand up for them and advocate for change.\textsuperscript{305} For example, in her political commentary, “Justice and Peace,” she reports on the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, and affirms citizens’ right “to challenge the unjust law

\textsuperscript{299} John Paul II, \textit{Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women in the Consecrated Life and all the Lay Faithful on Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: ‘...that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10:10)}, last modified November 6, 1999, last accessed May 22, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_06111999_ecclesia-in-asia.html, chapter 7, section 45.

\textsuperscript{300} \textit{Letter to Bishops}, part 3, section 13.

\textsuperscript{301} Yuen, “Between National and Local Identity,” 9-12; Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 129.

\textsuperscript{302} Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, “Morality and Spirituality of Asian Lay Missionaries: An Asian Feminist Perspective,” \textit{Asian Horizons} 10, no. 2 (June 2016), 58; Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 130.

\textsuperscript{303} Yuen, “Morality and Spirituality of Asian Lay Missionaries,” 59.

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid, 58.

\textsuperscript{305} Yuen, “Between National and Local Identity,” 11-2.
and policy, hoping to arouse the consciousness of Hong Kong people.”  

Her discussion on solidarity serves as an impetus for others to emulate this virtue and participate in the world, such as in advocacy groups or in political movements. As such, one can see from her discussions on solidarity and advocacy that participation in the world is necessary.

d) Gender Distinction

As one can see from John Paul II’s warnings towards women appropriating male traits and roles, it can be argued that he is in favour of gender distinction. In fact, in the Pope’s *General Audience of November 7*, he argues that masculinity and femininity are two ways of being human. His emphasis on the “feminine genius” also demonstrates his agreement with gender distinction, but also the idea that there is a universal underlying essence that all females share by virtue of their gender. As mentioned before, New Feminist Sr. Prudence Allen argues that the Pope, “…did not then, nor did he ever, suggest that a man may have femininity or a woman masculinity.”

Likewise, one can also interpret that Yuen believes in gender distinction. In her article on Edith Stein, she outlines Stein’s “theology of woman”. Much like John Paul II, Stein also roots her discussion of the human person to the Genesis narrative, and sees the genders as complementary to one another. Stein and Yuen both believe that gender neutrality would lead to, “neglecting the needs, roles and abilities of women.” As such one can conclude that Yuen would agree with the concept of gender distinction, though not to the same degree as Stein or Pope John Paul II.

In summary, it can be seen that both Yuen and Pope John Paul II emphasize the concepts of equality between genders and inherent dignity of each individual, recognize women’s ongoing experience of oppression, call for women’s participation in both the Church and in the World, and believe in gender distinction. One can see that though Yuen and John Paul II

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306 Yuen, “Justice and Peace.”
307 *MD*, part 4, section 10; *FC*, part 3, section 23.
308 John Paul II, *General Audience of November 7, 1979*.
309 *Letter to Women*, section 12; Allen, “*Mulieris Dignitatem* Twenty Years Later,” 30.
310 Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity,” 97.
share similarities with one another in principle, those similarities actually reveal their differences as well.

4.2 Differences:

In this section I will highlight the four main areas of difference between Yuen and Pope John Paul II: Methodology, Complementarity, women’s gifts, and women’s vocation.

a) Methodology

As a first point, it should be noted that while Pope John Paul II and Yuen share a similar starting theme for their theology (the dignity of the human person), they use different sources and approaches. As seen in Mulieris Dignitatem, Pope John Paul II starts from a biblical philosophical point of view and extrapolates ideas about womanhood and personhood from the biblical narratives and from philosophy.\(^{312}\) He roots his discussion on the inherent dignity of each person and the equality between genders in the two creation accounts found in Genesis. The first account demonstrates for him the equal dignity and value the two genders share, and the second account explains gender distinctiveness and complementarity.\(^{313}\)

His methodology, especially with regards to the person, is also highly biological. As Allen writes,

> In Love and Responsibility Wojtyla also considered what will become a biological foundation for women’s unique approach to another person, namely that by a woman’s ovulation from puberty to menopause she has a monthly rhythm that disposes her to welcome new life, even if she never becomes pregnant.\(^{314}\)

It is based on his observation of women’s ability to welcome life within her, that he draws connection to the “inherent nature” of women and their vocation; that they are designed to welcome the “other”, and as such their vocation is give herself to the Other, and to accept the Other whole heartedly.

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\(^{312}\) MD, part 3, section 6.

\(^{313}\) Ibid.

\(^{314}\) Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity,” 96.
However, Yuen, much like most Asian feminist theologians, starts her discussion with the lived experiences of Chinese women. For example, when she speaks about marginalized women, she does not provide an abstract example. Rather, she introduces the reader to a real person and her story, such as Dally and Nina in her article entitled, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrant Workers in Hong Kong”. While both Dally and Nina are ethnic minorities situated in Hong Kong, are domestic helpers, and are abused in some way, their stories are far from being the same. Dally, a Filipina, has a college degree but could not find a job in the Philippines. She needs to support her family, which includes sending her brothers to school, so she migrated to Hong Kong as a domestic worker. Nina, an Indonesian woman, was hired through an employment agency, had to pay “extortionate agency fees amounting to US$2,692 through a debt-bondage arrangement,” and her passport and contract were taken away by the Hong Kong agent upon her arrival as leverage.

This example points to a key insight that I believe Yuen learns through listening to these women’s stories, and informs her theological anthropology. By listening to their stories, Yuen gains a fuller understanding of the person she is interacting with and a recognition that each person has his/her own unique story, just like Dally and Nina; universal statements no longer hold in light of this methodology.

The importance of listening to the women’s stories can be seen in Yuen’s critique about the lack of inclusion of real women’s experience and stories in the Papal documents. In both her articles, “Promoting Women’s Dignity” and “Using Feminist Liberation theology as an Angle”, she notes that feminist theologians have questioned whether the Church has listened to or consulted with women when they produce documents, such as *Mulieris Dignitatem* or *Familiaris Consortio*. While the Church does advocate for a greater recognition of “housework”, its value, and women’s role in the family, it does not address issues such as

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316 Ibid, 743.
317 Ibid, 744.
domestic violence or sexual abuse. Furthermore, Yuen notes that in the Papal documents there is a clear, “…lack of women’s voice in the social teaching.”

An implication of the different methodologies is the types of relationship that get featured in the authors’ writings, which then connects to the types of roles and identities a woman can hold in their perspectives. For John Paul II, because he starts with the Genesis narrative, with a particular understanding of the man and woman relationship as a spousal relationship, the only relationship that he speaks about is the marital relationship. And because of this focus, one can conclude that the only relational identifier for women is “wife of man”. On top of this, John Paul II relies heavily on the biological image of the “womb” to deduce the qualities of ideal womanhood, which leads to the second, though just as important, identity for women: mother. As these two foci are related to the domestic sphere, they give the impression that the Church only understands women in light of the domestic sphere.

However, Yuen starts with the stories of real women, different relationships and roles are included in her discussions. This encourages a more holistic understanding of the person. This shifts the hierarchy of relationships, with marriage on the top, to a more egalitarian view of relationships, where all relationships are valuable, equal, and play a crucial role in the person’s development and story.

b) Complementarity

It is out of John Paul II’s focus on “integral complementarity” that women and men as spouses and parents come to light. Looking at *MD*, Allen writes of three types of integral complementarity that John Paul II sees men and women participating in: “…(1) wife and

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318 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128; Yuen, “從女性主義解放神學角度看信仰與正義.”
319 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128.
320 There are a few times where he does recognize the other types of relationships women are in (especially in respect to men), such as “moms”, “sisters”, etc. (for example in his *Letter to Women*, section 2). But such mentions of other relationships are rare and few. *MD* part 9, section 31.
321 *MD*, part 6, section 18.
husband in marriage, (2) mother and father in family, and (3) men’s and women’s vocations to human and spiritual parenthood.”

As mentioned before, John Paul II’s focus on the biblical account of the creation of man and woman, and the reproductive abilities of women, leads him to view the genders as complementary along other things. In his Letter to Women, he writes,

Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are complementary. Womanhood expresses the ‘human’ as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way….Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological. It is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realization.

As he states in other works, “masculinity” or “manhood” and “femininity” or “womanhood” are two separate and distinct ways of being human, of interacting and experiencing the world.

For some, this topic on gender difference and neutrality is what I would call a “this or that” scenario. For example, Prudence Allen argues that, “When one of two fundamental principles of gender relation—equal dignity and significant difference—is missing from the respective identities of man and woman, the balance of a complementarity disappears into either a polarity or unisex theory.” As such it can be seen that Allen sees gender complementarity as the only way that views the different engendered and embodied humans respectfully, with dignity and with gender distinction. For her, any other way of seeing theological anthropology would be erroneous as it does not take into consideration a particular, “fundamental principle[s] of gender relation”.

However, Yuen seems to believe in a “this and that” option, which can be clearly seen in her article on Edith Stein. Stein believes in the necessity of gender distinction, as gender

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324 This can also be seen in his Letter to Women, section 7.
325 MD part 3, section 7.
326 Pope John Paul II, General Audience of November 7, 1979; Allen, ”Man-Woman Complementarity,” 97-98.
327 Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity,” 87.
328 Ibid.
neutrality would neglect the needs and abilities of women. Yuen is sympathetic to this argument for gender distinction, but she also agrees with the black womanists and post-structuralist feminists on the need to draw attention to the particular woman’s “social location”.

This recognition of context is quite important for theological anthropology. One can see Yuen’s advocacy for the focus on particularity and context in her article, “Promoting Women’s Dignity”. Yuen writes, “To understand the situation of women, we must look into the particular context of each of these women and respect each of them as an individual.”

This means that while one can rightly recognize a woman as a woman in different contexts, by recognizing her location, one is taking her uniqueness and particularities seriously. By recognizing such details of the woman, it remembers that while all women are women by virtue of being fully embodied as women (and different and distinct from men), each woman is also different and unique and cannot be stereotyped to be the same.

Yuen’s “this and that” option can also be applied to how one views “women’s work”. Earlier I spoke about how Pope John Paul II rightly advocated for a better recognition and renewed dignity of motherhood and home-making. This addresses the Chinese women’s needs for recognition that housework and participation in the familiar atmosphere are “work”, and that “work” need not be a production of monetary gains.

But as we see in the narratives of the Chinese women, they also need a different type of recognition in the work force as well; that is to say, women are capable of being or having both “this” (traditional feminine traits and gender roles) and “that” (traditional masculine traits and gender roles). With the stereotypes that are at play against them, there are women who are unable to climb the corporate ladder or are pressured to remain in the family on the basis of cultural and societal norms. While John Paul II’s acknowledgment of women’s participation in the “public” sphere helps highlight that there are women in the labour force and that they should be encouraged to participate in that realm, he actually projects a particular understanding of “women’s work”. Because he sees women as embodying this type of love and service, the types of work that

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330 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 127.
331 FC part 3, section 23; Letter to Bishops part 3, section 13.
women do must include that aspect. This can be best seen in his *Letter to Women*. When speaking about women working outside the family, he pays special attention to, “those women who are involved in the various *areas of education* extending well beyond the family: nurseries, schools, universities, social service agencies, parishes, associations and movements.”

All these roles entail a specific type of service and attention to the Other that are connected to his view of the “feminine genius” (self-giving love). However, one can see that he neglects to include other types of jobs on this list, such as a police officer or an accountant. As such one can argue that the roles that he focused on, follow his idea of the “feminine genius”, and can be labelled as “women’s work”, while all the other jobs that he does not include, can be labelled as “men’s work” or the Other.

The adoption of Yuen’s “this and that” option illustrates that what is viewed as traditionally “women’s work” is actually not “women’s work”. By blurring the lines between gender role divisions, what is traditionally seen as “women’s work” can also be seen as “men’s work”, which then enables and empowers men to participate in those spheres, such as familial responsibilities or in parish work. Not only do the traditional roles of women, such as motherhood or jobs that exhibit the “feminine genius” need to be promoted and have their dignity restored, so do other jobs that involve women.

**c) Women’s gifts**

When Pope John Paul II speaks of “women’s gifts”, he is normally referring to the “feminine genius”, which include the ability of a woman to accept and give herself as a gift to Others.

In the *Letter to the Bishops*, the Church recognizes that what it calls “feminine values” are actually “human values”, but label them as such, “because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values.”

This comparison between men and women, and the view of women as holder of virtues and

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333 *MD*, part 6, section 18; *Letter to Women*, section 12.
334 Ibid.
agent of transformation can be further seen in section 12 of John Paul II’s *Letter to Women*, where he argues that women are more able than men to view the individual as a person, and thus more willing to provide aid to the person in need.\(^{336}\)

However, he also has the following warning for women,

> Consequently, even the rightful opposition of women to what is expressed in the biblical words ‘He shall rule over you’ (*Gen* 3:16) must not under any condition lead to the ‘masculinization’ of women. In the name of liberation from male ‘domination’, women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’. There is a well-founded fear that if they take this path, women will not ‘reach fulfilment’, but instead will *deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness*.\(^{337}\)

From this quote, one can interpret that while the Church recognizes certain gifts of women, such as the ones discussed above, a woman should be careful not to appropriate ways of being a man, including male characteristics and skills, as those traits are antithetical to her being a woman.\(^{338}\) This means that there are characteristics that will not bring her to God or help her develop to the fullest “woman” she can and is called to be. According to the quote, such traits will make her, in a sense, not woman anymore. As such, one can conclude that Pope John Paul II would support the development of women and their gifts, as long as those gifts comply with the Church’s understanding of “femininity”.\(^{339}\)

On the other hand, one can see that Yuen does not see certain traits as “feminine” or “masculine,” and it can be interpreted that Yuen is a supporter of the full flourishing of a woman through the development of all types of gifts. In her discussions about self-cultivation and Confucianism, she does not restrict or label any traits or virtues as specifically “feminine” or “masculine”. In the process of self-cultivation, Yuen explains that one may choose to follow a moral exemplar.\(^{340}\) Historically, moral exemplars come in a variety of forms: from Confucius to virtuous kings to Jesus of Nazareth. When Yuen speaks about the types of leaders who have achieved *ren*, she notes that the leader should display, “personal

\(^{336}\) *Letter to Women*, section 12  
\(^{337}\) *MD*, part 4, section 10.  
\(^{338}\) Ibid.  
\(^{339}\) Ibid.  
\(^{341}\) Ibid, 30-33.
integrity and selfless devotion to the people, treating the common people justly with respect and kindness.” As these qualities are quite similar with the “feminine genius”, John Paul II would argue that these are “feminine traits”. This is quite different from Yuen’s perspective. One can see from her description of a virtuous leader that these are qualities of someone who has achieved ren and should serve as a good moral exemplar. As such these are all qualities that both men and women should strive to develop in their progress towards virtue. One can also see Yuen as a supporter for the development of all types of traits and gifts through her incorporation of Nussbaum’s list of capabilities. As mentioned before, Yuen uses Nussbaum’s list of capabilities when she speaks about the needs of rural Chinese women, and she notes that CST is insufficient in addressing some concerns regarding gender. Looking at Nussbaum’s list, one can see that the complete person is considered in Nussbaum and Yuen’s perspective, as these capabilities covers all the different aspects of the person.

d) Women’s vocation

In Mulieris Dignitatem, John Paul II defines a woman’s vocation as a state in which, “what is personally feminine reaches a new dimension: the dimension of the ‘mighty works of God’, of which the woman becomes the living subject and an irreplaceable witness.” Furthermore, he sees that a, “man…‘cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.’” Thus the idea of self-gift of self is an important part of what constitutes as “vocation” for John Paul II. The two forms of vocation that fulfill this criteria for John Paul II are motherhood and virginity. In these two forms, women are engaged with constant self-gift of self (through acceptance and loving the Other), and bringing to fruition the word of God.

He further writes, “Motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift...Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery

342 Ibid, 32.
343 Ibid, 28-35.
344 Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 1-5.
345 Ibid, 3.
346 Ibid, 4.
347 MD part 5, section 16.
348 MD, part 3, section; part 8, section 30; GS section 24.
349 MD, part 6.
of life, as it develops in the woman’s womb.” From this quote, one can see the emphasis Pope John Paul II places on motherhood as a key component of womanhood, and the connection he makes between a woman’s biology, or “femininity”, and her vocation. It is out of her ability to conceive (or welcome the Other), that the Church sees her vocation as “Mother”.

While Yuen does not speak explicitly about the topic of women’s vocation, one can still see that she has a different vision of vocation. I believe her definition for vocation would be the flourishing of the human person.

First, it should be noted that in her discussions on marginalized women, she does not stress the idea of motherhood. It is true that there are women featured in her articles who are mothers, but this aspect of the person is not emphasized, as one might have expected from someone who supports the view that women’s vocation is motherhood, like John Paul II. The different women featured in her articles have a variety of roles they fulfill and most if not all of them experience a transformation through joining a self-help or support group. For example, in the article “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China”, though Siu-fong’s familial relationships are mentioned to establish a context for her story, Yuen does not pay close attention to her motherhood. In fact, Yuen focuses more on Siu-fong’s involvement in the Peasant Women Handicraft Association, and how she flourished as a person. From her articles, one can see that Yuen is primarily focused on how the marginalized women can be empowered to flourish and how their inherent human dignity can be promoted.

In her discussion on Confucianism, Yuen speaks about the concept of ren, and that this virtue can be achieved through the process of self-cultivation. This act of self-cultivation is essentially a process of transforming oneself to the best version of one self one can be. Yuen, referring to Richard Gula, notes that, “discipleship is not concerned with reproducing the external aspects of the master’s life and work, but rather the master’s wisdom,

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350 Ibid, part 6, section 18.
351 Ibid.
352 Yuen, “Enhancing the Capabilities of Rural Women in China,” 1-5; Yuen, “Between National and Local Identity,” 1-14; and Pakistani women in Mee-Yin Mary Yuen, “是鄰人還是陌生人？”.
dispositions, and spirit that shape our own character so that we will lead the way of life that harmonizes with the master’s.”

As such, following a moral exemplar does not entail conformity. Yuen notes that the individual should be focused on the *habitus* and taking the values and lifestyle of the figure, and integrating it into one’s context. This whole process of self-cultivation exists so that one can be the best version of the self—that is, the one who is *ren*.

When speaking about the inability for women to choose certain roles, such as priesthood, Yuen argues that, “…the crucial issue is whether women have freedom to choose their roles and not be restricted by traditional values as they try to develop their potential.” I believe that the question here is not about female ordination, but rather the inability for women to practice self-determination and *become*. There are avenues that women are prohibited from engaging, such as priesthood, that may lead them to flourish and become the best version of themselves. As such Yuen’s statement can be interpreted as implying a particular view of the human person and on vocation: humans should have the ability to practice self-determination, and their vocations are to “develop their potential” and become the best versions of themselves.

4.3 Conclusion:

In this chapter, I highlighted what I believe to be the key similarities and several differences between Yuen and Pope John Paul II. In terms of the latter, I have focused on questions of methodology, complementarity, women’s gifts, and women’s vocation. With regard to methodology, I explained how Yuen’s act of listening to women enables the reader to see the women as unique individuals.

With regards to complementarity, I argue that Yuen holds what I call, the “this and that” option. This respects the particularities of each woman’s context, and challenges universal statements about women. For example, migrant Mainland women are often labelled with negative stereotypes due to their place of origin. Adopting a “this and that” approach the

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355 Ibid, 34.
356 Ibid, 35.
357 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128.
migrant Mainland can assert that she is both a migrant from Mainland and a strong competent woman; these two identifiers (“this” and “that”) are not mutually exclusive.

Third, I demonstrated how Yuen sees traits (such as the “feminine genius”) to be gendered. In Yuen’s perspective, traits that are typically aligned with femininity are universal traits and everyone should strive to embody such values. Lastly, I argued that Yuen views vocation as the call to be the best version of oneself.

This discussion of the similarities and differences between New Feminism and Yuen’s theology is important as it not only demonstrates their compatibility (and in connection, New Feminism’s relevance to marginalized Asian women), but also highlights the weaknesses of New Feminism, in light of the Chinese context which Yuen operates in. The points that she highlights illustrate for the reader the aspects that Chinese women need in order to flourish, which at times may challenge New Feminism’s claims about womanhood.
Chapter 5

Yuen’s Contribution to Theological Anthropology

In chapter 4, I highlighted the key similarities and differences between the writings of Pope John Paul II and Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen. Those similarities and differences demonstrated the common themes that both see as important for theological anthropology, and also the areas that the current New Feminism lack. This is a similar approach that Yuen takes with CST. While acknowledging the good that CST does, such as the promotion of equal value and dignity of all, it does have its weaknesses, such as the lack of practical methods for cultivating the right disposition and enforcing right judgment.358 This is very much the “this and that” option that Yuen takes with regards to the question of gender complementarity,359 and I believe that this is the method that one should take with New Feminism. It will respect New Feminism for the good that it provides, such as affirming the dignity of women and recognizing the value of motherhood,360 while acknowledging the ways that Yuen’s scholarship, read against the background of the concrete experiences of Chinese women, can complement and enhance the values of New Feminism, and empower women.

In this chapter I will be drawing on my analysis of Yuen’s scholarship from chapter 3, including especially her emphasis on agency and self-determination, her “this and that” option, and her holistic view of the human person. These aspects of her work will be linked with the areas of difference that I observed between Yuen and Pope John Paul II on the question of theological anthropology. And lastly, I will demonstrate how Yuen’s contribution in this area will complement and add to John Paul II’s New Feminism, and empower Chinese women.

5.1 The Exercise of Agency/Self-determination:

Because of her advocacy for women to be empowered, one can presume that “agency” is a central aspect of Yuen’s theological anthropology. In “Between National and Local Identity”, Yuen writes, “Women Christians should support such groups so that Chinese migrant women

360 My discussion on these two topics can be found in Chapter 2 and 4.
can speak for themselves, rather than be represented by other people.” This action of allowing women to speak for themselves demonstrates agency because these women are personally voicing their concerns and experiences, and advocating for and making decisions about their future.

Moreover, in the article she advocates for the use of the story of Ruth as a way of empowering migrant women, and also as a way for Hong Kong natives to see the migrant women. One interesting point that she highlights is the idea that Ruth takes on the role as an agent of change, as she engages Boaz in a sexual manner in order to change her and Naomi’s situation. Ruth’s actions, for Yuen, can be empowering for migrant women as it encourages them to take charge and responsibility over their situations, and transform them for the better.

Yuen’s focus on agency can also be seen in her discussion on virtue ethics. The process of self-cultivation, for example, entails agency, insofar as the person chooses to change or continue to act in a particular manner. When speaking about this topic, Yuen refers to the contemporary medical ethicist Joseph J. Kotva,

Kotva points out that virtue ethics understands the self as a self-forming and determining agent. It assumes that we are embodied creatures whose choices and actions are neither completely determined nor completely free. Human agency is a means of shaping character. We shape ourselves, develop and help form our tendencies and dispositions through our choices, actions and interactions. In turn, our character helps inform and direct our choices and actions. Thus, we participate in this formation of our tendencies, dispositions, and capacities.

And while Confucian virtue ethics, which Yuen argues should be incorporated into CST, does advocate for the imitation of a moral exemplar as part of one’s process of self-cultivation, human agency is still involved in this process. One must willingly decide to

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362 Ibid, 7-9.
363 Ibid, 8.
364 Ibid, 8, 9, 11.
commit to this process, reflect on the exemplar’s values and *habitus*, and actively change one’s own *habitus* to match.\(^{366}\)

This connects to the difference between Pope John Paul II and Yuen’s vision of vocation, noted in the previous chapter. While the Pope emphasizes a universal and innate vocation for women,\(^ {367}\) Yuen’s vision of vocation as becoming the best version of the self allows for and encourages the exercising of one’s agency. It is through actively making changes, as spoken above, that one is able to become the “self” that God has always intended the individual to be. As such, this exercising of one’s agency also motivates one to participate in self-reflection and to use one’s imagination: who do I believe I am called to be?

While there is no doubt that Pope John Paul II with his emphasis on human dignity would see human agency as part of being a human person, Yuen’s approach to moral theology strongly emphasizes this. In New Feminism, one can see the Pope’s emphasis on the innate feminine nature and the different characteristics that it embodies, such as being nurturing.\(^ {368}\) However, Yuen would emphasize the woman’s agency in choosing to act according to this “innate” feminine nature.\(^ {369}\) This is then connected to my earlier remarks regarding women’s gifts: with this alternative way of understanding humanity, women are able to foster different types of talents and gifts. Such gifts are seen as non-gendered, and women are encouraged to practice their agency. As mentioned before, Yuen argues that, “the crucial issue is whether women have freedom to choose their roles and not be restricted by traditional values as they try to develop their potential.”\(^ {370}\) As such this aspect of Yuen’s theological contribution complements New Feminism on the level that it draws attention to women’s will and agency in their imitation of a moral exemplar, in their decision to act in a particular manner (versus being confined to the characteristics of an innate nature), and in their decision of what types of traits or gifts they should develop.

5.2 “This and That” option: recognizing both particularities and universality

\(^{367}\) MD part 6
\(^{368}\) Ibid, part 6, section 18.
\(^{369}\) Yuen, “Toward an Ethic of Solidarity and Reciprocity with the Marginalized,” 158.
\(^{370}\) Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128.
As mentioned before, Yuen has a habit of practicing what I call a “this and that” option, which one can see through her discussion of CST and Confucian virtue ethics, as well as gender complementarity, as discussed in the previous chapters. With regard to gender complementarity, Yuen’s “this and that” option entails the belief in the necessity of gender distinction, but also contextualization of the person and localization of the universal in her concrete circumstances. Her dual focus allows for the ability to claim a universal “female” experience of being, which does justice to women’s shared needs and abilities, while also acknowledging the context of each individual woman. The latter is extremely important for this discussion because this is exactly what John Paul II’s New Feminism does not address: the differences of each woman from every other woman. By paying attention to the particular context of the woman, as mentioned before, it allows for the woman’s unique qualities and factors to emerge in the discussion: her location, her skills, her struggles, etc.

Yuen’s “this and that” option, particularly the attention given to women’s contexts, will empower women because it sees each woman as an individual. Under the model of simple gender distinction, all women were seen as the same and were told to emulate the same model. Yuen’s option will take into consideration women’s differences and affirm their particular “form” of womanhood. The recognition of particularities is also a way of affirming the women’s status as *imago dei*. Yuen argues that the Trinity relays to humanity what it means to be a community constituted by differences, “Since human beings are created in the image of God who is Trinitarian, to be human is to be different, equal and connected to other persons.” By virtue of being created in the image of God, humans are supposed to be different from one another, and form their own version of “a community of differences”.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the context of the woman, as implied in the “this and that” option, also challenges the use of universal statements about gender. For example, Pope John Paul II often praises women for their universal “feminine genius” and critiques men and their

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373 MD part 6. For example, women are told to imitate the Virgin Mary as she is the epitome of womanhood in the eyes of Pope John Paul II.
375 Ibid.
ways of domination--another universal statement. However, Yuen’s “this and that” option reminds us that one must look at the person’s specific context. In this case, one may realize that not all men participate in patriarchal ways of domination; they may be practicing solidarity with women through advocating for a different type of relationship to be fostered between men and women. This can be seen in Yuen’s discussion of the importance of recognizing the difference between the marginalized Mainland Chinese migrant women and the powers in Beijing. She argues that the local Hong Kong citizens cannot conflate these two parties together and make universal statements and judgment on all Mainland Chinese persons.

It should be remembered that Yuen’s option is a “this and that” option. That is to say, one must recognize that Yuen would stress that both elements have to be there at the same time: while one recognizes the shared universal “feminine nature”, one must also equally recognize the social context of the woman and the possible differences that come out because of her particularities. The “this and that” option is exactly what the feminist ethicist Christine Gudorf argues the Church needs. She writes:

> What developing communities—and many minority communities within developed nations as well—need from the church is recognition that the range of character traits and skills shared by males and females is many times larger than those exclusive to one sex. Men and women are not the same—but all men are not the same, and all women are not the same.

 Hence, this option complements New Feminism because it affirms New Feminism’s emphasis on gender distinction, but also allows for ways to express and focus on the differences within the gender as well, precisely by looking at the women’s particular contexts.

5.3 Holistic view of anthropology: Seeing the entire person

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376 *MD*, part 6, section 18; *Letter to Women*, section 12; Sara Butler, “Some Thoughts on the Theology of Woman in the Church,” 44.
378 Ibid.
In Chapter 4, I highlighted the difference in methodology between Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen and Pope John Paul II. While Pope John Paul II has a more deductive and classical way of approaching this topic, Yuen starts with the experiences of the women.\(^{380}\) It is out of this act of listening to the women’s experiences that one can see Yuen’s holistic view of the person. For example, in Yuen’s article, “Between National and Local Identities”, one is able to see the different dimensions of Mei-Ting: her different relationships (with her husband, her daughter, society, and the support group *Tong Gen Se*), her struggles (divorce, prejudiced views against her, and insufficient funds), her past (factory worker in Southern China who married a Hong Kong man), and her present (participation in *Tong Gen Se* as a member of the executive team).\(^{381}\) All these different aspects of the person intertwine with one another and inform the person’s entire being. This view of theological anthropology demonstrates both the necessity of listening to women’s stories and the need to recognize their different aspects. If one does not give these women a voice, they are not able to fully express every part of themselves. This, combined with the presentation of particular understandings of “womanhood” or misconceptions about certain women, will lead to the dismissal of all the other aspects of the women’s being and experiences. One is not addressing the whole person if all of her experiences are not included, and the only way for one to know about these stories and feelings is through listening to her and having a dialogue.

This view of the person entails a switch in methodology for theological anthropology. In recognizing that each woman will have her own story to tell, it provides the “forgotten” woman a voice to share her experiences and recognize the unique struggles and strengths of each woman. Yuen writes about the necessity of this methodology in her article about the plight of working migrant women in Hong Kong: “From the above narratives and analysis, we can see that each one of these migrant women has her own unique story. If we look at them as numbers without attending to the complexities of each life, we may neglect a special


\(^{381}\) Yuen, “Between National and Local Identity,” 1-14
need, without affirming them as human persons with dignity.”\footnote{Yuen, “Extending Hospitality to the Women Migrants Workers in Hong Kong,” 746-7.} This method affirms the experiences of each individual as it is willing to listen to each of their stories: all stories are valid and valuable. This attention “to the complexities of each life”\footnote{Ibid.} further affirms the validity and value of each story, of each voice, and it sees each person as a different individual. Not all women come from the same mold. If one makes sweeping statements, or derives one’s theological anthropology from abstract philosophical theories, then one forgets the reality of a woman. This focus on the “local context” is very much a Third Wave feminist focus.\footnote{Yuen, “The Life of Edith Stein,” 22; Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 124-5.} By recognizing the diverse stories of women, it pushes the Church to recognize the uniqueness of each person and their experiences, and for theological anthropology, it will lead them to recognize that while there is a shared essence of “womanhood”, which accounts for the similarities between women, there are also the contextual experiences of “womanhood”, which account for the differences between women, including even those who are in the same context.\footnote{Yuen, “The Life of Edith Stein,” 22. This is very much the essence of Yuen’s stance on recognizing gender distinction, yet remembering the context of particular women.}

As mentioned before, a holistic understanding of the human person entails the recognition of every aspect of the human person, including his/her needs as much as his/her unique character traits. A theological anthropology that sees the person holistically will be beneficial for the Chinese mothers, both working and migrant, as currently their needs are not being addressed. As mentioned before in chapter 3, it is the societal and traditional norm that the family and the home are the responsibilities of the woman. As such there is a disproportionate allocation of familial responsibilities on her, which can lead to the mother placing priority on her family, and not enough time and attention for herself.\footnote{Francesco and Shaffer, “Working Women in Hong Kong,” 321; Currier, “Redefining ‘Labor’ in Beijing,” 92-3; Wang and Cho, “Work-Family Conflict Influences on Female’s Career Development through Career Expectation,” 44.} This type of devotion that the Chinese society expects from women for their family is similar to the “feminine genius” in New Feminism. The “feminine genius” applauds and promotes the complete giving of the self to the other, and for the self to be, “at the service to the others in
their everyday lives. For in giving themselves to others each day women fulfil their deepest vocation…”387 As such, New Feminism can be seen as a supporter of the Chinese expectations of women.

Such an emphasis on self-sacrifice—to the point of placing it on a pedestal as the highest ideal—is dangerous for many women, as it can inspire burn-out. When a woman places her family as her priority and does not have time for herself, while everyone else is developing—educationally, in their career, as a person, etc.—she will not have a similar opportunity to practice self-cultivation. For example, Currier explains in her article that often-times women are unable to meet up with potential clients outside of work hours, participate in networking events, or take extra courses after work because of their familial responsibilities.388 Wei Wang and Taejun Cho further find that because the familial responsibilities are allocated to women, they have, “fewer resources to invest at work…”389 All these factors contribute to self-neglect, possible negative self-esteem, and burn-out.

Under New Feminism, I do not believe that these women’s needs will be properly addressed, because of its focus on self-abnegation.390 A theological anthropology that can respond to this reality is one that emphasizes self-care along with appropriate self-sacrifice; another “this and that” option. According to Michael Lawler and Todd A. Salzman,

Self-care first affirms self as a created self-in-God, good, valuable, and lovable, and then informed by neighbor-love, turns towards and gives this good, valuable, and lovable self-in-God unconditionally to an other in particular and to others in general. Aquinas argued that nemo dat quod non habet; no one gives what he does not have.391

This quote is important to this discussion, because not only do Lawler and Salzman call for theological anthropology to emphasize the importance of self-care, as a complement to its traditional emphasis on relationality and specifically inter-relationality, they also call for self-

387 Letter to Women, section 12.
390 MD part 6, section 18.
love and self-knowledge. In order for the woman to love, she must first be loved, particularly by herself. This love can be developed through getting to know herself. She must know of her own value and that she is created “good” in order to stay grounded but also to pass along the message to those around her. New Feminism, with its promotion of self-denial and self-sacrifice above all else, is particularly dangerous for the women in my case studies.

In summary, this holistic view of theological anthropology will affirm the need to recognize the needs of an individual, much like how Yuen does in her discussion on the different capabilities migrant women need. Furthermore, when this principle is enacted, it affirms the woman’s decision to see herself as a full person, for placing herself as priority, and addressing her own needs and desires.

5.4 Holistic view of anthropology: Bodily Integrity – Eros

Another aspect of Yuen’s holistic view of the human person can be seen in her view of bodily integrity. This is important for theological anthropology as it projects the view of a unified human person, and one who is able to truly be according to their interiority. While this moves further beyond Yuen’s explicit statements than the other principles discussed so far, one can nevertheless see this concept in her writing on Nussbaum’s list of capabilities, her support for the self-help/support groups, and the Confucian principle of self-cultivation.

As mentioned before, Nussbaum’s list of capabilities include an array of capabilities that range from the exterior (the physical body) to the interior (emotions, imagination, and the intellect) to the social (relationships). By utilising Nussbaum’s list of capabilities as a way of complementing CST, Yuen demonstrates her inclusive and holistic understanding of the person and recognizes that the needs of the marginalized women goes beyond physical needs. For example, she notes that, “In the case of Siu-fong, since she was not respected by her husband, and was not economically independent before she joined the handicraft association, her capabilities of emotion, practical reason, affiliation, and control over the environment (material) were especially in need of enhancement.”

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392 Ibid.
393 MD part 6, section 18.
types of needs of the person, demonstrates that she sees the human person as a complex creature. That is to say, she sees the person as a whole, and thus all aspects of the person need to be addressed.

However, some of the women in my case studies are unable to achieve bodily integrity. As mentioned before, some women feel obligated to put their careers on hold, in one way or another, in order to satisfy the societal expectations of the “perfect mother”: one who dedicates herself to her children and her family, and places them as her priority. These women are unable, due to their particular contexts, to listen to their interior voices and live according to them.

Interestingly, the North American Womanist Audre Lorde addresses this issue of bodily integrity in her essay about eros/erotic power. Like Yuen, she argues for the need to allow the interior influence the exterior, which leads to bodily integrity. She argues that,

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual’s. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense.

It must be recognized at this point that eros is a type of power in itself. And thus, if included in theological anthropology, it reminds women that they created by love, to love, and for love. And most importantly, their ability to love (to feel etc.) is their power. This addresses the criticisms that managerial women experience. When they are told that they are too sensitive or relational, these women can see those qualities rightfully as valuable gifts from

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God, and that these are manifestations of her power.\textsuperscript{398} Furthermore, for those women who feel powerless in face of unjust criticisms, bad marriages, or living in a culture or society that does not recognize their worth as humans,\textsuperscript{399} this concept of \textit{eros} as power also reminds them that they are not powerless.

In a sense, I believe Lorde’s statement above actually provides a way of being which allows for Yuen’s argument of bodily integrity. In order for one to achieve bodily integrity, one must be acting in accordance with one’s \textit{eros}. This then entails that one needs to know what those “erotic guides” are; that is to say, self-knowledge.\textsuperscript{400} I do not believe New Feminism allows for self-knowledge and self-discovery because it proposes a single, normative way of being for Chinese women (modelling after Mary),\textsuperscript{401} and thus does not encourage the exploration of different aspects of the self. For example, John Paul II asks women to not “masculinize” themselves, clearly indicating a particular way of being that is not appropriate for women.\textsuperscript{402}

This disconnect needs to be fixed in order for the individual to “be responsible” to herself. She needs to treat herself as she treats others: with love. If she loves herself then she would not treat her inner desires as meaningless or irrelevant. She would not be able to dismiss her innate characteristics, nor can she neglect her own personal growth. These acts of self-negation can be seen in the women from my case studies, and this needs to be addressed for their benefit. As mentioned in chapter 3 of this thesis, Suet Lin Hung’s informants from mainland China told her that their priorities were their children, husband, and family finances.\textsuperscript{403} And Hung notes that the women’s own needs were not mentioned in the discussion at all.\textsuperscript{404} By not placing themselves as a priority, and thus spending all their energies and resources on her family, these women neglect their own needs and growth. This is a potential danger of John Paul II’s New Feminism with its emphasis on women’s innate

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\textsuperscript{398} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{399} Such as the women in Yuen’s many narratives (as listed in footnote #66) and in Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 11-12  
\textsuperscript{400} Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” 76.  
\textsuperscript{401} The call to model Mary can be found throughout \textit{MD}, and primarily in part 6, as she embodies the vocation of motherhood.  
\textsuperscript{402} \textit{MD} part 4, section 10.  
\textsuperscript{403} Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 11.  
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid.
nature of “self-giving”\textsuperscript{405} While it is right to encourage a different way of being, particularly one that is more centered on the other, service, and love, it can also be a negative re-enforcement for women who are already practicing self-negation.

5.5 Conclusion

In summary, one can see that while some of Yuen’s theological assumptions and vision of the human person may be different from John Paul II’s New Feminism, these two visions complement one another. Yuen’s “this and that” option affirms New Feminism’s gender distinction but affirms particularities as well; Yuen’s holistic understanding of the person provides an alternative vision of the person that affirms the need to view the person in her entirety and promotes bodily integrity; and Yuen’s emphasis on women’s agency highlights key elements of self-determination and individuality that are lost in the midst of John Paul II’s focus on the preordained roles and behaviours of women. These key markers of Yuen’s theology are able to address the needs of the women in my case studies, and as such provide a more empowering vision of theological anthropology. With a shift in how one views theological anthropology, there will be subsequent shifts in how one speaks of other aspects of theology, such as: theological methodology, the Church’s particular view of gender, Confucianism and Catholicism, and God-talk. These topics will be explored in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{405} MD part 6, section 18.
Chapter 6

Implications and Final Thoughts

In this last chapter, I would like to briefly highlight some key implications that emerge from this thesis. These implications highlight: the need for a change in theological methodology, a call to change in how the Church views and understands “gender”, the imperative for Confucianism and Catholicism to address the oppression of women together, and the renewed significance of *eros* in our talk of God. In the latter portion of this chapter, I will conclude this thesis with a general summary, and a positive look towards the present.

6.1 Implication: Change in Theological Methodology

The first implication of my thesis is that it will contribute to the growing voice within theology which argues for a change in methodology. As seen in chapter 2 of my thesis, Pope John Paul II starts with the abstract to deduce a universal concept about women. But as I have demonstrated in my thesis, through analysis and comparison with Chinese women’s experience of personhood and womanhood, this methodology has its limits, especially since it makes such general statements about women. It needs to be supplemented by more approaches like that of Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen. These types of statements do not resonate with many women’s lived experiences, because they do not take into consideration their contexts and the obstacles that they face, particularly women in marginalized situations of migration, exclusion or oppression. For example, in Chapter 3 and 5, I noticed that many of women in mainland China and Hong Kong participate in self-negation because they focus their time and energy on their children and family. Thus a theology of woman that sees self-gift-of-self as the core of womanhood will encourage these women to continue such practices of self-negation, which is detrimental to their self-growth and sense of self-value.

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406 *MD*, part 3, section 6.
407 This can be seen in chapter 4, particularly in the section on the difference in methodology between Pope John Paul II and Yuen.
409 For example, this emphasis on the giving and service nature of women, by virtue of their gender and biological make up, can be found in *MD*, part 6, section 18.
These concerns will only be addressed in theology if theology is rooted in and listens to Chinese women’s experiences.

As such there needs to be a change in methodology in the sense of what is accepted as a credible source for theology. Feminist theology embodies this shift as it advocates for women’s voices and experiences to be included in theological discussion. Even within the inclusion of women’s voices, there cannot be a privileging of one voice over another. More recently, third-world feminist theologians are highlighting the fact that Western Caucasian women’s experiences and problems are made the “norm”, and that Third-world women’s needs and voices are not being heard.410 Yuen notes, “…many feminist theologians in the developing countries realize that their experiences are not totally the same as those in the West.”411 By noticing the experiences and contexts of the non-Western/non-Caucasian women, one will see that general statements, for example about women, no longer make sense. The particularities and contexts of individual women will influence how they understand their “womanhood”. As such, one cannot have a responsible and relatable theology about women, without consulting women of different ethnicities, social status, and age. The inclusion of different voices means that different experiences will be addressed.

6.2 Implication: Change in how the Church understands gender and gender role divisions:

The second implication has to do with the Church’s understanding of gender, which primarily manifests itself in discussions about the role of women in the Church. Throughout my thesis, I critiqued the complementary and essentialist school of thought, and subsequently challenged the gender divisions and roles that the Church adheres to, particularly through the two case studies of Chinese women mentioned in chapter 3.412 As the Church’s particular view of gender influences the types of roles that men and women are allowed to participate in respectively, an adoption of Yuen’s “this and that” theology for theological anthropology may help open doors for women’s greater participation in ministries.

411 Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 124.
412 This can be seen primarily in chapter 4 and 5.
New Feminism’s division of traits helps facilitate the division of roles. As mentioned before in chapter 4, the types of jobs and roles that Pope John Paul II links with women are connected to the ideas of motherhood, acceptance of the other, service, love, and nurturing. For example, he speaks about the roles of nurses, teachers, and mothers.\(^{413}\) As such one can see that for New Feminism, gender appropriate roles emerge out of gender appropriate traits.\(^{414}\)

However, the inclusion of the “this and that” option challenges such traditional divisions of roles, as it no longer sees certain traits and roles as bound to a particular gender. As such, the “this and that” option provides a chance for dialogue within the Church about women’s participation in ministry, especially those which are deemed by the Church as male-appropriate roles, such as priesthood. Because of the differences between each person, it also raises the question of whether ministries’ requirements, such as being a man for priesthood, are too narrow. In recognizing that women can inhabit both female and male characteristics and roles, it urges the Church to realize that there are women who have the gift and calling to be priests within the Catholic Church. The “this and that” option allows for the Church to have a language to dialogue with the other party, as it allows the Church to hold firmly to its belief in gender distinction, while giving space for the other group to speak, and discovering a possible way of collaborating with one another when speaking about gender roles and ministries.

The permission of women’s ordination will benefit the Church, as the people of God, greatly as it addresses the issues that feminist theologians, such as Yuen, have raised about the lack of women’s voices in papal documents, and the lack of women’s participation in leadership and decision-making positions.\(^{415}\) Often times, these positions are reserved only for members of the clergy. For example, 32 women were invited as auditors and nonvoting members of the 2014-2015 Synod on the Family, in comparison to 270 bishops and cardinals present at

\(^{413}\) Letter to Women, section 9.
\(^{414}\) MD, part 6, section 18; Letter to Women, section 12.
\(^{415}\) Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128, 130.
the Synod.\footnote{Celia Viggo Wexler, Catholic Women Confront Their Church: Stories of Hurt and Hope (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 3.} Wexler quotes Sister Maureen Kelleher, an auditor of the synod and a lawyer about her experience speaking with the prelates,

> The prelates share the same seminary training and have a vision of the church that often differs from that of the laity, Kelleher told the National Catholic Reporter. There were times, she said, ‘I’ve felt the condescension so heavy, you could cut it with a knife….Some of it is, ‘Oh, here comes the bleeding heart. Well, she’s a woman—what else would you expect?’ kind of thing.’\footnote{Ibid.}

As one can see from the latter portion of Kelleher’s statement that she felt stereotyped.\footnote{Ibid.} This is very similar to how New Feminism sees all women as nurturing and inhabiting the feminine genius.\footnote{Allen, “Mulieris Dignitatem Twenty Years Later,” 31; MD part 6, section 18.} The “this and that” option provides an alternative way of viewing women (or men), where one is not able to make stereotypical judgments on the other person’s actions or being. It opens up the discussion on the types of roles women can take on as women, and the types of traits women can embody as women.

### 6.3 Implication: Confucianism and Catholicism’s work for the betterment of women

Another implication is the need for Confucianism and Catholicism to work together for the betterment of women. While it is not the main focus of this thesis, this thesis did draw attention to the areas in both Confucianism and Catholicism that can be used in a negative way that will encourage the oppression or limitation of women in each of the beliefs. It is not a case where one outshines the other, rather it is an opportunity for both to address a common problem together. As described in chapter 3, Confucianism holds a huge influence in a Chinese person’s life, as its teachings are embedded in the social and cultural traditions.\footnote{To name a few: Yuen, “Religious/Cultural Ethics as Living Traditions,” 103-105; Yuen, “Social Virtues in the Hong Kong Catholic Community,” 28; Ji, “Between Tradition and Modernity,” 1060; HyeRan Kim-Cragg, “Women and Confucianism: A Korean-Canadian Postcolonial Feminist Perspective,” In God’s Image 28, no. 1 (March 2009): 34, 42.}
As for Catholicism, Yuen notes that while Catholicism is a minority religion in Hong Kong, “Since the handover of sovereignty, the leaders of the Catholic Church, specifically Cardinal Joseph Ze-kiun Zen... have spoken more frequently through mass media and have acted as a moral force in society.”

Despite having a smaller percentage of religious followers, Catholicism and Cardinal Zen hold very public, important, and influential roles in Hong Kong’s moral discourse. As key players in Chinese women’s lives, it is important for Confucianism and Catholicism to take a stand against patriarchy and the oppression of women, and for them to have an honest dialogue with one another, in hopes of finding ways to empower women and changing those particular teachings.

This impetus to draw both Confucianism and Catholicism into dialogue with one another is already seen very prominently in Yuen’s works. As discussed in several chapters of this thesis, she is interested in connecting Catholic teachings on ethics and Confucian virtue ethics together and using their common ground as a way to address issues, such as human rights.

Her work in placing the two ethics system in dialogue with one another also demonstrates the necessity for context. She writes, “As a Chinese Christian, I am especially interested in comparing the ethical systems of Chinese cultural tradition and Roman Catholic tradition, seeking culturally appropriate discourse as to uphold human dignity and enhance human flourishing in the Chinese context.”

The words “culturally appropriate discourse” is key because the discussion and its partners have to be relevant to the people. For the Chinese people, Confucianism, because of its influence in society, culture, and norms, needs to be included in the conversation. Like Yuen, scholars from both Confucian and Catholic traditions need to come up with new ways to dialogue with one another and to address the oppression of women. Through a united front, not only will people who are part of those

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424 Ibid.
beliefs benefit from this discussion, but also people, like Chinese Catholic women, who are hybrids of both beliefs.

6.4 Implication: God-talk and *Eros*

The last implication for this discussion on theological anthropology is how one speaks about God in light of these aspects we highlighted. As seen in chapter 5, Yuen holds a holistic view of the person, and one aspect of this vision is the idea of bodily integrity. For example, in Yuen argues that the interior (mind, desire, soul) must match the exterior (physical actions, verbal exchanges).  

I also noticed in chapter 5 that the Chinese women featured in my case studies experience a lack of *eros*. As Audre Lorde is a preeminent scholar in the power of the erotic, I drew on her explanation of *eros* to expand on the bodily integrity aspect of Yuen’s holistic view of the person.  

At times these Chinese women are expected to conform to the societal norms of womanhood, such as being married and having children, and are unable to listen to their own inner voices and desires. Likewise, New Feminism presents a model of womanhood that is focused on the self-gift-of-self, love and acceptance of the Other, and constant service to the Other. As John Paul II sees this as the nature and vocation of all women, women are (indirectly) asked to conform to such standards and to this model of being. Here women experience a lack of *eros* as well as they are unable to act and behave in a way that is true to themselves.

If we are to take seriously the addition of *eros* in theological anthropology, as a type of love that women (and men) experience and embody, then one must also consider the possibility that God experiences and embodies *eros* as well. This is because humans are created *imago Dei*, and as such, one can use one’s experience, in this case: of *eros*, to speak about God.  

This connection between theological anthropology and God-talk can be seen in the thought of John Paul II. In *Familiaris Consortio*, he writes that men’s fatherhood reveals, “the very

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426 Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” 76.
427 For example: Ji, “Between Tradition and Modernity,” 1064-5.
428 *Letter to Women*, section 12; *MD* part 6, section 18.
429 Chung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 47.
fatherhood of God…” As such, this idea that out of one’s experience (of fatherhood, of erot), one can begin to speak about (the fatherhood of, the erot of) God, is a part of the greater Catholic theological tradition. Hence, an implication of my thesis is on the inclusion of erot as part of God’s nature.

Traditionally and historically, Christians have often asserted the God is love, and the type of love God has for humanity (and in connection, the type of love that humanity should endeavour to imitate) is agape. According to Anders Nygren, the author who catalyzed the “widespread contemporary use of agape”, agape can be described as: “unconditioned, spontaneous, groundless, or unmotivated; indifferent to, but creative of, value; directed toward sinners; the sole initiator of creaturely fellowship with God; in opposition to all that can be called self-love; sacrificial giving to others; and expressed only by God.”

This understanding of God’s love as agapic love projects a particular view of God’s relation to the created world. If one focuses on the aspect of God’s self-sacrificial, apagic love for humanity, one will no doubt believe and feel loved by God, but also experience indebtedness to God for God’s sacrifice. God and humanity’s relationship becomes one of “God-sinner,” as God’s demonstration of love is to save the person, which is then connected to various atonement theories that further help formulate the God-humanity relationship. As such one implication of the inclusion of erot in theological anthropology is the recovering of erot in human-human and human-divine relationships.

It should also be noted that erot can also be defined as, “the yearning for fulfillment and deep connection,….the divine-human energy, a drive toward union with that to which we belong.” The inclusion of erot when speaking about God, I believe, properly places God and humanity’s mutual yearning for one another in perspective, and also see one another as

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431 Thomas Jay Oord, Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 33.
432 Ibid, 33-34.
desirable. Speaking about God’s desire for humanity, John Blevins argues that the Incarnation can be seen as an act of *eros*,

> The distinctive Christian belief that God became incarnate in Christ is an act of kenotic self-emptying not so much of agapaic love but because of erotic desire. The incarnation itself is, theologically, a Passion. God gave up ‘being beyond being’ and took on a human body out of a desire, an *eros*, to know us.\(^{434}\)

In comparison to the previous relationship where one is a sinner, the idea that one is desirable in God’s eyes has huge ramifications for how one views oneself. One is no longer simply a sinner who needs saving; one is a sinner who is desired by God. Such an inclusion of *eros* in the discussion of theological anthropology will cause a shift in the God-human relationship from one of saviour-sinner or creditor-debtor, to one of mutual desire.

### 6.5 Conclusion:

In summary, I have proposed that New Feminism, as articulated by John Paul II, could be interpreted in a way that supports the oppression of women, and that it does not adequately respond to the lived experience of Chinese women. I used the two case studies of Mainland migrant women and working Chinese women in Hong Kong to demonstrate the particular needs of women that need to be addressed in theological anthropology. I introduced Dr. Mee-Yin Mary Yuen to dialogue with John Paul II, in terms of theological anthropology, because she works with Chinese women and addresses the issues that they face in her research. By putting these two theologians in dialogue, I drew out their similarities and differences, and argued how Yuen’s different emphases, if included in theological anthropology, empowers the Chinese women involved in the two case studies, and addresses their needs. I concluded this discussion with some key implications that arise from this thesis.

After spending the whole thesis looking at the unfortunate oppression of these two particular cases of Chinese women, I would like to end this thesis with a happy note. While the current society and the Church can feel, at times, patriarchal or traditional in mindset, there is hope for these Chinese women. Many authors have noted how these women “reinvented”

themselves. That is to say, they may have to play by society’s rules, but they are not victims. For example, Yingchun Ji explains, “These women thus are strategically navigating China’s ever-shifting modern-traditional landscape, maintaining their modern side—individual identity and independence and compromising when necessary with tradition—yet partially subscribing to patriarchal norms.”\footnote{Ji, “Between Tradition and Modernity,” 1070.} She warns that these women’s compromises are not an act of, “simple obedience…but a redefinition and renegotiation in a changing context.”\footnote{Ibid.} For these Chinese women, as long as those patriarchal norms and expectations do not interfere with their “public life”, then they are willing to cooperate with those traditions.\footnote{Ibid.} As such, one can see that these women are agents, and they reclaim their identity by providing their label, for example “mother” or “migrant”, with new definitions that reflect their lived experiences. Overall, there is a theme of negotiation and navigation that these two types of women (and possibly other groups of women) participate in. They are negotiating their desires with the traditional expectations and navigating their way through this maze of patriarchy and modernity.

(a) Redefining “Motherhood”

While “motherhood” has always been an important part of a Chinese woman’s identity, contemporary mothers have reclaimed what it means to be a mother, and what motherhood entails. According to Sun, traditionally motherhood has been understood as a “laborious experience”, but Sun found that the mothers she interviewed for her article all expressed “happiness and satisfaction”\footnote{Zhongxin Sun, “Worker, Woman, Mother: Redefining Urban Chinese Women’s Identity via Motherhood and the Global Workplace,” \textit{Asian Journal of Women’s Studies} 14, no. 1 (2008): 24-25.}. Furthermore, these women expressed their free choice in having a child, which differed from the older generations of Chinese mothers who did not have that ability.\footnote{Ibid.} With regards to the work-family balance, these “new” mothers, as seen briefly in chapter 3 of this thesis, have decided that it is not a question of “either-or”. They are actively participating in both realms, unlike the traditional view of “motherhood”, and expect their partners to shoulder an equal portion of the familial responsibilities as well.\footnote{Ibid, 21, 27-29.}
And for those who do take time-off from their career to raise their children, they do not see it as a “set-back”, and not, “…from the traditional point of view of being full-time mothers, but argued that they gave up their jobs temporarily, of their own volition.”In summary, one can see that these mothers are redefining what “motherhood” is; it is no longer bound to the traditional view of “motherhood”.

(b) Redefining “Migrant”:

In Suet Lin Hung’s article, she speaks about the empowerment groups that migrant women participate in, and one part of the program is the reconstructing of their identities. The migrant women provided alternative definitions for “migrant women” that corresponded to their own reality and fit their understandings of themselves as “migrant women”. “Migrant women” are no longer moochers of the Hong Kong system, or valueless persons; rather, “Migrant women are -active laborers. – devoted mothers. –committed family caregivers. –nurturing the future generations of Hong Kong. –saving welfare expenses by taking care of family members. –bridging the cultural gaps between Hong Kong and China.” By changing the narrative around “migrant women”, these Chinese migrant women are affirming and asserting their worth and identity.

6.6 Parting thoughts:

One can see that these particular groups of women are no longer letting society dictate these labels and definitions for them. By redefining these terms, these Chinese women are able to have leverage over patriarchy, and truly embrace who they are. They are no longer bound to society or patriarchy’s definition of womanhood; they are reclaiming the term for themselves by defining it based on their own experiences and reality.

This redefining of womanhood can also be done within the Catholic Church. A common theme that run throughout the above examples is that women are the ones redefining womanhood. This is an important first step for Catholicism to take. As mentioned before in chapter 2, many scholars have noted that New Feminism does not have relevance to real

441 Ibid, 26-7.
women and their experiences, and women’s voices are missing from *Mulieris Dignitatem*, a document specifically about women.\(^{443}\) The incorporation of Yuen’s theology into theological anthropology will encourage and provide space for women to redefine womanhood as there will be a shift in methodology: to write a theology about womanhood, one must start with women’s narratives. As mentioned in previous chapters, the act of storytelling allows the woman to find her own voice and share her own experiences.\(^{444}\) It is through this act that women begin to redefine womanhood for themselves, and rediscover their power and dignity as women created in the image and likeness of God.

\(^{443}\) The full discussion can be found in Chapter 2, under the section: Critiques of New Feminism. Similarly Yuen also notes of this in the following sources: Yuen, “Promoting Women’s Dignity in the Church and Society in Hong Kong,” 128; Yuen, “從女性主義解放神學角度看信仰與正義.”

\(^{444}\) Hung, “Empowerment Groups for Women Migrating from China to Hong Kong,” 9-10.
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