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BUILDING PERSONALIZED CULTURALLY RELEVANT CHINESE SEX EDUCATION



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Building Personalized Culturally Relevant Chinese Sex Education

Synopsis:

This article argues that pedagogy designed to assist students in constructing personal sexual philosophies is a crucial element that is absent from the current scheme of Chinese sex education. Building from ideas presented in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, this article makes a case that Chinese sex education should use teaching methods relying on interactive dialogue about cultural and personal values while continuing to address the health and physical concerns normally associated with sex education.

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Abstract

Sex education in China may benefit from improved consistency of the messages it sends to young men and women regarding premarital virginity and sex-roles. This article argues that development of pedagogy designed to assist students in constructing personal philosophies relative to their potential sexual lives is a critical element that is absent within the current scheme. Chinese culture has historically been extremely conservative concerning sexual matters as is evident in the classical literature it has produced; however, expression of the reasons for such conservatism in this regard is discouraged by the very lack of discussion of the topic that that very conservatism promotes. Building from ideas presented in the classic novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*, this article makes the case that Chinese sex education should utilize teaching methods relying on interactive dialogue and debate about cultural and personal values while continuing to address the health and physical concerns with which sex education has traditionally been occupied and theorizes possible methods for doing so.

I. A Classic Literary Introduction to the Topic

Apart from being the work of a genius and one of the four classic novels of Chinese literature¹, Cao Xueqin and Gao E's classic work *A Dream of Red Mansions*² is significant for sex education in China because it presents, what was for its time, a very unusual attitude of a male protagonist Baoyu (who starts off in the novel as a young boy and ends as a man) toward his female companions³ (many of whom began as young girls and (those who survived) end as women) especially his two primary love interests Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai⁴. Remarkably unlike most other novels from this time period, the female characters are not passive damsels in distress awaiting their prince but rather possess active, well developed, and multilayered personalities. However, for all of its virtuosity, *A Dream of Red Mansions* is of interest primarily because of the complex and often contradictory and confusing way in which it sets forth sex issues, sex roles, and what these days would be called gender stereotypes. For the sake of clarity I will present and expand on the relevance of a few of the great many examples of such portrayals from the book before moving on.

A Dream of Red Mansions presents the reader with a vivid image of the simultaneous acceptance and rejection by the characters, most notably Baoyu, of the common attitudes of feudal Chinese society. In Chapter 4, where Baoyu's family members are being introduced, Baoyu's sister-in-law Li Wan's father Li Shouzhang, a nobleman in their society, is noted to have raised Li Wan according to very conservative principles.

¹ The other three are *A Journey to the West*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and *Three Kingdoms*.

² The original Chinese title is 红楼梦 (*Honglouloumeng*). It is also sometimes rendered in English as *Dream of the Red Chamber* or *The Story of the Stone*.

³ I leave them unnamed only because were I to name them here the full list would take up too much space.

⁴ Lin Daiyu is a girl (in China, traditionally, one does not become a woman until one is married – the word 'girl' shall be used in this sense elsewhere throughout this article) with whom Baoyu is in love but, for many complicated reasons (including her death) he cannot marry. Xue Baochai is a girl who loves Baoyu and with whom he does get married but with whom, again for many complicated reasons, he cannot be happy.

When he became head of the family... in the belief that “an unaccomplished woman is a virtuous woman,” instead of making his daughter study hard he simply had her taught enough to read a few books such as *Four Books for Girls*, *Biographies of Martyred Women*, and *Lives of Exemplary Ladies* so that she might remember the deeds of worthy women of earlier dynasties while devoting her main attention to weaving and household tasks (Cao & Gao 1791/2009, p. 95).

Later on, in Chapter 5, Baoyu’s initial sex education is explained. Cao presents Baoyu’s sex education as taking place in a fantastic dream where the ‘Goddess of Disenchantment’ teaches him.

“This is simply to let you know that after you have proven yourself the illusory nature of pleasures in fairyland [the dreamscape] you should realize the vanity of love in your dusty world. From this day on you must understand this and mend your ways, giving your mind to the teachings of Confucius and Mencius and devoting yourself to the betterment of society.”

With that she initiated him into the secrets of sex. Then pushing him forward, she closed the door and left.

Baoyu in a daze did all the goddess had told him. We can draw a veil over his first act of love (Cao & Gao, 1791/2009, p. 159).

Baoyu’s first sexual experience in the real world occurs after awakening from his dream, in the very beginning of Chapter 6, where he has sex with his maid Xiren.

Since Baoyu had long been attracted by Xiren’s coquettish ways, he urged her to carry out the instructions [from the goddess] with him; and as she knew that the Lady Dowager had given her to Baoyu she felt this would not be an undue liberty. So they tried it out secretly together, and luckily they were not discovered. From that hour Baoyu treated Xiren with special consideration and she served him more faithfully than before (Cao & Gao 1791/2009, pp. 165-167).

Even by examining these few examples, one begins to gain a sense of the complexity of the relationship that the Chinese have traditionally had with issues pertaining to sex, sexuality, and sex education.

From the first example, the illustration of the traditional role of women in the Chinese society of that time is obvious. The second example is far more complicated. In this example we

see that Baoyu's sex education occurs in a dream, which means that whatever he learned was essentially produced by his own mind as opposed to having been taught to him by another person. We see also that 'a veil' is pulled over the exact knowledge he gained from his experience in the dream meaning that the reader does not learn what Baoyu learned. That is, the reader is left to make his or her own connections. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, by "... realizing the vanity of love..." (Cao & Gao, 1791/2009, p. 159) we see that Baoyu received a moral education along with whatever he learned about sex as a practice; and because of this fact, rather than misuse sex, he was able to strengthen his relationship with a girl, by adding a sexual element, rather than erode or problematize it as evidenced by our third example. Xiren's position as a maid given as property to Baoyu is also a noteworthy feature of our third example. As property, theoretically, Baoyu is at liberty to do with her as he wishes; and yet he chooses to treat her with respect (something that even if not uncommon was much less commonly done by men towards women especially at that time and especially if, by the rules of that society, he owned her).

All of the points elaborated on bear great relevance to the thesis of this article which is that some of the vestiges of traditional Chinese culture, when it comes to the discussion of sex, combined with current failings within sex education in China add up to a need for a more developed theory to teach sexual subjects in China. Exactly how these and other points are relevant shall be expanded on later in this article. However, it should also be stated that, while certain ideas have had lasting negative effects, there is also much potential for many elements of traditional Chinese culture – including *A Dream of Red Mansions* itself, considered in its entirety as a product and icon of Chinese culture – to lead to more positive future effects. Therefore, as

this article progresses, I shall present and interpolate information from a multitude of scholarly sources in order to arrive at such a theory.

II. The Need for Improved Chinese Sex Education

Setting aside works of fiction for the moment, historically, since the Song Dynasty⁵, sexual topics have been considered taboo in Chinese culture. (Li, Cottrell, Wagner, & Ban, 2004). Issues related to sex and sexuality were rarely discussed even within family settings, let alone school settings. While sex education does currently exist in China, many studies indicate that Chinese sex education has failed in many key areas. (Wang & Davidson, 2006; Wang, Hetrog, Meier, Lou & Gao, 2005; Li, Cottrell, Wagner & Ban, 2004; Watts, 2004; Renaud, Byers & Pan, 1997; Bo & Geng, 1992; Mo, 1992). These failures cover a wide range of areas within sex education, which shall be presented and explained.

The first, and probably most obvious, issue that sex education cannot ignore is that of health including: the prevention of HIV and AIDS and other STDs, the prevention of unwanted pregnancy, and the encouragement of the appropriate use of contraception. Though these issues are currently addressed in Chinese sex education Wang, Hetrog, Meier, Lou, and Gao (2005) point out that,

Programs with vastly different goals, structures, lengths, delivery agents and theoretical underpinnings are often classified under the broad heading of sex education. As such, abstinence-oriented programs, HIV prevention initiatives, contraceptive education and programs limited to physiological topics tend to be grouped together, and this disparate grouping makes evaluation difficult (p. 64).

⁵ The Song Dynasty corresponds to the 12th century on the Western calendar. Before this time attitudes towards sex were much less repressed and materials depicting different aspects of sexuality were much more common (Li, Cottrell, Wagner, & Ban 2004). Li, et al., (2004) state, “in fact, the oldest existing books on sexuality were published in China, around 200 B.C.” (p. 128). However, during and after the Song Dynasty, material regarding sex (educational or otherwise) all but dried up until the 1980s when the ““Open Door” Policy” (Pei, Sik-ying, & Ng p. 204) began to reverse the view that social sciences were unnecessary because social problems did not exist in a socialist society (Pei, Sik-ying, & Ng, 2007).

Beginning with the issue of disease, studies indicate that while education regarding the issue exists in China it is not achieving the desired effect. One study, focusing on the HIV awareness of Asian-Americans, found that "... foreign-born Asian youth are less knowledgeable about HIV transmission compared with their native-born [American] peers" (Tsunokai, McGrath, & Hernandez-Hernandez, 2012, p.318). In another study, Wang and Davidson (2006) explain, "according to one survey 17% of Chinese citizens had never heard of HIV/AIDS, and 77% did not know that condom use can prevent its transmission..." (Wang & Davidson, citing AVERT, as cited in Wang & Davidson, p. 228). Estimates of the number of Chinese people living with HIV/AIDS lie somewhere between 650,000 (Yang & Xio, 2006) and 1.5 million (Tucker, et al., 2005). While the statistics are disturbing, the good news is that there is currently a great and growing awareness of the need to address the issue of disease in Chinese sex education. A study investigating what topics Chinese students would prefer to learn about in their sex education found that 90% of the students that they asked believed the topic of HIV/AIDS should be included in a college-level sex education course and 89% of the students they asked believed that the topic of sexually transmitted infections should be included (Li, Cottrell, Wagner, & Ban, 2004). Similarly, Zhang, Li, and Shah, in their study investigating where Chinese adolescents obtain their knowledge about sex, recommended that, "First, intervention programs targeting STI/HIV/AIDS related sexual risk reduction should combine the roles of family, schools, mass media and peers. Second, the sex/reproductive health education curriculum in schools should incorporate knowledge of sexuality and STI/HIV/AIDS" (p. 361).

The issue of unwanted pregnancy in China is slightly more complicated. In China a pregnancy could be unwanted for a number of reasons, not all of which are health issues, including: pregnancy coming about as a result of ignorance or immaturity leading to risky sexual

behavior (Wang & Davidson, 2006), pregnancy involving a child that will likely be born out of wedlock (Wang & Yang, 1996)⁶, and the knowledge that one will bear a female child if the pregnancy is carried to term (Chu, 2001). However, for our purposes here, I shall only focus on the health aspects of the issue. In the previously mentioned study by Wang and Davidson (2006) they interviewed 40 women who had "...experienced an unwanted pregnancy and terminated the pregnancy" (p. 228). They point out in their literature review that,

Studies examining the sexual behavior of students in urban areas show that safe sex practices (e.g. condom-protected intercourse) are largely uncommon (Wang & Tang, 2001). In rural settings, educational levels are lower as is contraceptive use. Consequently women in rural areas are even less familiar with the health risks associated with unprotected intercourse than their urban counterparts and have much higher rates of unwanted pregnancies and induced abortions relative to those living in urban areas (Tu, Lou, Tao, & Gao) (Wang & Davidson 2006, p. 228).

This fact, combined with other factors, led to their recommendation that,

... sex education programs must solicit the participation of parents with the aim of increasing parents sex-related knowledge and motivation to discourage their adolescent children from engaging in unprotected premarital sex. Program strengthening family communication about sexual issues and behaviors to help prevent pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other STDs, should be especially promoted (Lederman & Maian, 2003) (Wang & Davidson 2006, p. 234).

Given these facts, it is beyond contention that health is an important concern for sex education in China. However, health issues are one piece of a much larger interconnected web of issues, which sex education must address.

A less obvious but no less important issue for the improvement of sex education in China is that of sexual satisfaction. Zha and Geng (1992) focusing on sexual practices among people in urban China found, among other trends, that, "... fully 45 per cent of the men and 94 per cent of

⁶ This is an inference made based on information presented in Wang and Yang (1996) where they say that "premarital birth... is extremely rare" (p. 301) while also saying "by the mid-1980s 5 out of 100 pregnancies were conceived before marriage. This may be an understatement, given that premarital abortions are greatly underreported" (p. 302).

the women who had engaged in post-marital masturbation preferred masturbation to intercourse or were undecided” (p. 9) and that, “large numbers of the wives [interviewed] never achieved sexual gratification during intercourse” (p. 20). Zha and Geng (1992) also imply that, as of the time of their study, the reasons for such low levels of sexual satisfaction were due, at least in part, to the restricted availability of information regarding sex.

In fact, 46 per cent of the males and 72 per cent of the females admitted in the survey that their information about sex, especially about the techniques of sexual intercourse, had been derived entirely from their own sexual practices in marriage (Zha & Geng, 1992, p. 6).

As a result of a more recent study, Renaud, Byers and Pan (2001), found that, “... the sex lives of Chinese men and women could be enhanced” (p. 408) and that,

As rewards and costs as well as sexual concerns and problems were found to be related to sexual satisfaction, it is likely that the increasing openness to sex education and public discourse on sexuality issues in China will have a positive impact on individual’s sexual satisfaction and sexual functioning (p. 408).

Thus, sex education in China should take sexual satisfaction into consideration on some level if responding to the deficiencies reported above is deemed important.

If a new guiding theory for Chinese sex education is going to be effective at responding to and heading off the sexuality concerns of young people, it must take into account the many socio-cultural aspects which have influenced the topic throughout history up to the present day. Many of these socio-cultural issues are complex and difficult to understand (particularly for Westerners who do not share and who have not studied the cultural history of China) but they are nonetheless very important for a complete picture of the complex context in which the theory expounded here is to be applied.

The first important element to note here is the status of women relative to men in Chinese society. Historically, the status of women in Chinese society, while it has improved over the years, was, and in many ways continues to be, lower than that of men. This lower female social status is rooted in many ancient Chinese beliefs such as the belief that ‘yin’ (representing femininity and passivity) and ‘yang’ (representing masculinity and activeness) are natural complementary opposites (Evans, 1993; Higgins, Zheng, Liu, & Sun, 2003; Mo, 1992) and in Confucian beliefs regarding social hierarchy (Bauer, Wang, Riley, & Zhao, 1992). From such beliefs developed a string of stereotypes surrounding female (and male) sexuality that continue in China even today. In an extensive review of literature focusing on women's sexuality Pei, Ho, and Ng (2007) found that while attitudes towards sexuality in literature have become more positive and while, in general, the descriptions of female sexuality have become more positive since the 1980s, negative portrayals such as women as victims of sexual abuse and women “As Asexual Beings Who Lack Enthusiasm for Sex” (p. 208) do persist. Such stereotypes were even purported to be justified by science. Evens (1995) writes,

The scientific views of experts...were located within a scientific paradigm that did not question the scientific status of gendered notions of strength, energy, weakness, and passivity. The 1950s discourse presented as scientific fact a series of assumptions about sexual difference that belonged to China's past as well as to contemporary Western theories and that reflected moral and social as much as medical concerns (p. 386).

Considered together, all of the stereotypical portrayals of female sexuality add up to a characterization of Chinese women as being more or less passive recipients of sex rather than active and equal participants. Wang and Davidson (2006) indicate the danger of such ideas saying, “The results of this study indicate that unmarried young women in rural China lack the negotiation and refusal skills for a truly consensual first sexual encounter” (p. 223) and later where they say,

... sex education courses must address issues of coercion and other pressure tactics that lead young women to engage in sexual intercourse against their will. For example, sex education programs can work to enhance adolescents' negotiation and refusal skills by modeling situations requiring adolescents' decision-making, refusal, and resistance skills (p. 234).

The point of all this attention given to female social status and gender stereotypes for sex education is that as long as Chinese men see Chinese women and as long as Chinese women see themselves as being in a position of sexual passivity the risk of coercion and misunderstanding is intensified. Sex educators should therefore work to develop curriculum strategies to combat this situation. Such development is one of our goals in this article.

Another feature of Chinese sexual culture is the emphasis it places on virginity. The fact that virginity, and particularly female virginity, is highly valued by the Chinese returns in a number of sources (Hoy, 2001; Xinran, 2002; Zha & Geng, 1992; Zhou, 1989). Tsunokai, McGrath, and Hernandez-Hernandez (2012) point out that even among Asian minority groups in America such a cultural emphasis on virginity seems to affect sexual behavior. "Concerning Asian adolescents, studies have consistently shown that this particular group tends to experience sexual debut later than all other racial/ethnic groups" (p. 301). They go on to say, "Existing studies have suggested that delayed physical intimacy among Asian Americans may be attributed partly to cultural traditions and values that stress sexually conservative attitudes and behaviors" (p. 302). However, in China, this emphasis on virginity has been a great source of tension when it comes to sex issues and their relationship to society. Hoy states, "As a result of attitudinal and behavioral changes women face new dilemmas such as that created by the tension generated between more relaxed attitudes towards sexual behavior and the high value still placed on female virginity" (p. 264). Historically, this emphasis on virginity was so strong, in fact, that Xinran (2002), in her book *The Good Women of China*, reports that one woman she interviewed, who

recounted events occurring in 1969, went so far as to lie to her husband as to the reason her hymen was broken for fear that, if he knew she was not a virgin⁷, he would leave her.

Curiously, Zha and Geng (1992) found that while society “highly emphasizes female virginity” (p. 9), among individuals the value men place on female virginity was roughly equal to the value women place on male virginity. These authors found that, overall, 66.8% of men and 58.8 % of women strongly valued the virginity of their potential life partner of the opposite sex (Zha & Geng, 1992). This information has huge implications for Chinese sex education. However, while both men and women seem to value virginity equally as an ideal, in actual fact Ward (2009) indicates, “A recent survey by the family planning agency found almost 70% of men and women were not virgins when they married, up from 16% at the end of the 1980s” (p. 1208). Thus, it would seem that relative to the issue of virginity there is a disparity between people's thoughts and their actions, perhaps attributable, at least in part, to the double standard present regarding virginity in Chinese society.

If it is true, as Zha and Geng (1992) suggest, that men and women each value the virginity of the opposite sex equally, and if the societal double standard of overemphasizing female virginity while ignoring male virginity is an injustice to be corrected, then sex education can begin to work from the ground up to understand and to bring greater visibility to these already existing views as opposed to the current social double standard. Doing this would, theoretically, have the effect of alleviating many of the negative stereotypes that women (and men) currently face with regard to traditional attitudes towards virginity as well as, perhaps, being effective approach to promoting abstinence and healthy sexual relationships.

⁷ This interviewee told Xinran the story of how, because of their Japanese ancestry, she and her sister were raped by the Red Guards when they were young. She describes how the Red Guards brought her to a meeting, drugged her, and raped her in a study-room (Xinran, 2002).

Another important social issue in China is the selection of one's partner according to monetary factors. Though I make this claim in large part based on my own personal experience living, working, and talking to people in China, I wish to point out that according to the work of Farrell (1986) women in general, not just Chinese women, tend to select sexual partners who prove to them that they can 'make it'.

I call this "falling in love with a framework". A man's experience teaches him a woman is more likely to fall in love once he makes it within a certain framework. And since sex comes much more easily with love "making it" also seems to open her up sexually (p. 42).

Throughout his book Farrell points out many times that 'making it' in a societal context usually means earning large amounts of money (1989). In China this is also the case to a great extent. In fact, the Chinese phrase 高富帅 (gao, fu, shuai) meaning 'tall, rich, handsome' indicates the standard of masculinity that Chinese women are expected to look for in a man⁸. Evidence of the prevalence of this view, again, can even be found among the Asian population in America. Liu (2014) tells us, in an article investigating trends in bridal photography among Asians,

While some couples choose to take photos in settings where they met or spend time together a number of these photographs are taken at places of pleasure and consumption, such as in a sports car, an outdoor shopping mall, or...in front of a Tiffany & Co. storefront. Here, as landmarks of accomplishment and wealth (or the potential of wealth and happiness), the settings primed the couple for a bright future of matrimony.... the social pressure to spend unrestrained amounts of money to show one's love with the purchase of an exorbitantly priced engagement ring obliges even more demands for an extravagant wedding to come (p. 145).

As far as sex education is concerned, for the sake of healthy relationships between men and women, educators can devote at least some attention to such issues in order to assist young

⁸ The equivalent standard of femininity that Chinese men are expected to seek is 白富美 (bai, fu, mei) meaning 'white, rich, beautiful'.

people in sorting out their values and determining for themselves what is truly important in a healthy relationship, sexual or otherwise.

III. The Philosophy of a Sex Education Curriculum

As is obvious by now, Chinese culture is currently trying to advance along two seemingly contradictory fronts relative to the issue of cultural and societal treatment of sex. This attempted simultaneous advancement is having the effect of creating complex dilemmas, which young people in China are currently struggling to constructively resolve. Young people must have the knowledge to prevent diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other STDs, but sex educators do not wish to encourage premarital sex and other risky sexual practices. Virginity is highly valued by both Chinese society as a whole and by individuals, yet the actual behavior of individuals does not seem to match those stated values. There is an expectation among individuals of both sexes to choose a partner out of love and, yet for many, money remains the factor of primary concern. And, by far most importantly, young men and women are expected to be sexually responsible and, yet they are rarely engaged in deep discussion over what sexual responsibility means. I shall address each of the dilemmas mentioned above in turn, with the ultimate goal of arriving at a theory that resolves these dilemmas effectively while at the same time addressing all of the issues that sex education is normally expected to address.

To begin, Wang et al (2005) attempted to encourage “...the development of healthy sexual attitudes and values (abstinence or, for sexually active youth, contraceptive use)...” (p. 65), one of the main problems with their approach was that at too many points their methods sent contradictory messages. For example, these authors tell us “A qualified expert was asked to lecture on premarital sexual abstinence and pregnancy prevention in the intervention town’s

meeting room” (p. 65). The inherent flaw in this strategy is a practical inseparability of the sexually active group from the group of those yet to have had sex. Were they to be separated and given different information based on their current situation, those in the not yet sexually active group would not have vital information necessary for their own and their partners’ protection should they decide to become sexually active in the future. Yet, by keeping these two groups integrated, as was done in the study, the information intended to protect the already sexually active group was the same information that ended up encouraging students in the non-sexually active group to become sexually active. The strategy utilized by these authors provided no explicit way for students to understand that certain information was intended for students in one sort of current situation and that certain other information was intended for students in a different current situation. The approach of trying to encourage students to be sexually abstinent until marriage but at the same time providing information about contraception only served to create a mixed message.

Another important problem with the methods used by Wang, et al. (2005) was that the information they provided was apparently done so in a fashion relying on monologue utilizing what amounted to fear tactics designed to scare students in the non-sexually active group into continued abstinence. These authors explain, “The speaker told several stories about unmarried youth seeking induced abortions, and counseled participants not to engage in early sexual activity because of its consequences. The speaker also encouraged young people to set life goals and to postpone sexual activity in favor of higher aspirations” (p. 65). The problem with such tactics, however, is that they provide little if any opportunity for individual learners to develop personal understandings and perhaps even personal guiding philosophies around the issue through a deep dialogical encounter. Rather, the students in this study were simply grouped and

then treated as a group (or as groups depending on whether one speaks of the integrated group or the sexually active and non-sexually active students as different groups) and provided only with cautionary tales and relatively superficial, though presumably factually correct, information. This strategy also overlooks the fact that fear tactics are easily defeated in any number of ways including through bravery, through hubris, through outright dismissal of the information, or through a lack of care about the consequences of one's actions.

Finally, many of the messages regarding sex education in China, including the messages regarding the importance of premarital abstinence, tend to be very female centric. Indeed, many of the articles cited previously in this article, about China, have also focused either primarily or entirely on women (Hoy, 2001; Mo, 1992; Pei, Sik-Ying, & Ng, 2007; Wang & Davidson, 2006; Zhou, 1989). However, Rahimi and Liston (2009) argue that such female centrality is damaging in that it reinforces a norm of male sexual activeness and 'freedom from accountability' and female sexual passivity by unfairly holding only women accountable for the regulation of sexual activity for herself as well as for any interested men. They call this expected regulation 'sexual gatekeeping' and explain that,

...women are viewed as "gatekeepers" of sexuality. Girls and women are situated through this role in a contradictory position wherein their own sexual desires are taboo, and therefore denied. This is, perhaps, the primary contradiction of female sexual expression (p. 517).

The negative effects of such female centrality regarding the regulation of sex are by no means limited to women. Farrell (1986) argues that such a *de facto* assignment of sexual regulation as a woman's responsibility serves to create and reinforce adversarial sex roles, which harm men as well as women. It creates, according to Farrell, a societal expectation whereby women are to be the regulators of sex and men are to be the regulators of money thus resulting in a conception of

the 'male-female dynamic' as essentially a quite unequal trade of financial security for sexual gratification. Conceived in this way, Farrell argues, marriage is a victory for women because it creates a relationship in which the man is now obligated to financially support the woman as well as any children in the picture while the woman retains the freedom to give or withdraw at will that man's access to her sexuality. "*The fact that we create different fantasies for each sex and use marriage to fulfill one sex's fantasy but not the other's is the real double standard*" (Farrell, p. 176). A careful and radical adjustment to current thinking about the dynamics of sexual relationships is therefore imperative in order to correct these oppressive asymmetries.

To improve sex education in China, I am suggesting that it should take on a dialogical character, as opposed to being a monologue, that does not only and merely provide students with cautionary tales, information about physical risks, and social norms but rather one which engages adolescents in deep and meaningful conversation about sexual matters which go beyond physicality. I posit: (1) that there are reasons more abstract and philosophical than physical risks and social concerns for being abstinent until marriage; (2) that those reasons are just as, if not more, important than the physical risks and social concerns associated with premarital sex; (3) that these other reasons are already, on some level, a major motivation for parents and other adults to take steps to provide sex education to adolescents though they rarely and perhaps are incapable of acknowledging these reasons in the context of sex education; (4) that it is important to discuss these other reasons with adolescents so that they understand, in a complete and sophisticated way, the importance of abstinence prior to marriage as well as the deep motivation that many parents and other adults have for holding premarital abstinence as a virtue, an ideal, and an expectation; and, (5) that these other reasons apply equally to both sexes.

With reference to the abstract philosophical reasons spoken of in the above points, some ideas from Western philosophical frameworks may be helpfully applicable. Murphy (1990) an author writing from a Judeo-Christian perspective, tells his audience,

Premarital sexual experiences are not conducive to a happy married life. Often, the man distrusts the woman he can have so easily. He says to himself, "if she will do this before marriage, she will do it with others afterwards." I asked a young man, "is your girlfriend nobler, grander, sweeter, more dignified in your eyes now than before sex relations?" Usually he blushes and says, "No, I guess you're right" (p. 26).

It is important here to be extremely careful in apprehending Murphy's point. Murphy, though he has stated his case in what seems to be female centric terms, is not simply repeating the female centric caution against failing to properly regulate sexuality. Rather Murphy has, in fact, raised a much deeper philosophical point that applies to both men and women. His point is that premarital sex, for people of both sexes, sends a troubling message to one's partner. That is, for both men and women, engaging in sex before marriage sends the signal to one's partner that he/she would sleep with anyone who said the right things at the right time and in the right situation. Though Murphy's example is of a hypothetical man distrusting a woman and of a young man apparently seeking to have sex with his girlfriend, as are stereotypically perceived to be usual cases, this mistrust is not unique to men towards women. Women can and stereotypically do have exactly the same mistrust of men precisely for the reason that men are seen, in China and elsewhere, as the active seekers of sex. Thus, the abstract consideration beyond physicality at issue here is that the choice to engage in premarital sex implicitly involves a communicative, though possibly non-verbal, dialogue whereby whatever decisions the male and female partners make, even if they are not made together, give each partner information about the other from which one partner can draw conclusions about the other's character. Given this implicit communication, it is important, in a sex education context, to engage learners in

critical dialogue about the kinds of signals they may wish to send possible partners and how best to send those signals.

Admittedly, while Murphy (1990) makes a deep point regarding sex as implicitly communicative, his point regarding the choice to engage in premarital sex sending the message that one would therefore be willing to engage in extramarital sex were the two hypothetical people to marry is simplistic. Indeed, Murphy's argument that premarital sex leads inexorably to viewing one's partner as potentially being willing to engage in extramarital sex overlooks the fact that an event such as marriage can have the effect of changing one's perception of oneself as well as one's partner. That is, relative to getting married, it is quite possible to view one's identity as having shifted such that, whereas before marriage, where one may well have been willing under certain conditions to engage in sex with more than one partner, after marriage, one may see oneself as having chosen to devote one's life, sexuality and all, from the marriage onward to only one's husband or wife. By the same token, it is also possible that one's partner has made this psychological identity shift and to, therefore, not be concerned that one's partner will engage in extramarital sex. All this is meant to say that sex educators must not turn Murphy's statement into a pat answer to questions over why premarital abstinence is important. The critical element in Murphy's point lies in the communication and interpretation of messages sent and received in sexual negotiation, not in the suggestion that premarital sex will undoubtedly send this or that particular message.

Accordingly, when it comes to the dilemmas surrounding virginity, the above is a great conceptual tool for reaching a resolution. When viewed through the above lens, the importance of virginity for both males and females, to whatever extent one sees it as important, is derived

not from a nebulous value placed on remaining 'pure' but rather from a virtuous focus on initiating a sexual relationship from positions lending themselves to mutual trust and truth.

Finally, let us consider the matter of changing the current social context within which issues of sexuality are played out. I intend to make the case that encouraging the kinds of previously described communicative dialogue between sex educators and learners is a major step toward rejecting the sorts of social stereotypes and double standards also previously mentioned. Only through meaningful communicative dialogue can double standards be exposed and, therefore, become subject to scrutiny and eventual change and can harmful stereotypes be refuted.

By current social expectations, in China and elsewhere, males and females have clearly and often rigidly defined gender roles when it comes to relationships and sex. As Farrell (1986) mentioned, men are often 'assigned' the role of financial regulator whereas women are 'assigned' the role of sexuality regulator. However, Farrell argues that the lifestyle fantasies of men and women, as a result of their clear divisions of gender roles, are very different from each other. A man's primary fantasy is unrestrained sex with any woman he wants; but, since this is, for the vast majority of men, hugely unrealistic, men's secondary fantasy is a stable loving relationship, including a sexual component, with one woman (Farrell, 1986). A woman's primary fantasy, on the other hand, is financial security allowing her freedom of choice, and her secondary fantasy is a passionate, sexy, loving, caring man (Farrell, 1986). However, as was mentioned before, marriage fulfills the primary fantasy for women but only the secondary fantasy of men (Farrell 1986). While it is understandable why the primary fantasy of men cannot be fulfilled, Farrell argues that often women do not achieve both of their fantasies through marriage either.

Women's primary fantasy is of marriage to one man who is able to provide security, in which she has the option to devote energy to work, home, children, or a combination thereof, as she chooses. Ideally she wants her secondary fantasy as well: excitement, passion, respect, attention, romance, gentleness, and firmness from their one man. Often, however, the man is too busy providing her primary fantasy to fulfill her secondary fantasy (Farrell, p. 56).

This drive to provide women's primary fantasy for the sake of their secondary fantasy is the mechanism that causes men to fulfill (or seem to fulfill) the male stereotype of aggression. All his life a man learns that, in order to bring happiness to his future or current wife, he must be aggressive. Conversely the female primary fantasy, arguably, encourages stereotypical female passiveness – the man provides money so that the women can do as she chooses with her time. This relationship structure gives women options whereas it does not do so for men (Farrell, 1986).

When it comes to sex, stereotypical expectations of male aggression and female passiveness are still at work. Farrell (1986) tells us that when a woman and a man meet there are at least 150 steps between the first encounter and sexual intercourse, all of which the male is expected to initiate.

If a woman is receptive to handholding, he thinks: “should I caress her fingers a little, rather than let our hands get like two lumps of clammy clay – but suppose I caress her fingers too soon, and she thinks I'm forward and I lose everything?” If she's receptive again, he may try to crack a joke so he can hug her during a moment of laughter, thereby reducing his risk of rejection: he may whisper something in her ear and see if she keeps her ear there; he kisses her on the lips and wonders, “How long? How hard? How much passion?”....

He soon begins to piece together the first of three commands in the most devastating of all mail messages... *“If you don't initiate, women won't – and what little there is will go to those who ask for it. So be prepared to risk rejection 150 times between eye contact and sexual contact”* (Farrell, pp. 125-126).

If all of this presents an unflattering picture of relationships, that is the point exactly; the current societal expectations surrounding male-female relationships are flawed. However, the point is

also that the stereotypical male aggression and female passivity are learned behaviors and, since they are learned, this means that a change in the way people are educated can have an effect. Sex education is in a good position to affect some of these important changes.

For instance, as has, in part, already been recommended by Wang and Davidson (2006), sex education could utilize strategies such as modeling in order to encourage learners to begin to think about and work through problems presented by the current framework thereby slowly changing the framework itself. Whereas Wang and Davidson suggest modeling should be used to help inexperienced adolescent girls avoid unwanted pregnancy, I suggest that the combination of modeling with scenarios such as one might use when using a role-playing strategy could be an effective way to help Chinese people of both sexes come to a greater understanding of sex as a communicative activity in itself as well as to encourage dialogue between learners and sex educators about such critical issues. That is, building on Wang and Davidson's recommendation, I suggest that sex educators could incorporate a sort of mental modeling amounting to what would be imaginary simulations of possible experiences. The point we are trying to make is that sex education in China should provide a space in which young men and women can play out some of these issues so that they have some guidance and some idea of what to do before they end up in situations for which they are not prepared. In this way the problems presented by the '150 initiations' presented by Farrell (1986) can be played through and result in ways that are much more equal and therefore less stressful for members of both sexes.

Through such dialogue, adolescent Chinese boys and girls may begin to understand each other's situation well enough that by the time they grow into men and women currently existing norms such as the expectation that a man 'prove himself' will be a thing of the past and sexual relationships will be able to be founded on much more symmetrical grounds. For, ultimately, as

Plato (circa 370 BCE/1997) points out, love is that which exists and yet can never be proven, and certainly can never be proven through the pursuit of worldly things. Plato points out that people often live their whole lives and never know if their partners love them because love is precisely that which cannot be pinned down or proven in any rational way. For this reason, in ‘Phaedrus’ Plato calls love a ‘madness’, and in ‘Symposium’ he writes the following,

There are the people who finish out their lives together and still cannot say what it is they want from one another. No one would think it is the intimacy of sex – that mere sex is the reason each lover takes a great and deep joy in being with the other. It's obvious that the soul of every lover longs for a sense of what it wants, and like an oracle it hides behind a riddle (Plato, circa 370 BCE/1997, Symposium 192c-d).

In practical terms, no matter how spectacular the proof of greatness might be, no matter how beautiful a person is, no matter how much money he or she is capable of providing, and no matter how wonderful sex with that person might be, none of it is capable of proving one's love to another because it is always possible to ask the question – “How do I know if my partner really loves me?” The challenge for sex educators in China (and elsewhere) is to design effective ways to help adolescents understand this dynamic and, hence, to place more emphasis on love and sex as communication rather than on a proof which can never be attained.

IV. A Classic Literary Conclusion

The above considerations, as argued previously, are of great relevance to the Chinese context. Though it is conceivable that the pedagogical theory I propound, as well as the more specific curricular suggestions, could be utilized in many contexts, the unique social atmosphere of China including the previously mentioned health concerns, difficulties with sexual satisfaction, and the socio-cultural considerations including the rigidly defined gender roles and

stereotypical notions of male aggression and female passivity of Chinese society, makes this approach ideally suited for this particular context. Let us now return to the insights offered by the classical story *A Dream of Red Mansions* in order to recap the intention of our project.

A Dream of Red Mansions is in part a story of how the main male character Baoyu is trapped in a society that demands of him that he fulfill a gender role in which he has no interest (Cao & Gao, 1791/2009). Thus, the ‘dream’ referenced in the title turns out to be a conflict of dreams between Baoyu’s own personal dreams to please the girls in his life through his own autonomous action and the dream of Chinese society to maintain the Confucian hierarchy even at the expense of individual happiness. Symbolically, Daiyu, the girl Baoyu loves and who returns his love by accepting him for who he is, dies from ‘consumption’ before they can be married. Daiyu, representing, on one level, acceptance of Baoyu’s deviant and autonomous ways, is almost abandoned on her deathbed. “But now not one relative or servant came, not even sending inquiries, and when she opened her eyes there was nobody but Zijuan in the room. She knew there was not the least reason for her to live on” (Cao & Gao, 1791/2009, p. 2929). After Daiyu’s death Baoyu is deceived into marrying Baochai and from this point on Baoyu’s life is miserable.

The ultimate point that this article is meant to convey is that to the extent that Chinese sex education currently seeks only to reproduce existing social conditions and sets aside dialogue and intimate communication, both between teachers and learners and between sexual or potential sexual partners, it is not only discouraging happiness and love but also being inconsistent with the much deeper philosophies from which came current Chinese culture. In other words, current sex education is preserving the social system but not the truths of the cultural philosophies on

which this system was once based. I shall end with a quotation from the tradition of Zen Buddhism⁹ – a foundational and influential philosophy to Chinese culture even today.

The content of this Enlightenment was explained by Buddha as the Dharma which was to be directly perceived (*sandittika*), beyond limits of time (*akalika*), to be personally experienced (*ehipassika*), altogether persuasive (*opanayika*) and to be understood each for himself by the wise (*paccattam vedihabbo vinnuhi*) (Suzuki, 1949, p. 61).

Until sex education in China, in addition to addressing practical concerns, begins to convey a sense that there are eternal truths at work within the communicative activity of sex and that abstinence prior to marriage is more than simply a value to be accepted or rejected lightly but rather a virtue important, at the very least, because of its connection to philosophical concerns, it will provide neither ‘enlightenment’ nor permanence within or transcendence of time nor will it foster satisfying and deeply meaningful personal sexual experiences and wisdom.¹⁰

⁹ While Buddhism originated in India, the Zen aspect of Zen Buddhism was developed largely by the Chinese and Japanese (Suzuki, 1964).

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