The Hundred River Review

Volume 5, Issue 1 | 2020-2021

The Writing Program
NYU Shanghai

海纳百川 有容乃大
The ocean accepts a hundred rivers
to contain each one equally

The Hundred River Review is a journal of excellent student writing produced in our core writing courses here at NYU Shanghai. We celebrate essays that challenge our thinking, present us with new ways of seeing texts, build great arguments, and model the writing goals of our core courses. We believe that students want to share their writing and read the work of their peers, and *The Hundred River Review* provides a space for this exchange.

All works cited as in the original text.

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The Masthead

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Table of Contents

Letter from the Editors

There's a magnificent turn in Jia Zou's essay on the complications of the selfie in which a casual-seeming photo of a girl and her pet cat—Zou includes the screenshot—is held up as an example of online authenticity against an avalanche of edited, plastic beauty shots. Later, after Zou gives us a "Selfies Without Editing Contest" that only winds up enforcing traditional beauty standards, we return to the cat-girl's photo for a closer look: the text accompanying the photo is her handy list of tips for taking a truly authentic selfie. We're left to wonder: do the tips mean she's generous, or fake, or both? Can you tell someone how to record their most authentic self? To answer, Zou settles on the trap of self-objectification—one driven not by the selfie taker's tips or tricks, it turns out, but by the comments of everyone else.

This tension lies at the heart of the smart student work in this year's *Hundred River Review*. Alongside Zou's essay, we have Zhiqing Guo writing during the terrifying early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and arguing forcefully against then-U.S. President Trump's racializing of the disease. Kuntian

Chen carefully dissects the stigma attached to rural children of migrant workers, struggling to find their way in classrooms as their parents are forced to toil in cities far away. Finn Bader signs up for Tinder to explore the purported shallowness of dating economy, only to uncover both new networks and old desires, and Qinci Li deftly swings the double-edge sword of Han dynasty writer Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women* to re-see the gender politics of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. In each essay we see a young writer using research and a good question to tell the story of an idea or self or community that will not be foreclosed by likes or limits laid by the world beyond. In the Writing Program at NYU Shanghai, we know this intellectual curiosity, hustle, and strength will power these and all our students through the rest of their academic careers. We are also certain that the skill of crafting a convincing, well-researched argument will serve them in any path they follow after leaving Century Avenue.

But we also harbor the hope that good writing here and across our Writing as Inquiry and Perspectives on the Humanities classrooms will grant our students the critical eye and questioning minds that will help them better not only themselves, but the societies around them. Consider the heartbreaking image of the left-behind child Chen cites in his

essay: “When the show started, all the other kids were lifted above by their parents... so they could still see what’s going on out there.” The child interviewed remains on the ground, unable to see. Chen argues for a world in which we respect both child and working parent, and then extend a hand ourselves. We at the *The Hundred River Review* concur: there is so much we all struggle to see. In these pages, may we see the lifting begin.

Sincerely,
Dan Keane and Chrystal Ho,
The Hundred River Review Editorial Board

Anti-Chinese Sentiments During the COVID-19 Pandemic: the Trump Administration's Racialization of the Medical Crisis

by Zhiqing Guo

Faculty Introduction

by Adam Yaghi, Lecturer in the Writing Program

Zhiqing Guo wrote "Anti-Chinese Sentiments During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Trump Administration's Racialization of the Medical Crisis" for my Writing as Inquiry I, Spring 2020. This is a refined version of Guo's final research project. In that project, Guo identified and investigated a significant issue that still interests a broader audience nowadays: the racialization of COVID-19 by ex-President Donald Trump and his administration. Guo also draws attention to how Trump's irresponsible and opportunistic exploitation of the pandemic has serious repercussions which continue to affect Asian Americans and Asians in the United States and other parts of our world. This exploitation, Guo further argues, has weakened the American health system, and left visible marks on the lives of many Americans, Chinese, and Asians.

In responding to this problem of racializing the pandemic, Guo offers an arguable and defendable thesis statement, one that is supported by evidence taken from trustworthy and reliable sources. "Anti-Chinese Sentiments" represents a well-researched and clean work. I would like to congratulate Zhiqing Guo on this accomplishment.

Anti-Chinese Sentiments During the COVID-19 Pandemic: the Trump Administration's Racialization of the Medical Crisis

by Zhiqing Guo

Early in 2015, just after the world had succeeded in containing a deadly Ebola outbreak, Bill Gates advocated for global collaboration for future pandemics in his TED Talk, titled "The Next Outbreak? We're Not Ready" (Gates). While people doubted his pessimism at that time, Gates' concern has proven to be reasonable today. Contrary to Gates' appeal for collaboration six years ago, we still have not found a way to contain a pandemic through global solidarity and cooperation — the current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), since its first outbreak in China in January 2020, has overwhelmingly spread worldwide, along with rising racism and discrimination. By April 9 2021, the number of confirmed cases around the globe has reached 133.5 million, which is about 4665 times the number of Ebola cases ("WHO Coronavirus''). In the United States, the number has reached 30.6 million with 553,801 deaths (''WHO Coronavirus''). Back in 2020, during the pandemic's progressive outbreak in the US, the former Trump administration reversed their previously amicable attitude towards China's efforts in containing the pandemic. Instead,

they demanded that China pay the full price for the global pandemic, and accused China of manipulating the virus. In this research paper, I analyze these accusations, identify the political rationales behind the accusations, and recognize their impacts on the US under the COVID-19 pandemic. Opposed to the Trump administration's denunciation against China and racialization of the pandemic, I argue that their accusations are insufficient, and serve as a political strategy that shifts the American public's attention away from the Trump administration's failure to contain the disease, to xenophobia against China. This strategy led to the deterioration of the pandemic in the US, and increased serious anti-Asian racism domestically. By analyzing the Covid-19 crisis in the US, this research paper aims to give a warning against the racialization of pandemics in the future.

At the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic spread in March 2020, the Trump administration demanded China to take full responsibility for the global COVID-19 pandemic because of the Chinese government's inability to contain the initial outbreak. US officials have frequently attributed the pandemic to China's delay in announcing the disease's severity. As Mark Esper, former US Secretary of Defense, said on *Fox News*:

> If the Chinese government had been more transparent early on, we're talking late fall, December at least, we

> would all — all of us, all the nations of the world — would have been able to get our arms around this and contain it in China where it began and prevent its propagation around the world. (Nelson)

Esper directly indicated that China had concealed the epidemic from other countries, until it was too late to stop a global outbreak. It is true that the Wuhan government in China underestimated the contagion of the virus at the initial stage, and did not make an emergency announcement until January 20 2020. With a mass Spring Festival event taking place in Wuhan on January 19 2020, the Wuhan government ultimately failed to contain the domestic breakout within the province, eventually leading to a national epidemic outbreak (Huang).

However, even with the miscommunication between the Wuhan government and the central Chinese government, the central government had been transparently reporting to the World Health Organization (WHO) since January 3 2020, as soon as the central government became suspicious about the disease's potential threat (Huaxia). Also, authoritative public health experts from nine different countries have recognized the "rapid, open, and transparent sharing of data" by Chinese scientists to be of great help in the world's preventive efforts against the virus (Calisher et al.). Moreover, other countries still had enough time to prevent the spread, despite the

Wuhan government's delay in response. Taking the US for example, there were only 11 confirmed cases when the country closed its borders to China on February 2 2020, but this number reached 400,000 by April 8 2020 ("Foreign Ministry Press Conference"). The statistics prove that the Wuhan government's delay is not the main contributor to the US outbreak. It is thus unjustified for the Trump administration to demand that China take full responsibility for the pandemic's global spread. If the accusations are unjustified, why did the former Trump administration still make them?

The answer may be identified through the officials' attitudes towards China during the pandemic: more than overstating China's responsibility, officials in the former Trump administration have also deliberately racialized the pandemic since March 2020. Contrary to the WHO's declaration that epidemic names should never be associated with a specific group of people, Trump and other officials in his administration had deliberately called COVID-19 the "Chinese virus" since March 16 2020 ("WHO Issues Best", Rogers). In the following two weeks, Trump repeatedly used the term "Chinese virus" more than 20 times (Viala-Gaudefroy and Lindaman, Yeung et al.). A picture taken and tweeted by a Washington Post photographer shows that Trump marked the word "Corona" to be replaced with "Chinese" on his briefing notes (Bostford).

When accused of his deliberate use of a racist term to name the virus, Trump still defended himself by saying "it's not racist at all. [The virus] comes from China. I want to be accurate" (Viala-Gaudefroy and Lindaman). Such statements clearly violate WHO's warning in naming a pandemic, and the subsequent aggravated tension due to the naming issue worsened China-US relations. Even worse, Trump and former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo escalated the tension by groundlessly stigmatizing China for allegedly manipulating the coronavirus. Despite credible scientific evidence that the virus "is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus," Trump and Pompeo constantly asserted that there was "enormous evidence" of the virus as a Chinese bioweapon (Andersen et al., Borger). However, they never provided their alleged evidence nor responded to the scientific rectification (Borger). Although US officials could have called for a serious investigation to better understand the pandemic, they chose instead to publicly accuse China for virus manipulation without having any tenable proof. This stigmatization of China's reputation, and the racist use of "Chinese virus," reflects the Trump administration's deliberate attempts at racializing the pandemic.

This racialization of the pandemic may be a political strategy to shift the public's attention away from the Trump

administration's incapability in managing the medical crisis to blaming China, especially considering the administration's previously amicable attitude towards China at the start of the pandemic. At the beginning, Trump highly praised China's efforts in combating the virus. On January 24 2020, Trump tweeted, "China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency," and particularly thanked Chinese President Xi on behalf of all Americans (Peters). As some cases were soon found in the US, the Trump administration blocked entry from China to the US on February 2 2020 and assured the US public that the travel ban guaranteed the US enough time to prevent the pandemic's spread (Dáte). Throughout February, Trump repeatedly praised China's efforts in fighting the pandemic (McDermott and Kaczynski).

However, Trump's attitude towards China sharply shifted when the number of coronavirus cases in the US surged in March 2020. On March 19, when 4043 new cases were reported in America, Trump changed his previous gentle tone for China and used the improper term "Chinese virus" to label the coronavirus for the first time. Since then, Trump started his unceasing denunciation of China's inability as a strategy to shift the public's attention. Based on a scientific study on British media's coverage of SARS in 2003, the political strategy

of xenophobia gave the British public a sense of domestic safety and prevented public panic (Washer). In other words, the British tended to hold more confidence in their government's ability to contain the medical crisis when the association between the Chinese and the SARS epidemic was emphasized (Washer). Specifically, the British felt a sense of safety, when implicitly distinguished from the Chinese, who were in danger from SARS (Washer). Likewise, when Trump adopted the term "Chinese virus," he possibly sought to shift public attention from his government's ineffective prevention of the pandemic, to sharply blaming it all on China. In some way, the xenophobia strategy may help alleviate the pressure from the US public, similar to the strategy used by the British media. However, in the US, this xenophobia became directed at its own people — Asian Americans who look almost the same as Chinese. In this case, this strategy deteriorated the situation in the US rather than mitigating the crisis, both in the medical and racial aspects.

Firstly, the Trump administration's overemphasis on isolation from China diverted their attention from preventing the pandemic spread from other countries. Trump repeatedly mentioned that the virus is a threat from China, and highlighted that his early resolution of exerting a travel ban on China was "far earlier than even the great professionals wanted to do"

(Rogers et al.). Trump was very optimistic about the travel ban, as he said, "and I think, in the end, that's going to be — that will have saved a tremendous number of lives" (Rogers et al.). However, according to a credible evaluation of international travel restrictions published on *Nature Medicine*, the scholars point out that "rapidly implemented and almost total restriction of international travel" was needed to effectively prevent domestic pandemic outbreak (Otsuki and Nishiura). This study emphasizes the significance of implementing timely travel restrictions on all countries in the face of a severe pandemic. However, the Trump administration only focused on a travel ban on China. Not until March 11 2020 did they implement travel bans on Europe, though the infection numbers there had been increasing exponentially since February ("A Timeline"). A travel ban on China could only partially delay the contagion, and the US's lack of attention to travel restrictions on other foreign countries largely contributed to the drastic increase in its domestic COVID-19 cases. Also, the government officials' reassurance of domestic safety because of the travel restriction on China misled the American public, driving the country to neglect potential pandemic spread from other countries. Therefore, the US missed the best time to avoid infection imports from different countries in the world.

Secondly, xenophobia against China has intensified

ubiquitous Anti-Asian hostility, causing Asian Americans to doubly suffer from racial attacks and from a higher risk of infection under racial pressure. The rising anti-Chinese sentiment also exerts a huge shock on Asian immigrants in the US. After Trump adopted the phrase "Chinese virus" on March 16 2020, negative comments against Asians increased 167% in one week (Ao). Stop AAPI Hate, a social organization that has been speaking up for the rights of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities since March 20 2020, received 1135 racial attack reports in the following two weeks (O'Hara). Moreover, according to a social investigation of 2047 Asian Americans, racial discrimination has serious impact on Asian Americans' mental health, leading to mental disorders and enlarging health disparities among different races in the US (Gee et al.). Scientific studies prove that such mental problems from discrimination worsen immune systems and expose individuals to a higher risk of health disorders (Ao). The rising anti-Chinese sentiment and discrimination against Asian Americans due to the Trump administration's political strategy thus not only worsened US-China relations, but boosted racism domestically. The increase in racist attacks against Asian Americans, and the higher risk of infections they face due to mental pressure, does no good to contain the indiscriminate virus. Instead, the racialization of the pandemic

only triggers more fear and anger, leading to social instability.

In conclusion, it is crucial to study the social and political conditions that originate from a pandemic, but it is improper for American politicians in the former Trump administration to frame the conversation in groundless accusations and racism against China. The anti-China strategy with political rhetoric could not truly help the Trump administration redirect the pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic to the Chinese government. Rather, this strategy downplayed efforts towards controlling the spread and led to domestic discrimination against Asian-Americans. As Bill Gates said in the TED Talk "How we must respond to the coronavirus pandemic," "although it's very sober when we're dealing with this epidemic — you know I'm very positive that this should draw us together. We will get out of this and then we will get ready for the next epidemic" (Clifford). In this globalization era, different countries and people of different races cannot be isolated from each other, because the virus is indiscriminate and cannot be stopped by physical borders. The COVID-19 pandemic may fade away, but its impact on deepening xenophobia and racial discrimination will be hard to offset. The racialization of the pandemic has made the fight for justice more difficult, as captured by the recent rise in deaths of Americans of Asian descent, due to overt violent attacks (Markos and Lunis). Although we see rising efforts in

combating racism, such as social organizations like "Stop AAPI Hate", and a recent executive action against AAPI racism signed by the US president Joe Biden in January (Zaru), these efforts are not enough. We need more voices to speak up for racial equality and more actions to stop racist acts. Pandemics should never be about race, and the racialization of a pandemic will only worsen the crisis; this is not just a lesson for America, but for all countries around the world. As opposed to accusations, isolation, and discrimination, we must recognize the importance of inclusiveness, solidarity, and global cooperation, especially in the face of pandemics like COVID-19.

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Chinese Young Adults' Sense of Self in Social Media: Through the Lens of Beauty Apps

by Jia Zou

Faculty Introduction

by Alice Chuang, Lecturer in the Writing Program

Jia Zou wrote "Chinese Young Adults' Sense of Self in Social Media: Through the Lens of Beauty Apps" for my Spring 2020 Writing as Inquiry class. For this assignment, students were required to respond to course texts, conduct research, and develop their own original argument in response to sources. Jia Zou's essay models the development of a complex thesis statement through weighing and synthesizing differing perspectives. Jia Zou evaluates the effect of selfie-editing apps on young people's self-esteem and argues that as much as unedited selfies seem to capture one's "authenticity," they still promote self-objectification. By weighing the arguments of Jiayang Fan's "China's Selfie Obsession" and sources she found through research, Jia Zou makes a convincing case that social media as a platform intensifies young people's hunger for validation. Jia Zou skillfully incorporates and weaves quotations from secondary sources to support her claims. She carefully defines key terms, such as "authenticity" and "self-esteem." She includes social media posts as apt visual examples for her claims. Overall, Jia Zou's essay is an ambitious, methodical response to the way social media has affected our psyche today.

Chinese Young Adults' Sense of Self in Social Media: Through the Lens of Beauty Apps

by Jia Zou

Since photo-editing apps have emerged in China, Chinese young people are spending lots of time and effort editing their selfies using all kinds of beauty apps, before posting them online. In "China's Selfie Obsession," Jiayang Fan points out one disturbing phenomenon caused by these beauty apps: they are making young people's selfies look more and more homogeneous: all with big eyes, double eyelids, pointed chins and pale white skin, flawless yet losing authenticity (Fan). This phenomenon is disturbing, because scholars agree that selfies are "a valuable means of self-presentation and self-expression" in social media cultures nowadays (Lobinger and Brantner 1849). Homogeneous selfies mean that young people are not expressing their real selves through this valuable means of self-presentation. As Fan argues, "the freedom to perfect your selfie does not necessarily yield a liberated sense of self" (Fan). In other words, Chinese young people's self-representation through inauthentic selfies distorts their sense of selves. They create the illusion that they have expressed their individualism by achieving their ideal self-image, which is in fact not their true self, as they are conforming to the social aesthetic standard. I

agree with Fan's opinion that the inauthentic selfies posted by Chinese young adults are associated with lower self-esteem. However, a selfie with authentic self-representation does not necessarily mean higher self-esteem, because of the subconscious existence of self-objectification. By considering the recent trend, several years after Fan's article was published, where more and more Chinese young people are appreciating less-edited selfies on social media, I argue that these selfies may not be authentic self-representations. Instead, unedited selfies that are posted without seeking outside confirmation are less affected by self-objectification and truly have a stronger sense of self.

The concept of "sense of self" is not yet strictly or scientifically defined by scholars. However, as a branch of self-concept, "sense of self" involves ideas like self-esteem (Skoglund). Self-esteem refers to a person's overall sense of personal value or worth. It can be considered as a measure of how much a person "values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself" (Adler & Stewart). Another concept, which can also be regarded as one branch of "sense of self," is self-objectification. Self-objectification is defined as "the adoption of a third-person perspective on the self as opposed to a first-person perspective" such that people who post selfies "come to place greater value on how they look to others rather

than on how they feel or what they can do" (Calogero 575). It refers to an individual's internalization of an observer's perspective as a primary view of their own self (Zheng 325). In other words, self-objectification happens when people look at and evaluate themselves as objects based on appearance. "Sense of self" is a complicated concept that of course includes more than these two components, but this essay will focus mainly on these two aspects.

To figure out the relationship between a person's sense of self and the authenticity in their selfies posted on social media, the concept of "expressive authenticity" needs to be employed, following the work of Marcus Banks. A photograph achieves expressive authenticity when the representation of the person is consistent with their own nature (Banks 168). In other words, we regard a selfie as having expressive authenticity when it is an honest expression of the user's true appearance, personality, and beliefs. "Authenticity" in my essay mainly refers to expressive authenticity based on Banks' theory, which means that the photograph is not only less-edited technically, but is also closely related to the true self of the depicted person. The following image is an illustrative example of a photograph that demonstrates expressive authenticity:

Fig. 1 Screenshot of a selfie posted on Zhihu

The selfie above, taken from Zhihu, which is the largest question-and-answer platform in China, is a highly rated answer under the question "What do you think of people who post selfies without any Meitu processes?". This user posted a caption along with her selfies that said, "Most people regard beauty as features like white, flawless, big eyes, slim, etc. But beauty should be diverse and tolerant and I like myself with flaws, with my freckles, pimples, and black circles." Her selfie has the property of expressive authenticity as she looks natural rather than staged, authentic to what she looks like in real life. The girl stresses that she didn't edit the selfie at all while admitting and embracing the existence of the "imperfections" on her face.

On the other hand, inauthentic selfies basically include the features appearing in Fan's article as *wang hong lian* ("internet celebrity face"), as shown in Fig. 2: double eyelids, big round eyes, white skin, and small mouths, as a result of having the selfies heavily perfected using Meitu apps (Fan). Such selfies do not have expressive authenticity, because the selfie cannot really represent the person depicted, as not only his or her appearance, but also the state of life shown, is faked into an ideal yet dishonest and unnatural image.

A lower level of self-esteem will result from young Chinese posting more inauthentic selfies, as they use photo-

Fig. 2 Example of *wang hong lian* ("internet celebrity face")

editing apps as tools to achieve their dreamy self-images, losing confidence in their true selves. Rachel Grieve et al.'s study "Inauthentic Self-Presentation on Facebook as a Function of Vulnerable Narcissism and Lower Self-Esteem" reveals the congruence between self-representation on Facebook and the participants' true selves. According to the researchers, "for individuals with average and low levels of self-esteem, there is more incongruence between the true self and the Facebook self (as a function of increased vulnerable narcissism)" (144). Though Grieve et al.'s research was on Facebook, we can still see similar phenomena happening in Chinese social media: those who spend more time and energy editing a selfie to a "perfect"

one before posting it online, such as the internet celebrities described in Fan's article, tend to care more about the likes and followers they receive. When they edit their selfies, they tend to focus more on the "unsatisfying" parts of their appearance, denying their own unique features. Their actions imply the negative self-perception that they do not think people would accept who they really are, signifying their low self-esteem. Young people can be trapped in this vicious cycle, just like the internet celebrities in Fan's article, who stare at their phones all the time to see whether their new posts have gone viral (Fan). As Grieve et al. claim in their research, "greater discrepancies between the [true and Facebook] selves may be indicative of an individual attempting to mask feelings of inadequacy" (148). Because these young people have comparatively lower self-esteem, they care much about what other people think about their selfies and want to exhibit a perfect image of themselves; however, as they over edit their selfies, they deny their own images, conforming to the social aesthetic standards, instead of accepting or even admiring their uniqueness, leading to an even lower self-esteem.

Much different from the homogeneous and inauthentic beauty described in Fan's article, Chinese young people have started appreciating natural and authentic selfies more and more in recent years. One example of this trend is the heated "Selfies

without Editing Contest" on Weibo starting from 25 April 2020, with 100 million "reads" and 20 thousand "discussions" so far (Fig. 3). In addition, a new BeautyCam app named Qingyan Xiangji, released in 2018, which focuses on natural filters and especially avoids wanghong editing styles, has gone viral, and now occupies a large share of the beauty camera app market in China (@CharisApril). In the study "In the Eye of the Beholder: Subjective Views on the Authenticity of Selfies," researchers Katharina Lobinger and Cornelia Brantner examined how people's evaluation of the selfies posted on social media is affected by the photographs' expressive authenticity. They found that some participants regard selfies as "inauthentic" because of the apparent staging or visibility of the photo editing process. Their research also suggests that teenagers admire photos showing people in "natural, everyday situations" instead of "artistic and visually scripted or composed pictures" (1856). It can be seen that expressive authenticity has become an admirable quality in this new trend.

However, a selfie with expressive authenticity is not equal to authentic self-representation in the selfie, even if the person has high self-esteem, because of the influence of self-objectification. According to Dong Zheng et al.'s study on Chinese adolescents on social networking services (SNS), their selfie-posting behaviors on Qzone were positively associated

Fig. 3 “Selfies without Editing Contest” on Weibo

with self-objectification. This relationship is specifically moderated by imaginary audience ideation, which refers to the assumption in one's mind that others are "looking at and thinking about oneself all the time" (326). Therefore, when young people post selfies on social media, they are preoccupied by the idea that a group of imaginary audience would be gazing at their images and evaluating them based on their appearance. For instance, winners from the "Selfies without Editing Contest" on Weibo, who received more likes and comments than others, all fit into Chinese beauty norms, with fair skin, big eyes, and slim bodies. They also promoted their selfies to seek complimentary comments, and enjoyed increased likes and followers on their platforms as a result of being rated high in the contest. No matter how "authentic" the selfies posted by people with high self-esteem are, they are still under the process of self-objectification, subconsciously seeking for positive feedback from the "subjects," namely, other people who are viewing and judging them.

The selfie on Zhihu in Fig. 1, belonging to the girl whose image demonstrates expressive authenticity, further emphasizes this point. Her entire post actually emphasizes the technical tips to take a beautiful selfie that will gain likes and followers on social media, using just a smartphone camera and without photo-editing apps. When people emphasize on social media

that their selfies are "not edited," they are actually seeking a sense of satisfaction from others' compliments. In other words, they post selfies with expressive authenticity that are not staged or edited; but they post them only as evidence of "I look beautiful even without any Meitu process". It is true that these young people may have higher self-esteem, as they have the confidence and courage to post unedited authentic selfies that highly represent their true self. However, they are still stressing to their imaginary audience that they did not edit their selfies, reflecting how much they care about getting compliments from others, to confirm their beliefs that they are beautiful. Self-objectification is thus almost always playing a subtle role when Chinese young people post authentic-like selfies, even for those who have high levels of self-esteem.

Compared with those who post authentic selfies with captions that emphasize how their selfies are "non-edited" or "filters-free," young people who post authentic selfies without highlighting this fact are less affected by self-objectification. According to the study "Clarifying the Relationships Between the Self, Selfie, and Self-Objectification: The Effects of Engaging in Photo Modification and Receiving Positive Feedback on Women's Photographic Self-Presentations Online" led by Megan Vendemia, engaging in the selfie modification process does not affect the state of self-objectification significantly;

however, receiving comments on one's appearance would increase the level of self-objectification (37). Though the study mainly focused on women, some findings can still be applied to young social media lovers as a whole: it is not the photo-editing process, but receiving favorable feedback that heightens self-objectification for people who share selfies on social media, enticing them to focus on their appearance as "a valued commodity" (40). Young adults who post unedited selfies without any sign of looking for outside compliments, in contrast, are more likely to be accepting of what they look like, including those parts of their bodies that are regarded as "imperfect" when examined by social media norms. As they do not depend on receiving favorable comments on their appearance to gain their sense of self-worth, such behavior can be considered as lower self-objectification. Interestingly, there is no measure for determining the reason why they are not stressing the fact that their selfies are unedited — while they might not care about outside confirmation, they may also believe that their natural appearance is good enough for receiving favorable feedback, and therefore are still seeking external confirmation consciously. Therefore, even when a photo demonstrates expressive authenticity, it does not necessarily demonstrate authentic self-representation.

Young social media users may always be looking for

favorable feedback like complimentary comments, likes, and the number of followers, when they present themselves through selfies on social media platforms. In other words, self-objectification always seems to be playing a part in self-presentation on social media, whether through heavily edited or unedited selfies, and unedited selfies posted without drawing people's attention to their expressive authenticity. On a superficial level, low self-esteem is associated with more inauthentic self-representations. In this case, expressive authenticity is not achieved, since the person's true self is either distorted or hidden by the photo-editing process. However, higher self-esteem does not necessarily lead to authentic self-representation, because of the subconscious existence of self-objectification, which entices young adults to stress the non-edited aspect of their selfies, in order to gain likes on social media. In turn, these likes allow young adults to gain a sense of self-value. Therefore, despite the decreasing popularity of wanghong-style selfies in China, in favor of less-edited selfies, Chinese young social media users need to recognize that their self-worth is embedded neither in heavily edited selfies nor the texts posted along with the selfies. To gain a better sense of self-worth, they need to hold the belief that their natural appearance can be appreciated no matter what, as long as they believe that they are representing their authentic selves.

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Inequality and Rural Discrimination: Causes of the Rural-Urban Literacy Gap for Children in China

by Kuntian Chen

Faculty Introduction

by Adam Yaghi, Lecturer in the Writing Program

In Writing as Inquiry I (Spring 2020), Kuntian Chen was interested in exploring what causes the unequal literacy abilities children of migrant workers exhibit in large Chinese cities. In "Inequality and Rural Discrimination: Causes of the Rural-Urban Literacy Gap for Children in China," Chen brings to our attention a few important issues: the struggle of migrant laborers' children for literacy, and the bias against migrant workers who are often seen as irresponsible parents. Chen however does not accept these negative attitudes and popular accusations. Instead of blaming the migrant parents, Chen argues that we should pay more attention to the multi-faceted nature of inequality these migrant Chinese parents and their families face if a real change is to happen. "Inequality and Rural Discrimination" indeed explores an important issue that needs attention. Chen uses reliable sources to advance a clear argument. His work is informative and educational. I congratulate Kuntian Chen on this achievement.

Inequality and Rural Discrimination: Causes of the Rural-Urban Literacy Gap for Children in China

by Kuntian Chen

Around 5 years ago, Chinese scholar Qian Liu examined the "social integration status" of migrant workers' children in urban public schools, attempting to understand whether migrant workers' children were accepted as part of the urban communities they were living in (395). According to an entry in his field diary, a teacher from an urban primary school told him: "... since the parents (migrant workers) aren't well mannered, it is hard for us to manage them, and the parents don't understand what we are saying" (398). The quote displays a negative view of migrant workers and their children, where they are viewed as illiterate and bad-mannered in the urban spaces that they live and study in.

In this essay, I define migrant workers ('农民工' in Mandarin) as people who grew up in rural areas, and moved to urban areas for work in China. Migrant workers are commonly considered as a group 'in-between' urban and rural residents in China, in that they grew up in rural areas but are now working and living in cities. By the term 'urban residents', I refer to Chinese nationals who are born and have lived continuously in cities in China, as contrasted against

rural residents, who are born and live in rural areas.

With urban residents and migrant workers now living together in closer proximity, migrant workers are often blamed for their children's lack of literacy skills, and perceived as lacking in their own sense of personal responsibility for their children. This is evident in surveys conducted in four major cities by the Chinese sociologist Li Zhu, who noted the presence of strong negative reactions against migrant laborers in urban populations (48). Such negative reactions include instances where migrant workers, their children, and larger rural populations are considered as illiterate and lacking any ability or potential to become literate (48). Read together with Qian's field research, Li's surveys illustrate how negative attitudes about the literacy of migrant workers and their children are common among urban residents.

However, I argue that such negative attitudes against migrant workers are unreasonable. Lower literacy skills in migrant workers' children are due to long working hours imposed upon their parents, where their parents are unable to provide adequate informal literacy activities to support their children's education. Rather than seeing migrant workers' children as incapable of becoming literate, and their parents as irresponsible, we should see migrant workers and their children as victims of a cycle of low income and inadequate

education, and inherently capable of achieving stronger literacy skills, instead of placing the blame of lower literacy skills on them.

Some children of migrant workers have relatively weaker literacy skills because their parents move into the cities to find better jobs, leaving them unattended and lacking in informal literacy activities. These children are commonly referred to as 'left-behind children' in China, whose parents migrate from rural areas into the cities for better jobs, but leave their children behind in these rural areas. In their study on the effects of family involvement on the development of literacy skills, Jingying Wang, Hui Li, and Dan Wang have defined daily activities between parents and children which help children practice their language as "informal literacy activities," which complement the "formal" literacy activities offered by public schools (119). Moreover, according to their research, these activities play a vital role in the development of children's literacy skills, where the presence of such informal literacy activities are linked to better academic performance in primary school children (130).

However, children of migrant workers have fewer chances to meet and interact with their parents, and would thus lack the opportunity to have such essential informal literacy activities. In a study by labor scholars Guanglun Michael Mu

and Yang Hu, both authors highlight the living conditions of 'left-behind' children by conducting interviews with them. One of these children said:

> At the New Year Party, all other kids had their parents around, but my parents were busy at work... When the show started, all the other kids were lifted above by their parents... so they could still see what's going on out there... At that time, I just want my parents to be with me (25).

This excerpt highlights how these children are affected by their parents being "busy at work," who cannot spend time with their children even on New Year's Eve. Given this geographical separation and the lack of time with their children, migrant workers have generally fewer opportunities for interaction and activities with their children, as compared with urban residents. Given such circumstances, it is understandable that these children would face greater challenges developing stronger literacy skills, as compared with urban residents.

Some children of migrant workers do move and live together with their parents in urban areas. While such children would live in closer proximity to migrant workers, they still face limited opportunities in strengthening their literacy skills — not due to any irresponsibility on the part of their parents, but due to the economic hardships and labor conditions they

face. Most migrant workers have to work fairly long hours, leaving them with less time to spend with their children, as highlighted in a report by Hong Kong labor scholar Kaston Siu. Siu spent several months living with migrant workers to observe their living and working conditions. He writes that a typical factory migrant worker in Shenzhen needs to work 9 to 10 hours a day, but this can go up to 14 hours a day in the rush season (55). In contrast, according to the China Labor Statistical Yearbook, the average weekly working hours of urban employees is 46.2 hours in 2018 ("Survey of Average Weekly Working Hours"). Though urban employees also work quite long hours, migrant workers still work longer hours on a more consistent basis than urban residents. Furthermore, as most of them work in factories and other industrial areas, these workers are faced with more rigid working conditions and hours, leaving them with less time to spend with their children as compared with urban residents. Under such difficult economic and labor arrangements imposed upon them, migrant workers face considerable challenges in helping their children to develop stronger literacy skills.

We have discussed how migrant workers' children have poorer literacy skills than the children of urban residents, due to lack of informal literacy activities and the economic conditions faced by their parents, instead of some born inferiority. With

this understanding, we might wonder: how might these children perform, if they have the same material conditions and educational opportunities as their urban counterparts? Under the same conditions, it is likely that migrant workers' children will display a similar level of literacy skills and academic performance as the children of urban residents. This is supported by a study by Gerard A. Postiglione and several Chinese scholars, who randomly sampled the academic scores of students from urban and rural areas who were admitted to top Chinese universities. When comparing the scores of these two groups of students, the authors found out that the average Grade Point Average (GPA) of urban students is 77.75 out of 100, while the average GPA of rural students is 76.74 out of 100 (68). Though urban students have a slightly better academic performance, this difference is, in the researchers' own words, "not statistically significant" and can almost be ignored (71). Since the children of migrant workers are born in rural areas, they are more likely to take college entrance examinations in their hometown, and so may be considered as a part of the group of "rural students" examined by the authors. These scores highlight how there is no inherent inferiority in the children of migrant workers; if given more opportunities to receive a better education, these children have the potential to develop strong literacy skills, and to achieve academic success

as well.

In light of this study, we should reconsider the common negative perceptions of the children of migrant workers. Rather than adopting a view of them as inferior by their own or their parents' faults, we should see such children as possessing great and equal potential for academic success. Furthermore, we ought to see the children of migrant workers as victims of a cycle of low income and weak literacy skills. In light of their parents' lower income levels, the children of migrant workers are less likely to get high-income jobs because of their weaker literacy skills, thus perpetuating and transmitting lower income levels into future generations. Many studies have been done on the intergenerational transmission of poverty in China, but most focus on the specific conditions faced by poorer rural residents of being unable to work while not fully accounting for the specific challenges faced by migrant workers and their children (Zhang 56). For instance, migrant workers' children can attend the same public schools as their urban counterparts, but still face a greater difficulty in achieving academic success under the economic and social challenges faced by their parents.

Consequently, migrant workers' children continue to face the effects of intergenerational poverty. In their study, Fangwei Wu, Deyuan Zhang, and Jinghua Zhang used mathematical

models to explore the relationship between inadequate education and low income. Their study highlights that families with the same initial income level but different educational backgrounds may have differing economic outcomes, forming an income gap after some time (314). Moreover, if a family begins with a lower educational background and with poorer economic conditions, the income gap grows in severity, as time progresses (314). This model applies to the migrant workers' children, as their weaker literacy skills makes it more challenging for them to achieve academic success and gain access to higher paying occupations and positions. While the children of migrant workers may possibly attain marginally higher income levels in the future, they will remain as victims of a more severe income gap, thus transmitting poor economic outcomes into future generations. The model therefore demonstrates the effects of lower literacy levels among the children of migrant workers, painting a more complete picture of the vicious cycle of poverty and poor educational outcomes faced by this population.

In this essay, I have explored how poorer literacy skills in migrant workers' children are not due to the personal irresponsibility of their parents or family members, but due to economic and labor conditions — such as the parents' movement away from home and longer working hours, which

prevent them from playing a more active role in supporting the development of literacy skills in their children. Understanding the causes of lower literacy skills in these children helps us to see migrant workers as victims of the unbalanced economic development of rural and urban areas, and as victims of cycles of low income and inadequate education. As ordinary citizens, we may not have the ability to solve this complex problem comprehensively, but understanding the causes of the literacy gap helps us to show respect to migrant workers and their children that we meet in daily life. While policymakers have made great efforts to ensure the minimal income of migrant workers, more attention should also be paid towards protecting their rights and improving their working conditions, while also investing more in schools and educational programs for left-behind children. Such investments would improve the well-being and literacy skills of migrant workers' children, and may eventually free them from the vicious cycle of low income and inadequate education.

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Swiped Off My Feet — Tinder Gold and Superficiality in Modern Relationships

by Finn Bader

Faculty Introduction

By Dan Keane, Lecturer in the Writing Program

In Finn's *Writing as Inquiry* class, our final research project was to turn the skills students had learned in close-reading argumentative essays towards close-reading something more personal: an app on their phone. As in their previous essays, the goal was to uncover a value the app seemed driven by, or perhaps projected into our increasingly online lives. Finn's essay "*Swiped* off My Feet — Tinder Gold and Superficiality in Modern Relationships" takes an admirably fearless dive into the biggest, blurriest value of all: love.

A daunting project for any writer, indeed! But Finn shows two crucial skills here. First, there's his close attention to defining his terms: he begins examining Tinder Gold through the broad lens of love & dating, and then narrows it down, source by source, to physical attraction, ultimately building his argument on the distinction he's drawn. Second, he makes an inspired connection: instead of forever arguing with the clucking Tinder commentary, Finn jumps silos to explain the app's matchups not as love but as an example of networked individualism. This comfort in both explaining others' ideas and taking them to new places — along with his dry, self-deprecating humor about the whole project — makes Finn's essay an excellent example of rigorous, engaging scholarship.

Swiped Off My Feet — Tinder Gold and Superficiality in Modern Relationships

By Finn Bader

"But every boy I've ever met is a fuckboy". This is the voice of Ashley, a 20-year old college student interviewed for a *Vanity Fair* piece titled "Tinder and the Dawn of the 'Dating Apocalypse'" (Sales). The article delves into the intentions and overall psychology of Tinder users, attempting to shed light into the app's darkest corners. The author, Nancy Jo Sales, concludes that Tinder has changed the dating landscape, with one of the interviewees reaching the gloomy verdict: "Romance is completely dead." In particular, she denounces the superficiality of the relationships that are created through the app, which focus solely on the physical rather than the emotional aspects of a relationship. For instance, she introduces and describes the attitude of Marty, a Tinder user: "'We don't know what the girls are like,' [...]. And yet a lack of an intimate knowledge of his potential sex partners never presents him with an obstacle to physical intimacy" (Sales). Here, Sales problematizes the types of relationships Tinder fosters, by pointing out how the app objectifies Tinder users, promoting the idea of quantity over quality, and making the individual Tinder user replaceable. Besides *Vanity Fair*,

many other publications have released articles engaging with this question, using provocative titles, such as "The End of Courtship?" (from *The New York Times*), "Tinder: the shallowest dating app ever?" (*The Guardian)*, and "The Five Years That Changed Dating" (*The Atlantic*).

But its controversial concept seems to work: Tinder has racked up an astounding 5.9 million paying users for their Gold and Premium features (Iqbal), who account for around 70% of Tinder's total revenue (Bromwich). And while I understood and sympathized with the experiences and observations of authors such as Sales, who decry the superficiality of the app interface, I was skeptical about the claim that Tinder has changed the dating landscape. Does Tinder really have such a far reach, such a significant impact? Is an app able to single-handedly change an entire generation's concept of dating and love in the span of a few years?

These far-reaching implications of Sales' claims prompted me to look into the matter, so I decided to create a fake account for myself.[1] I had seen my friends use Tinder before but decided that it was time for me to personally try it out. But right before I finished setting up my account and

1 Giving a false name (simply the letter G), age (27), no bio, and adding a single picture of the lake in the local park, I was actually able to garner three likes on my profile. I don't know who they were though; only Tinder Gold knows...

could start swiping away, I encountered an advertisement for a Tinder Gold subscription. In its free version, Tinder users are limited to 50 likes in a time frame of 12 hours. Additionally, the geographical distance from the potential match, automatically determined by the device's GPS function, and the user's age were always shown on the profile. Cue the Tinder Gold features: unlimited likes, and the ability to hide one's age and location. After everything I had read and heard about Tinder, this surprised me; despite being criticized severely for its shallow approach to romantic matchmaking, Tinder seemed to double down on its approach by offering a paid version, giving users more power in the app by extending the features they can access. By taking away the limit on likes, Tinder aims at increasing the pace and quantity of matches. At the same time, by rendering information about age and location optional, they reinforce the idea that the user's pictures and their physical attractiveness are the only things that matter (Tyson et al. 461). Tinder relationships are bound to be of a superficial nature, as the profile layout only allows for a short description of 500 characters, not allowing for much connection on an emotional level. Additionally, a large majority of the screen is taken up by the user's photos, resulting in users matching with each other by virtue of physical attraction. In fact, Tinder explicitly promotes this value of superficiality — and casualness — in its

Gold features. In its blog post titled "Introducing Tinder Gold — A First-Class Swipe Experience," they promote how these features aim to make the user's experience as easy and casual as possible: "Now you can sit back, enjoy a fine cocktail, and browse through profiles at your leisure." (*Tinder Blog*).

Browsing through Tinder's website, I was surprised to find that Tinder nonetheless advertises with couples who claim to have found their "love of [their] life" or "soulmate" (Tinder), which stands in stark contrast with the superficial relationships that Sales criticized. Confronted with these seemingly conflicting concepts of love and relationships, I decided to read up on the different definitions of love from a research perspective; the conclusions in this paper will largely draw upon, and be applicable to a European and North American context.[2] When talking about romantic love in relationships, researchers often distinguish between the concepts of companionate and passionate love, which are often connected and related in a romantic relationship (Felmlee and Sprecher). While companionate love is less intense and most present when partners commit to a romantic relationship, passionate love develops first, playing an especially significant role in initial attraction that often dissipates over time (Sprecher

2 However, it would be interesting to investigate further how these findings could apply to the way Tinder is used in other dating landscapes, e.g. in societies with more traditional or conservative dating customs.

and Felmlee). Defined as a "state of intense longing for union with another," passionate love is thought to be closely related to sexual desire, similarly defined as "longing for sexual union" (Cacioppo and Hartfield). Researchers often use these terms interchangeably, highlighting the physical nature of passionate love. To examine match-making in Tinder Gold, I will focus on the concept of passionate love, as it pertains to the initial physical attraction in a relationship, which is the exact superficial approach that Sales decries in her article.

As the app's layout demonstrates, Tinder clearly intends to encourage the formation of passionate love through physical attraction. In Tinder Gold, physical attractiveness is reinforced as a value and consequently takes on an even more important role in the matchmaking process. Research has shown that physical appearance is one of the main factors in determining attraction and desire for a romantic partner, thus providing the basis for passionate love: "[our research] revealed that physical attractiveness predicted romantic evaluations with a moderate-to-strong effect size [...]" (Eastwick et al. 623). Furthermore, physical attractiveness as a determining factor in subjects' ideal partner preference was found to be equally significant for both sexes. This finding is interesting, as it disproves the evolutionary perspective of ideal partner preference — the idea that there are sex differences in ideal

partner preferences, where men value physical attractiveness while women value earning prospects, and that "ideal partner preferences are functional" based on these sex differences (Eastwick et al. 626). Instead, physical attractiveness seems to be a determining factor in measuring attraction across both sexes in a Western research context. Additionally, Eastwick et al. found that in a speed-dating context comparable to Tinder, physical attractiveness often influences the subject's choice, regardless of what they previously stated as valued attributes in a romantic partner:

> [...] people's spontaneous affective reactions to physical attractiveness in a romantic partner were entirely independent of their conscious judgments about whether they believed physical attractiveness to be a valuable attribute in a partner. (Eastwick et al. 642)

Overall, these findings strongly indicate that physical attractiveness has played and continues to play a deciding role in determining human attraction, regardless of the individual's previously stated preferences.

These findings directly apply to the logic behind Tinder and its Gold feature. By giving the user the ability to hide their location and age, Tinder Gold lessens the value of such information. The user's sole focus becomes the profile of their potential match, i.e. physical appearance. Furthermore,

removing the limit on the number of likes a user can give places emphasis on the value of quantity, generating as many matches as possible, thus lessening the value of the single match. The user is encouraged to keep swiping, to keep matching, as there is no need to be thrifty with one's likes. Tinder Gold consequently enhances superficiality of the app by increasing the focus on physical appearance and quantity of matches, building on the premise that physical attractiveness alone is able to generate sufficient attraction and produce matches in the app (Cacioppo and Hatfield). Tinder Gold's enormous potential and success is hardly surprising then, as it directly pertains to and encourages our innate human propensity to be attracted by physical appearance, in the context of passionate love.

Although the underlying factors influencing attraction are thought to be constant and inherent in humans, the expression and experience of passionate love and sexual desire depends heavily on what is acceptable in society (Regan). Romantic partner choice for both companionate and passionate love is continually shaped and influenced by social factors, changing and evolving over centuries with society (Kuchler and Beher 7). The purpose of the simplest forms of human interaction and cooperation — out of which love later sprang — was to acquire an evolutionary

advantage to guarantee survival and create offspring (Henrich and Muthukrishna 215). This utilitarian approach to love remained for a long time in the Western hemisphere until the Industrial Revolution in around 1800, when work and private life became increasingly separate, and the individual became removed from societal structures such as class or the extended family structure (Kuchler and Beher 12). The concept of love became increasingly complex after this, with a higher focus on companionate love as a governing quality of relationships (12). More recently, the internet has proven itself to be a contributing factor to change. It encourages and creates new forms of connecting with people, as well as enables almost immediate communication across the globe. It completely upends the nature of our relationships, eradicating rigid social structures and placing more emphasis on the individual. Sociologist Barry Wellman from the University of Toronto aims to depict this shift with his theory of "Networked Individualism". According to this theory, an individual's social environment has been transformed from intimate, contained social circles towards a much larger, broader network with an increased scope of flexibility to move around in it (Boase and Wellman). There are three main characteristics to this theory:

1. Relationships are both local and long distance.
2. Personal networks are sparsely knit but include densely

knit groups.

3. Relationships are more easily formed and abandoned. (Boase and Wellman)

In summary, Networked Individualism claims that the internet facilitates communication, by expanding our network regardless of location and making relationships less binding. In the context of Tinder Gold, the app promotes the formation of relationships regardless of distance, by rendering age and location as optional information. Previously, the app retrieved the user's location and only showed profiles in a customizable radius, limited to 100 miles. Since this information was always shown in the profile, it arguably influenced the user's swiping behavior, as it indicated availability and feasibility to meet up with the match. With Tinder Gold, the user is not subject to this restriction anymore; in fact, Tinder recently added a "Passport Feature," which allows the user to set their location to anywhere in the world and use the app in this area, completely eliminating any geographical barriers.

Removing the limit on the number of likes furthermore allows the expansion of the user's network and facilitates the formation and abandonment of relationships, as there are always a myriad of other users that are just a swipe away — which is the exact behavior of collecting Tinder matches and building a network of superficial acquaintances that Nancy Jo

Sales observes in her piece on Tinder dating culture (Sales). Referring back to my own experience of using Tinder, the theory of Networked Individualism might serve to explain the three likes that I got; despite having no picture of myself and no description in my profile, there was still a one-sided attempt by some other users to establish a connection. The app allows this simple formation of a relationship with a single swipe, and the relationship can be abandoned as easily, by not responding or even blocking the other user. Tinder Gold and its functions are thus in line with the development of Networked Individualism, and can be seen as part of a larger societal development in Europe and North America that has changed the way in which we think about relationships.

Sociologist Eva Ilouz makes similar direct observations about the effects of the internet on dating in Western societies. In her research on online dating platforms, she claims that the internet's "disembedding of individual romantic choices from the moral and social fabric" has culminated in the "emergence of a self-regulated market of encounters" (41), where partner choice — especially for passionate love partners — becomes an individual choice independent of previous social structures. Furthermore, she claims that media, consumer culture, and the internet have directly promoted superficiality in human attraction. In modern media, the value of "sexiness"

— emphasizing sexuality and physical attractiveness — has become increasingly portrayed and idealized (42). "Sexiness" has become a characteristic of its own, independent of a person's character and detached from emotions: "'sex appeal,' 'sexual desirability,' or 'sexiness' reflects a cultural emphasis on sexuality and physical attractiveness as such, detached from a moral world of values" (42). Though her research does not focus on Tinder specifically, this cultural emphasis includes apps such as Tinder with its Gold features, exploiting our propensity for superficial attraction to a person's physical attractiveness. Illouz further claims that sexuality has taken on a more central and deciding role in relationships as a consequence of the increasing depiction of sexuality in media and culture:

> Undoubtedly, along with the feminist and bohemian claims to sexual freedom, consumer culture has been the most significant cultural force that has contributed to the sexualization of women, and later of men. [...] The commodification of the body through the signifiers of youth and beauty entailed its intense eroticization, and its close proximity to romantic love as well. (42-44)

The increased significance of sexuality in relationships, combined with a general liberalization of societal norms pertaining to the expression of sexual desire, consequently

allowed people to pursue passionate love more easily and freely.

In short, societal developments influence the way we choose our romantic partners and the freedom with which we can pursue them. While the concept of romance has changed significantly over time, the underlying mechanisms of our bodies that ultimately determine attraction and desire are uniform across both sexes and have remained the same in a Western context. More recently, the barriers limiting partner choice have broken down and technology has opened up new opportunities to meet romantic partners. Encouraging the value of superficiality as a medium to meet partners, Tinder Gold fits perfectly into this societal development. Against a backdrop of a society developing towards a focus on open sexuality and expanding social circles, Tinder Gold takes advantage of these developments by providing a simplistic medium for meeting romantic partners. Its success in recent years is therefore not surprising.

My time as a Tinder user remained short-lived and despite my curiosity, I did not decide to purchase Tinder Gold. Trying out Tinder and flipping casually through profiles is superficial and felt weird, and I could certainly sympathize with the experience of Nancy Jo Sales and other authors. But returning to my original question of whether Tinder

destroyed romance and changed a generation's concept of dating, I realize that this is not the case. **While Tinder may have changed how we *find* our partners, it has not changed how we become *attracted* to them. And this is exactly why Tinder — and Tinder Gold — have found such success. Physical attractiveness has always played a deciding role in determining initial attraction, and it will only continue to do so in the future, strengthened by societal developments in Europe and North America towards heavily individualized societies that cherish sexiness as a value.**

We should see Tinder as a product of these larger societal developments towards expanding social circles and superficiality in human relationships. Being one of the largest and most popular dating apps, Tinder obviously plays an active role in promoting these values, and exploits the human propensity and societal changes towards a more sexualized society, but its reach is certainly not far enough to be a driving factor. Ultimately, whether this new way of meeting new partners is "right" or "wrong" is not the point of this paper — and I am highly doubtful that there are "right" or "wrong" ways to meet partners — but studying Tinder Gold and its success can reveal the role that superficiality plays in modern human relationships. No offense, but maybe Ashley had a point after all: we have some fuckboy qualities in all of us. Swipe on then.

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The Taming of the Tongue: How Silence and Linguistic Disguise Ennobles Women's Speech in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Lessons for Women*

by Qinci Li

Faculty Introduction

by Amy Goldman, Lecturer in the Writing Program

Jackie Li's essay "The Taming of the Tongue" soars amongst those received in my PoH Tales of Gender and Power course. Particularly notable is the rigor and exactitude with which Jackie addresses all aspects of the essay prompt. In brief, it asked students to meaningfully juxtapose two course texts in order to illuminate an overarching problem neither text does entirely on its own. Students tend to assume this assignment represents a "compare and contrast" essay, so they list similarities and differences, ping-ponging between descriptions. Minimal analysis or interpretive mission can result. Readers end up wondering, "So what?"

Adroitly negotiating disparities of culture and historical period through contextualization and detailed analysis, Jackie's juxtaposition of two marvelous women — erudite Han dynasty scholar Ban Zhao, China's first female historian, and Shakespeare's wickedly sharp-tongued English Renaissance shrew, Kate Minola — accomplishes its valuable scholarly purpose occasionally using the tools of compare and contrast, but never bridled by them. Jackie's pointed title highlights her essay's key insight: in highly patriarchal societies, literate,

sophisticated, and independent women, by disguising and/or modulating their speech, express power and agency, not subordination or submission.

Jackie drafted and revised this essay many times. It did not 'come easy' — why would it? Its richness, complexity, excellent research and tightly structured argument so well supported by textual evidence is a testament to Jackie's fierce persistence, devotion, love of her subject, and determination to make her essay ring true. I can only commend her essay without reserve.

The Taming of the Tongue: How Silence and Linguistic Disguise Ennobles Women's Speech in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Lessons for Women*

by Qinci Li

In his comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*, William Shakespeare portrays how Katherine, under the taming of her husband Petruchio, transforms from a shrewish contrarian to a deferential wife like her sister Bianca. However, Katherine's dramatic reformation, accompanied by the comedy's ridiculous and playful tone, undermines the credibility of her submission; *Taming* thus becomes more like a satire, poking fun at men's wishful celebration of women's ostensible subjugation. Similar dubiousness towards women's submission also exists in *Lessons for Women*, a survival guide for newlywed wives composed by Ban Zhao, the first female historian in the Han Dynasty. When we reexamine *Taming* through the window of Ban Zhao's work, specifically, where she persuades women to defer to men in language, we discover that, together with Bianca who has already tamed her language upon appearing on stage, Katherine exemplifies "linguistic taming"— a series of strategies available for women in response to overwhelming patriarchal pressure — through linguistic disguise, avoiding verbal confrontations, and strategically adopting silence. More

importantly, as Katherine gradually transforms her language from bellicose to forbearing, she also undergoes an inner voyage from aggressive self-isolation from the patriarchy, to liberated self-acceptance. **Thus, linguistic taming, especially for headstrong women like Katherine, not only empowers them to manipulate their male partners for power alliances within the patriarchy, but also alleviates the tension between their strong personalities and external societal pressure**.

Despite their cultural differences, the Elizabethan Era (1558–1603) under Shakespeare's pen bears startling similarities in terms of gender relations with the Han Dynasty in Ban Zhao's narratives (45–114). Notably, both societies advocate reticence as a virtue for women. In *Lessons*, Ban Zhao exhorts women to cultivate "womanly virtue" by speaking only "at appropriate times; and not weary others (with too much conversation)," which illuminates how women's use of language predominantly affects their perceived moral characters (184-185). Similarly, in *Taming*, Bianca's future husband Lucentio first notices her silence during their initial encounter, marveling that "in [Bianca's] silence do I see maid's milkd behavior and sobriety" (I.i.71-72). Here, Lucentio associates Bianca's silence with her sobriety, confirming the correlation between a woman's words and character. Additionally, in both societies, a husband's dignity will suffer

due to his wife's disobedience. As Ban Zhao pinpoints, a husband's incompetence to control his wife indicates his own unworthiness (181). Correspondingly, in Taming, after losing the wager on their spouses' obedience due to Bianca's defiance, Lucentio blames his beloved wife for making him a "fool" (V.ii.143). His unusual wrath highlights that a husband's level of competence to tame his wife functions as a barometer of his intelligence and masculinity. In light of these similarities in social background, the instructions from *Lessons* on when to speak, what to speak, and how to speak provide a good theoretical framework for interpreting Bianca and Katherine's true motivations behind their words in *Taming*.

Whether Ban Zhao promotes women's wholehearted submission to men in *Lessons* has engendered controversy in modern and contemporary Chinese feminism debate. In renowned Chinese feminist He-Yin Zhen's essay "On the Revenge of Women," she castigates *Lessons* and condemns Ban Zhao as "a slave of men" and "an archtraitor to women" (Liu 145). However, to capture Ban Zhao's true intentions, we need to examine her political career and lyric ode *Traveling Eastward*. After her student Empress Dowager Deng took on the role of regent, Ban Zhao took the position of Deng's backroom counselor to assist her in governing the state (Swann 41). Such tacit support for Deng's matriarchy not

only demonstrates Ban Zhao's ambition to exert influence on politics, but also indicates her approval of women's dominance over men. In addition, in her ode *Traveling Eastward*, Ban Zhao unreservedly expresses her desire for "benevolence," "reciprocity," and "uprightness," virtues that Confucianism permits only gentlemen to pursue (Swann 116). For instance, Ban Zhao acknowledges that "genuine virtue cannot die; though the body decay, the name lives on" (Swann 114). Thus, even though she "[knows] that man's nature and destiny rest with Heaven," she still believes that "by effort we can go forward and draw near to benevolence" (Swann 114). Ban Zhao's demand of these qualifications reflects not only her self-identification with competent gentlemen, but also her confidence in women's capacity to acquire genuine virtue, and then rule by virtue. Only with virtue and knowledge can a woman subversively touch on the fiefdom of men. Hence, although on the surface Ban Zhao emphasizes literacy and virtue merely as a recipe for husbands' affection in *Lessons*, she essentially strives for women's access to education, which prepares them to have a finger in the pie shared by men.

Even while expressing her ambitious aspirations for self-cultivation and political influence, Ban Zhao still adopts linguistic disguise to moderate her language in *Traveling Eastward*. At the end of this ode, Ban Zhao unexpectedly

switches her aspirations from following the examples of virtuous people to "[being] pure" and "[wanting] little" (Swann 116). Given the Confucian traditions that encourage scholars to secure an official position to exercise government by virtue, Ban Zhao's final objective of seeking innocence appears abrupt. In the *Analects*, Zixia, one of Confucius's disciples claims that "having conducted [one's] learning, one should take up official duties" (426). Zixia's advice highlights that Confucianism considers virtue more as an elementary qualification for ruling than as the ultimate goal of learning. Aware of this tight bond between virtue and political power, Ban Zhao prudently camouflages her political ambitions through reiterating her lack of desire in *Traveling Eastward*. Besides her explicit assertion of "[wanting] little," she models herself to Meng Gongchuo, a nameless gentleman who wins a modest reputation for his detachment from desire (Swann 116). Using the same disguise of a supportive and humble widow, Ban Zhao self-deprecates by calling herself "unenlightened" and "unintelligent" in the beginning of *Lessons* (178). Underneath the seemingly submissive contents of *Lessons*, Ban Zhao, in her own writing, exemplifies a form of linguistic disguise that enables women to cultivate themselves without arousing patriarchal suspicion.

Aware of the necessity for women to speak meekly, Ban

Zhao sees the interrelation between women's perceived moral characters and their reticence. Thus, she exhorts women to cultivate "womanly virtue" by speaking only "at appropriate times; and not weary others (with too much conversation)" (184-185). By reading *Taming* through the lens of Ban Zhao's theoretical guidance, we can interpret Bianca's silence, when Katherine interrogates her about her favourite suitor, as a performance that presents her "womanly virtue". In particular, after witnessing Katherine's rudeness towards Bianca, their father Baptisia indignantly questions Katherine, asking "when did [Bianca] cross thee with a bitter word" (II.i.31). Commending Bianca's silence in response to Katherine's insolence, Baptisia views Bianca's scantiness in word as a reflection of her innocence in mind, which stimulates him to defend this faultless yet helpless daughter. In comparison, when later asked how she thinks about Katherine's marriage with nutty Petruchio, Bianca comments that "being mad herself, she's madly mated," which displays remarkable ruthlessness in contrast to her previous forbearance (III.ii.152). Without any concern or pity for her elder sister, Bianca thinks Katherine deserves such a punitive marriage, which indicates her chronically repressed resentment and contempt towards her sister. But with her strategic silence, Bianca intentionally acts out her inability to independently make decisions, as a way to

signify her need for male support. This adoption of silence not only wins her sympathy and support from men around her, but also consolidates her image as an innocent and virtuous lady. For instance, when Baptisia curses Katherine for abusing her sister, Bianca simply "stands aside," weeping (II.i.25). In contrast to Katherine's vociferousness, Bianca's inconspicuous crying spurs her father to denounce Katherine for her "devilish spirit" (II.i.27). Positioning himself as a guardian of Bianca, Baptisia's brutal criticism of Katherine highlights his intense feeling of justice and obligation in defending his younger daughter. Through her timely silence, Bianca creates a façade of incomparable vulnerability that triggers a sense of moral righteousness in men, who will choose to stand with her.

This illusion of her submission also lures men into believing that Bianca always sides with them, which makes men more willing to attach importance to her voice. In addition to her father's partiality, Bianca's meticulous choice of words catches Lucentio's heart. Viewing Bianca as "sacred and sweet," Lucentio compares her voice to "Minerva speak" (I.i.178, 84). Minerva is the Roman counterpart of Athena, Zeus' daughter. As the daughter born from Zeus' head, Athena symbolizes the wisdom generated from male thinking. By comparing Bianca to this pro-man goddess, Lucentio illuminates the self-serving nature of his trust in Bianca: he listens to Bianca only because

he knows that her compliance and firm support of men will not give rise to aberrant behavior that deviates much from his intentions. Hence, when Biondello, one of Lucentio's servants, urges his master to ask for Bianca's hand in marriage, Lucentio does not agree with Biondello's plan right away despite his eagerness for Bianca, temperately claiming that "I may, and I will, if she be so contended" (IV.v.95). Prioritizing Bianca's choices, Lucentio's initial uncertainty towards Bianca's attitude indicates the power that Bianca's words possess in determining their relationship. However, shortly afterwards, Lucentio consoles and asserts himself by assuming that "she will be pleased" by his proposal (IV.v.108). Such reassurance implies that the weight Lucentio attaches to Bianca's voice functions merely as a retrievable reward for her assumed alignment with him. In short, Bianca's volitional submission in language tricks Lucentio into standing by her, subtly yet effectively, when Lucentio was trying to win her affections.

In contrast to Bianca, who views language as a lubricant for her involvement in the male-dominated world, Katherine initially regards language as the sole medium for self-expression that can consolidate her identity, in the face of its erosion by men. For instance, when denied her voice by Petruchio when choosing her caps, she cogently argues that her tongue tells "the anger of [her] heart," which sets her free, at least,

"in words" (IV.iii.82-84). Besides showing her determination to defend her own voice from the overwhelming remarks from men, Katherine's striving for expression illustrates her maladjustment to the patriarchy. Wielding her shrill tongue as a sword, she verbally attacks every instruction and expectation she receives from men. For instance, when Litio, the music schoolmaster, merely "[bows] her hand to teach her fingering," Katherine immediately pays him back with "vile terms" (II.i.157,166). Although she sees the potential danger of "[being] made a fool" for a woman without "a spirit to resist" (III.ii.226), such an overreaction to Litio's guidance reflects her persecution complex: she considers any guidance from men, even those out of good or neutral intentions, as a conspiracy against her. Hallett highlights this pathological rejection in his article "Kate's Reversal in *The Taming of the Shrew,*" claiming that for Katherine, every occasion becomes an opportunity to "demand the opposite of what is required of her" (7). Katherine regards her shrewishness as the only outlet for her demand for self-assertion. Hence, despite knowing men's inevitable aversion and hostility towards her cantankerousness, she still obstreperously carries her shrewishness into extremes, where she obsessively positions herself opposite to male expectations. Paradoxically, while indulging in her recalcitrance, Katherine simultaneously confines herself to the image of a shrew, which

in turn limits her capacity to liberate herself from patriarchal doctrine. Hence, Katherine's belligerent verbal explosions not only reveal her vehement rejection of male expectations, but also mirror a compulsive shrewishness that overrides her awareness of consequences.

Unexpectedly, Petruchio shakes this rigid shrewishness, not through adopting more acrimonious and pugnacious words like his future father-in-law Baptisia, but through his supportive and playful use of language that stirs Katherine's static self-perception. He intentionally praises Katherine as "art pleasant, gamesome" and "passing courteous" even though he clearly knows that Katherine is aware of her notorious reputation as a shrew (II.i.259). Instead of considering these remarks as Petruchio's taunts, Shakespeare scholar Tita Baumlin sees their healing and demiurgic effects on Katherine, motivating her to "[change] her sense of self, creating for her a new, more functional persona" (237). Since Katherine has condemned the entire species of men, Petruchio deliberately adopts such playful sarcasm to open a slim entry to her world. But he cannot touch Katherine without his appreciative reference to his mother: when Katherine asks where he studied such "goodly speech," Petruchio attributes it to "[his] mother's wit" without hesitation (II.i.277-278). Petruchio's appreciation for women's oratorical prowess demonstrates his respect for the

lineage of female wisdom. Such respect shows Katherine the possibility of gaining men's recognition through her eloquence rather than attracting dramatic attention to her peevishness. At the same time, Petruchio's wisecrack, inherited from his mother, illustrates to Katherine a sensible use of language that does not brutally infuriate or alienate others. Hence, although Petruchio bluntly announces his aim of transforming her "from a wild Kate to a Kate conformable as other household Kates" (II.i.292-293), Katherine moves to accept this aggressive husband who seems so incompatible with her headstrong personality. When Petruchio barely misses their wedding, she weeps instead of celebrating its abortion. Her tears imply that underneath her gruff resistance to marriage, her confirmed self-alienation from society has begun to melt.

Katherine's hovering over the brink of marriage seems to suggest a concession to impregnable male expectations. Yet Ban Zhao's teachings about women's respect and compliance in *Lessons* provide room for construing this "concession" differently. According to Ban Zhao, the relationship between a husband and wife follows the yin-yang philosophy (180). Women's yin nature dooms their distinctive characteristics featured by "yielding" and "gentleness" (181). Given their perceived soft nature, Ban Zhao pinpoints that for women, "[to self-cultivate,] nothing equals respect for others. To

counteract firmness nothing equals compliance" (181). Although throughout *Lessons*, Ban Zhao restrains herself from criticizing or challenging the existing female subordination dogma, here, she particularly emphasizes compliance as women's optimal strategy to play against the flinty and unyielding male-dominated conventions. Thus, from Ban Zhao's perspective, women's compliance does not necessarily show a sign of concession; instead, it reveals the wisdom of evading hand-to-hand combat with overwhelming societal pressure. Through the lens of Ban Zhao's teachings, Katherine's increasing acceptance of her role as Petruchio's wife does not imply a spineless relinquishment of her own identity, but sheds light on her increasing sophistication to "encounter [the] firmness" of the patriarchy, as well as flexibility to adjust to a new social position (Swann 181). Through Petruchio's wooing, Katherine catches sight of the wisdom for women to soften their language, which motivates her to marry Petruchio as a first step towards assimilation into society.

Yet Katherine's process of socialization requires her volitional acceptance of social conventions that comply with male expectations. To understand the paradoxical nature of women' entrance to agency in the patriarchy, we need to refer to Ban Zhao's observation of the correlation between a man's social dignity and his wife's obedience. In *Lessons*, Ban Zhao

points out that a husband's incompetence to control his wife illustrates his own unworthiness (181). Her perspective on men's social reputations corresponds with the rationale behind men's favor for a Stepford wife in *Taming*. In particular, after losing the wager on their spouses' obedience due to Bianca's defiance, Lucentio blames his beloved wife for making him a "fool" (V.ii.143). His unusual wrath underscores the importance of a wife's compliance for her husband to manifest his intelligence and masculinity. This male reliance on female submission empowers women in a paradoxical fashion: women can only gain control over men precisely through their public subordination. Thus, Katherine's monologue about male dominance at the end of the play, though seemingly submissive, exhibits her courage to admit women's disadvantage and powerlessness in the patriarchy. As she admonishes, women's "lances are but straws / Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare" (V.ii.189). By uncovering the emptiness of a tough female exterior, Katherine understands that women's affirmation of their independent mind in the face of overwhelming repression from men lies not in women's isolation from society, but in their capacity to cause men to relax vigilance against them. Starting from language, this process of social integration entails Katherine's psychological journey of reflection and reposition, which eventually leaves her "at peace

with her and her world" (Baumlin 247). Katherine's adoption of performative obedience in language to preserve Petruchio's male dignity marks her obtaining an inclusive selfhood that enables her to navigate the patriarchy.

In reward for her volitional submission, Petruchio, at least within their matrimony, releases Katherine from the shackles of the patriarchy. Literary critic Angelina Avedano reinterprets the cap scene, where Petruchio commands Katherine to "throw [her hat] underfoot," in context of the social conventions during the Elizabethan era (V.ii.135-136). As she argues, since head coverings symbolize their "subjection to men and God" for Elizabethan women, Petruchio's order for Katherine to remove her hat implies "both the assertion of Kate's liberation as well as the couple's decisive transcendence of cultural limitations" (116). By taking into account the emblem of head coverings, Avedano captures Katherine's emerging emancipation in her reciprocal submission to Petruchio. However, since Petruchio takes pride in his competence to "man [his] haggard" through depriving Katherine of food and sleep, he at least accepts female inferiority, as advocated by the patriarchy (IV.i.193). Hence, Avedano's reinterpretation exaggerates Petruchio's rebellion against social norms. In comparison, Ban Zhao's remark about a daughter-in-law's relations to her husband's family offers a more nuanced framework to understand the

cap scene. Ban Zhao urges women to attain a family umbrella through their linguistic obedience. As she notes, "modesty and acquiescence," which require a woman not to "dispute what is straight and what is crooked," serve as her fundamental principles to win the affection of her husband's family (187-188). Through acknowledging linguistic obedience as a concession of "personal opinions," Ban Zhao prioritizes its long-term benefits: women's "flaws and mistakes" get "hidden and unrevealed" (188). In the case of Katherine, she honored Petruchio in the wager with his brother-in-law with her performative obedience. In exchange, Petruchio offers her a breathing space in their marriage. Thus, Petruchio's playful cap challenge to Katherine, instead of suggesting his genuine rebellion against male authority, reveals his tacit promise of Katherine's "disobedience" in their family, as well as his willingness to cover it up. More importantly, this tacit collaboration with Petruchio reconstructs Katherine's public image from an obnoxious shrew to a virtuous wife, which protects her against criticism and attack from the patriarchy. Thus, Katherine's successful practice of linguistic disguise suggests that women's avoidance of verbal confrontations, though restraining their self-expression, repays them with both a firm foothold in public, and marital rapport in private.

Although Katherine, Bianca, and Ban Zhao all succeed

in adopting linguistic taming to strategically wrestle with the patriarchy, the extent of agency they gain through it differs. Compared to Bianca, who has grasped linguistic taming upon appearing on stage but still has to fake smiles even in the face of her husband, Katherine is fortunate enough to be allowed to express her true self, at least within the shelter of marriage. However, such "fortune," at the mercy of Petruchio, requires Katherine's brutal self-repression and shameless self-deprecation in public. Admittedly, such self-repression and self-deprecation do coincidentally enable Katherine to reconcile her obstinacy with patriarchal impositions, and thus reposition herself in the labyrinthine network of human relationships. However, these superficial benefits from practicing linguistic taming cannot cover up her limited agency and ultimate reliance on male power. Worse still, as Katherine alienates her sovereignty in public to her husband in exchange for marital asylum, she tacitly renounces her right to showcase her talents outside the domestic sphere.

In contrast, Bianca and Katherine's imprisonment in the domestic sphere does not happen to Ban Zhao due to her widowhood. But when Ban Zhao lived in her husband's family, she was also slaving at domestic labor "day and night" (Swann 178). Her humbleness and reticence then did not even slightly alleviate her constant "fear" and "distress" in such a

captious environment (Swann 178). Only when Emperor He summoned Ban Zhao to his palace to educate the empress after her husband's death, did Ban Zhao obtain an opportunity to give full play to her literacy and moral integrity (Swann 177). Hence, even for Ban Zhao, practicing linguistic taming did not help her chop off the shackles of domestic services. In light of the family trap imposed on Bianca and Katherine, linguistic taming is no more than a defensive strategy that buffers women against the brunt of the patriarchy. The agency afforded to women by linguistic taming still primarily depends on their husbands and fathers' charity. The wisdom of linguistic taming advocated by Ban Zhao lies in its duality, by enabling women to transform the seeming weaknesses of their obedience to men, into essential tenacity that preserves them, to varying degrees, from direct confrontations with the patriarchy. At the same time, if mistakenly regarded as an ultimately powerful weapon to fight against the patriarchy, linguistic taming can only create an illusion of agency and empowerment for women, which will eventually diminish their strength to break away from male domination.

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