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Comparison of the Beginnings of Feminism in Spain and China

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ABSTRACT

This comparative study aims to explores the origins of feminism in Spain and China. After examining the early stages of feminism in both countries, common aspects and differences emerge as a result of distinct social, political, and cultural conditions that shape the identity of each nation. To understand the beginnings of feminism, it is necessary to delve into the past when the concept of feminism did not yet exist, but there were voices that began to demand a different way of considering and treating women. In the case of Spain, notable pioneers such as María de Zayas Sotomayor have been selected, and also two key aspects, female education and women's suffrage, to comprehend the beginnings and their chronological evolution. Likewise, when considering China, apart from examining thinkers like Li Zhi in the 16th century, attention should be directed to the late 19th century to observe the development of feminism in areas that align with the Spanish context, such as women's education, as well as other initial feminist movements shaped by the unique circumstances faced by women in China. Overall, this study sheds light on the historical trajectories of feminism in Spain and China, offering insights into their shared and distinctive characteristics.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to identify the similarities and differences in the origins of feminism in Spain and China. These two nations, representative of Asia and Europe, have played significant roles in the global history of feminism. While the feminist movements in many countries, for example, Spain, have reached considerable diffusion and strength, they are still in nascent stages in numerous other regions, including China. China, in particular, is not lacking a clearly starting but a defined action plan. Therefore, by examining the historical trajectories of feminism in these two countries, we can gain a better understanding of global trends in women's status and explore how feminist movements evolve in different cultural and geographical contexts, influenced by international factors.

Despite the evident disparities in social systems and cultural backgrounds between China and Spain, commonalities exist in the oppression of women and the norms that dictate gender roles. For example, the Chinese concept of "xian qi liang mu" [virtuous wife and good mother] and the Spanish notion of "angel de hogar" [angel of the home] (All translations from Spanish and Chinese are my own.) both reflect rigid stereotypes and biases regarding women's social roles. Although these concepts originate from different sources, one rooted in

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Confucianism and the other in religious dogma, both aim to domesticate women into obedient daughters, wives, and mothers, primarily serving their families. By comparing these commonalities, we can delve deeper into understanding how patriarchal societies in distinct cultural contexts shape gender roles and gender inequality. Analyzing these shared features also allows us to draw lessons for advancing gender equality.

While China and Spain boast rich histories and cultures, mutual understanding of each other's research remains relatively limited. There are numerous unexplored areas in both directions of Chinese-Spanish academic exchange. Recent academic forums and dialogues between China and the Western world, such as the "3rd International Conference of Contemporary China Studies: East and West Contact and Dialogue" organized by the Confucius Institute at the University of León, Spain, from May 3rd to 4th, 2022, have sparked interest in comparative studies between the two nations. This presents an opportunity for future research. By delving into the history and development of feminism in both China and Spain, it can fill the knowledge gaps in existing literature, offering fresh insights and perspectives for a more comprehensive and cross-cultural understanding.

This study aims to address essential questions: Is feminism a universal phenomenon or does each country have its own unique characteristics? How, when, and why do feminist ideas emerge in these two countries? By investigating the beginnings and developments of feminism in both contexts, it seeks to recognize the need to understand the origins and trajectories for the future. It is crucial to summarize past lessons and learn from past mistakes. Additionally, a comparative study requires more than a historical overview; it demands a deep reflection that raises further questions. Has the trajectory of feminism been similar in Spain and China? Are Chinese and Spanish women concerned about the same issues? Did the germ of feminism emerge in Spain and China at the same time and under similar social circumstances?

To answer these questions, this research is divided into two main parts—one to study the inception of Spanish feminism and the other to examine the genesis of Chinese feminism. Each part is divided into different aspects specific to each country. However, it can be anticipated that female education forms the basis for awakening women in both countries, achieving suffrage marks another significant milestone in feminism, and women's literature offers a distinct perspective from the male narrative, enhancing the understanding of forgotten history.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a historical comparative research design to explore the origins of feminism in Spain and China. It will conduct a comparative analysis across various dimensions including social history, cultural background, educational systems, and societal status in both countries in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding.

A combined approach of literature review and analysis will be employed to gather information on the historical development of feminism in Spain and China. This data will encompass historical documents, feminist literature, policy documents, news reports, and relevant research papers. Through careful text selection and analysis, it will delve into the origins, development, and impact of feminism in Spain and China, explore the connections between historical context, socio-cultural factors, and political environment to unveil the evolutionary process of feminist ideas.

This study will conduct both cross-sectional and longitudinal comparative analyses of feminism in Spain and China, aiming to explore commonalities and differences. Emphasis will be placed on changes in women's education, political participation, societal status, and

more. The evolution of feminist ideologies under different societal environments will be investigated, illuminating shared features and distinctions. This will further facilitate an exploration of the development of feminist ideas within various societal contexts.

3. The Pioneers Before Feminism

In an epoch prior to the conceptualization of feminism, advocates had already arisen to champion women's rights, particularly pertaining to women's access to education. Taking Spain as a case study, notable figures such as Isabel de Villena (1430-1490) and Teresa de Cartagena (1425-1478) in the 15th century, Santa Teresa (1515-1582) in the 16th century, and the eminent female writer of the Golden Age in the 17th century, Doña María de Zayas Sotomayor (1590-1647), ardently addressed the issue of women's unequal treatment. As expressed by Doña María de Zayas Sotomayor:

> The true reason for women not being learned is not a deficiency in ability, but a lack of opportunity. Because if in our upbringing, just as they provide us with fine linen for pillows and embroidery for hoops, they were to give us books and instructors, we would be just as capable of holding positions and occupying professorships as men (1948, p.21).

They firmly believed that genuine physiological differences between women and men did not exist; instead, it was the unequal educational opportunities for women that posed a significant hindrance. They argued that, with equitable resources, women were just as capable of engaging in intellectual pursuits. However, confined by the limitations of their time, their concepts of gender equality remained restricted. For example, Doña María de Zayas Sotomayor believed that not all women should be defended, as she stated, "I do not converse with those who are not, just as the false, fickle, frivolous, and reputationless woman should not be given the name of woman but of a wild beast" (2017, p.434). Furthermore, the scope of their influence was confined to a limited sphere and did not bring about substantial change. In the 18th century, Josefa Amar y Borbón (1749-1833) could be seen as inheriting the essence of such feminist thought. She remained steadfast in her conviction that men and women were equally capable and, therefore, deserving of equal opportunities for acquiring knowledge (Borbón, 1994). Due to the constraints imposed by their historical contexts, the ideals of gender equality held by these women were somewhat circumscribed.

To comprehend the true origins of feminism, it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive examination of the developmental history of women's education. A parallel trajectory can be discerned in China. The feminist movement in China truly began to emerge in the late 19th century. However, even prior to this period, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), some intellectuals had already sowed the seeds of women's education. They used arguments rooted in gender equality, asserting that throughout history, numerous talented and knowledgeable women were on par with men in terms of intellectual capacity. For instance, philosophers like Li Zhi (1527-1602), often considered a pioneer of "feminism" in China, posited that differences were not inherent to gender but rather shaped by environmental factors:

> It is true that there are differences between men and women, but there is no difference in knowledge for being a woman or a man. A woman can know more than a man, even though she is always inside the house. Despite receiving many discriminations, the knowledge they have can embarrass men, who always despise them (2016, p.160).

Some of these intellectuals even attempted to implement their ideas about women's education by establishing private schools and admitting women. However, due to the enduring influence of feudal Confucianism and the constraints of the era, societal norms and rulers

were resistant to ideological and educational reforms. This line of thought did not gain substantial societal support. Consequently, educational reform required external forces, such as political revolutions or cultural movements.

It is important to acknowledge that this process encountered numerous challenges in traditional Chinese society, with a history spanning thousands of years. This society was built upon self-sufficient agriculture as its fundamental economic element and was characterized by a system of paternal authority, feudalism, and a rigid social structure. Its political system, led by intellectuals and grounded in Confucian ideology, was rooted in the hierarchical 'father-son' paternal system (Zhou, 2018). The deep-seated impact of this political culture extended across China's political, economic, cultural, and educational spheres.

Within this cultural tradition, female education diverged drastically from the public education received by males. It took the form of "gui ge" [inner chamber] education, confining women within enclosed spaces and limiting their exposure to the outside world. This confinement was a means of exercising control over their physical and mental aspects. Another fundamental objective was to serve the feudal patriarchal system, shaping women into compliant "virtuous wife and good mother" who conformed to societal expectations (Dai, 2016). This created a cycle from which they could not escape. The lack of knowledge not only subjected women to oppression but also led them to unconsciously defend this oppression.

4. The Beginnings of Feminism in Spain

4.1. Female Education in Spain

In Spain, significant advancements in women's education began in the early 20th century. This progress was largely attributed to Spain's delayed industrialization compared to the rest of Europe, which only took root in the early 1900s. Throughout the 19th century, Spain remained predominantly agrarian, resulting in a situation where most ordinary women had economic roles but did not participate in collective movements against exploitation alongside other laborers. Consequently, they remained economically unliberated (Ballarín, 2010). During the entire 19th century, literacy among Spanish women lagged behind their European counterparts, especially in rural areas where illiteracy rates were higher than in urban regions. As a result, the educational system of the era experienced limited growth, primarily focusing on combating illiteracy rather than promoting women's education.

Initially, women's education was highly restricted, primarily consisting of home education and religious instruction. Women received education at home through private tutors or under their mothers' guidance, with their curriculum vastly differing from that of men. Their education revolved around preparing them to become ideal wives and mothers, conforming to the notion of the "angel of the home". Private tutors taught them basic reading and writing, rudimentary arithmetic, rules of civility and etiquette, languages, and dance, among other subjects. Access to public educational institutions for women was scarce, and there were hardly any such centers available (Franco, 1994). While exceptions existed, they were rare. For example, the Royal College of Our Lady of Loreto, founded by Felipe II in 1585 for orphaned girls, had its rules updated in 1738 by Felipe V. However, this did not signify widespread female education; instead, it underscored the close connection between education and religion during this period. The arrival of religious groups like The Dominican Sisters of the Immaculate Conception offered noble girls a new opportunity for education.

The influence of the church on education persisted well into the early 20th century. Throughout this period, the primary purpose of female education was to serve religious

objectives. From the church's perspective, allowing women into the public educational structure provided an opportunity to shape them, particularly in upper-class families. Women were expected to receive a minimal level of education to fulfill their roles within the family, primarily centered on educating children and serving their husbands. As Franco pointed out:

> In this environment receptive to the need to provide education to a group of women who, due to their belonging to the elite, would have to play an important role in society, as a future wife and mother, but also as a model of a new woman, educated in a minimum knowledge, knowledgeable of the norms of urbanity, cultivated in virtue etc (1994, p.239).

However, during the same period, the Enlightenment movement of the 18th century exerted influence in Spain. Liberals believed that education was a driving force of progress and emphasized the practical application of useful knowledge in various fields. As Cruz noted: "...they created a favorable climate for female education and established neighborhood schools for girls, which were supplemented by some institutions dedicated to teaching the art of spinning under the auspices of the Economic Societies of Friends of the Country" (Cruz, 2009, p.10).

The process of integrating women into the education system in Spain was characterized by slow progress and occurred relatively late (Sanchez & Luis, 2012). In the 19th century, there were initial efforts to reform women's education, even in legislative measures. However, at the beginning of the century, legislation did not prioritize girls' education. The Constitution of 1812 and the Quintana Report of 1813 aimed to reform education but excluded women from the free public education provided to men. The Primary Education Act of July 21, 1838, during Isabel II's reign, continued this exclusion but worked on improving existing girls' schools and establishing new ones. In 1857, the Ley de Moyano formalized girls' education, making it compulsory but unequal compared to boys. Both genders shared core subjects such as reading, writing, math, grammar, and Christian teachings. Nevertheless, differences existed: girls learned about labor, drawing, and household hygiene, while boys focused on subjects like agriculture, industry, commerce, surveying, finance, and history (2008, as cited in Sanchez & Luis, 2012).

While there were numerous attempts at educational reform in the 19th century, both at the legislative level and in practice, the progress of women's education remained slow due to deeply ingrained traditional beliefs and political decisions rooted in the following convictions:

1) Initially, women's education was considered a private matter rather than a public one.
2) Throughout, their instruction was viewed as more focused on moral education than on actual instruction.
3) Finally, a differentiated curriculum was established (1989, p. 247).

This injustice persisted until the early 20th century when the Clausists, along with the institutionalists, advocated for a transformation of traditional women's education. This marked a significant change in primary education. The 20th century, often referred to as the "women's century" (Cruz, 2009), saw more aggressive and evolutionary development of women's education. The primary goals during this century were to increase the number of educated women, strengthen secondary education for girls, and reduce legal barriers to higher education for women.

A radical change occurred in 1915 with the establishment of the Residencia de Señoritas (Ladies Residence), the first official institution with university status created in Spain for graduated women. In the first half of the 20th century, many influential women in Spanish

society had close ties to the residence or the Lyceum Club, including figures like Zenobia Camprubí, Carmen Monné, María Martos Arregui, Luisa Navarro Margati, and Blanca García Güell (Fagoaga, 2015). Initially intended to provide accommodation for young women pursuing studies in Madrid, it evolved into an educational institution that offered a platform for young women of the time to explore new personal and professional aspirations.

> It featured amenities such as a library, laboratories, supplementary classes to university courses, language courses, and lectures. There, students were guided towards reading, attending lectures, and engaging in social interactions. The institution also undertook a mentoring role, fostering a culture of freedom and intellectual engagement (Conde, 2007, p.40).

During this period, several organizations advocating for women's education and liberation emerged, with the Lyceum Club being a notable example. This club provided a platform for intellectual women to exchange ideas, aimed to fulfill literary, scientific, and artistic needs, with a particular focus on women's needs – namely, satisfying the demand for women to enter and conquer previously male-dominated public domains. While it garnered support from numerous organizations, it also encountered criticism and opposition from conservative and religious groups. Even some self-identified feminist female intellectuals, like Teresa de Escoriaza, expressed disagreement with the club's establishment. But she alos argued that her dissent did not contradict her feminist beliefs (Escoriaza, 1926).

4.2. Women's Suffrage in Spain

During the period when Emilia Pardo Bazán and Concepción Arenal were advocating for women's education, the global suffrage and women's voting rights movement was gaining momentum. However, in Spain, the political climate of that era presented significant challenges to the advancement of voting rights, despite the presence of influential women actively participating in politics during the early 20th century.

Between 1877 and 1930, several attempts were made to secure women's voting rights in Spain. However, it wasn't until the promulgation of the Constitution in June 1931 that women finally gained the right to vote. Throughout the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, women had limited rights and were constrained by patriarchal and religious norms. Despite the presence of feminist activists and determined women, their influence remained restricted, making the journey towards women's suffrage a slow and arduous process.

During the dictatorship, there were changes in laws related to women's rights. From 1927 to 1929, conferences were convened to draft a new Spanish constitution that included Article 55, which aimed to grant women voting rights. Unfortunately, this article did not pass. Nevertheless, there were significant moments showcasing the political participation of influential women. For instance, the first woman to speak in the National Consultative Assembly, which convened on October 11, 1927, was a notable event. Thirteen women attended, most of whom were appointed as representatives of National Life Activities, signifying their prominence within their respective professions. Notable figures among these women included Natividad Domínguez Atalaya, Micaela Díaz y Rabaneda, María de Maeztu y Whitney, and others. These women were pioneers in holding seats in the Spanish Congress, contributing to the debate on important women's issues during a period marked by undemocratic conditions. Their contributions were characterized by seriousness and well-researched discussions on the most significant concerns for women at that time (Paloma, 2005, p.189).

This excerpt underscores the limited privileges of the bourgeoisie, revealing their significance in society that extends beyond politics. However, this form of political engagement remained

fragile and lacked true legitimacy, making it susceptible to prohibition during shifts in political power. Following General Primo de Rivera's resignation on January 28, 1930, a period of instability, transition, and unrest commenced. Once again, women faced the prospect of being relegated to secondary citizenship. The aim was to politically revert to the conditions of 1923, resulting in the expulsion of women from the political institutions they had previously entered. All the progress and achievements made in this regard were erased (Díaz, 2005).

Instability continued into the 1930s. After the proclamation of the Second Republic on April 14, 1931, Margarita Nelken, Victoria Kent, and Clara Campoamor secured seats in the first Republican parliament. Discussions about women's suffrage began on September 30th in the court, with Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor participating in a pivotal debate the following day. Despite their joint efforts to secure the female vote, they held differing positions.

Kent believed that women should not engage in political affairs without a solid foundation of political consciousness. She advocated postponing women's suffrage, considering it dangerous due to the lack of education and Republican sentiment among women at the time. She stated:

> But today, gentlemen Deputies, granting the vote to women is dangerous. I cannot sit without making my thoughts and feelings clear and without saving my conscience for the future. That is what I wanted to express to the Chamber (Kent, 1931, p.1352).

Conversely, Clara Campoamor argued that women should be immediately granted the right to vote. She believed that Kent's stance denied women's inherent capacity, asserting that women's suffrage was a logically rightful demand and that their natural ability to participate in politics was undeniable. Campoamor argued that women possessed these capabilities and knowledge from birth, obviating the need for any delay. Furthermore, women had fought for the Republic just like men, paid taxes, and contributed to the nation's maintenance. From her perspective, it was highly unfair that men could do anything while women were pushed aside and forgotten. She expressed:

> You have the right given to you by the law, the law that you made, but you don't have the Natural Right, the fundamental Right that is based on respect for every human being, and what you are doing is holding onto power; let women express themselves, and you will see how you cannot continue holding onto that power (Campoamor, 1931, p.1353).

Finally, in the 1931 Constitution, the article was ultimately worded as follows: citizens of both sexes, over 23 years of age, will have the same electoral rights as determined by the laws. Since then, women can vote in the political arena just like men. In the elections of November 19, 1933, women were able to vote for the first time in national elections.

4.3. Women's Literature in Spain

Women's presence in literature can be traced back to early times, but genuine feminist thought was relatively rare until the 18th century when magazines dedicated to women's issues began to emerge. Beyond individual women writers, the press played a significant role starting in the late 17th century. During the reign of King Carlos II, women's publications began to appear, often with female authors using male pseudonyms. The 18th century, marked by Enlightenment and journalism, saw the influence of the British press inspire Spanish publications like *El Pensador* [The Thinker]. Spanish press began exploring ideas such as marital independence. Despite constraints imposed by male authority, women's press carved its own space. Notably, two influential women writers in the journalistic realm were

Beatriz Cienfuegos, known as La Pensadora Gaditana, and Escolástica Hurtado Girón y Silva de Pico, known as *La Pensatriz Salmantina* [The Female Thinker from Salamanca].

Beatriz Cienfuegos criticized the male-dominated magazine *El Pensador* for its misogyny, which was a newspaper published in Madrid between 1762 and 1767, founded and edited by José Clavijo y Fajardo. These magazines tackled broader and deeper topics such as family, social customs, and marriage, aiming to counter male-dominant perspectives. Despite the many obstacles women faced during that time, they expressed their thoughts in the media and inspired others. This media criticism also drew the displeasure of high-society figures. Escolástica Hurtado Girón y Silva de Pico created and used *La Pensatriz Salmantina* to advocating for women's right to write and think beyond domestic roles, advocating for more learning opportunities for women. While they were aware of the potential for male backlash, they persisted in critiquing male authority and emphasizing the importance of women's voices:

> Therefore, let it be known, that you should cease to confine all female knowledge and understanding to the realm of needlework, spinning, sweeping, and cushion management, as well as the oversight of chickens, hens, and roosters... Men are so wicked and vengeful, that upon being caught off guard by my critique and the barrage of my ideas against the extensive realm of their disorders, they will unleash their wrath (which they already excel in), and with insults, epithets, and jabs, they will attempt to diminish my esteem (Escolástica, 1777, p.143).

Another significant juncture in the development of women's literary history emerged in the early 20th century. Inheriting the legacy of the Generation of '98, the female writers of the Generation of '27 made remarkable contributions to awakening and liberating women, as well as expressing the female experience. These writers excelled across various genres such as autobiography, children's literature, poetry, and novels. However, they were overshadowed by the fame of their male contemporaries, resulting in their being forgotten and overlooked for a considerable period. It's only in recent years that their works have been rediscovered.

Here are some representative figures of the Generation of '27 women writers: Concha Méndez (1898-1986), Rosa Chacel (1898-1998), María Teresa León (1903-1988), Ernestina de Champourcín (1905-1999), Carmen Conde (1907-1996), Josefina de la Torre (1907-2002), and María Zambrano (1904-1991). These women indeed played a highly significant and remarkably successful societal role, made extensive efforts to break outdated social customs, and opposed societal systems that denied women their freedom.First, most women writers of Generation of 27 have written for children, contrary to the tradition of focusing on moral and religious education:

> After examining a relatively significant corpus of children's theater written by women, premiered and/or published during the interwar period (1918-1936), a traditional division is observed within it. This division consists primarily of pedagogical and school-focused theater, centered around the moral and religious education of children. These plays aim to contribute to the moral upbringing of the child, and more frequently, the girl, while reinforcing the traditional allocation of social roles for each gender (Nieva, 1993, p. 114).

In other words, it attempts to limit the opportunities of girls from a young age, as their education is aimed at serving society and the family, with a subservient status to men. However, the writers of the 27th generation aimed to restore space and freedom to girls. The sole interest in creating children's works was to provide enjoyment for the children. Despite receiving criticism from many traditional writers, they persisted in challenging the norms. As Carmen Conde stated in an interview published in *Guadalajara AZB International Culture*:

> When I write stories for children, I am ultimately speaking to the girl I once was. I

> really like children's stories. Of course, at times, I have thought that they are not for children, that they are for adults. But I can seek the child within the adult, and that's not bad at all (Conde, as cited in Marie, 1996).

For her, childhood was an indispensable part of life, and young Carmen always found her freedom in the works of adult Carmen. She published several dramatic texts, such as *El Ángel del Correo* [The Angel of the Mail] (1931) and *Carbón y Rosas* [Coal and Roses] (1935). The writers of the 27th generation were challenging societal norms that sought to confine girls to the fate of traditional roles, such as that of a housewife. They engaged in a struggle against ideological control through their creations, aiming to restore the spirit of childhood freedom.

Secondly, the autobiographies of these writers serve as both a description of history and society, as well as a reflection of their life experiences. Works like *Desde el amanecer* [Since Sunrise] (1971) by Rosa Chacel, *Memoria de la melancolía* [Memory of Melancholy] (1968) by María Teresa León, and *Delirio y destino* [Delirium and Destiny] (1953) by María Zambrano are autobiographies, as examples, that not only reflect social phenomena but also offer a more personalized way to express themselves and rewrite the incomplete history written by the male writers.

The memoirs or testimonies of those women who lived through the 1920s and participated in the cultural and artistic revival of the era constitute a first-hand document that nuances the sometimes claimed novelty of women's lives in that decade. While it's often asserted that the true social emancipation of women began during that period, and the renewed avant-garde literary figures are interpreted as signs of their authors' 'feminism,' the bewilderment, insecurity, uncertainty about their own capabilities, their role as women, and the appropriateness of certain attitudes are spectacularly evident in the autobiographical testimonies of the female writers of the 1920s (Castillo, 2001).

In their works, they described their lives under the cultural control of male authority and sought to uncover the differences between genders. They aimed to become significant figures of their time, leaders in the fields of ideology and literature, yet their intentions clashed with the demands of traditional society, as María del Mar Inestrillas pointed out:

> The purpose of pioneering in the realm of culture and thought during this era is at odds with the established image and role assigned to women of their time, which is why their works reflect the quest for an authentic personal identity that suits their new way of life and departs from the feminine norms of patriarchal society. They confront these norms in a more direct and subversive manner (2002, p.11).

Thirdly, their works consistently showcase the awakening of female consciousness and self-discovery. The emphasis on the self is evident in the poetry of many female writers - "I understand, I know..." This narrative seeks to liberate women from their objectified status and position them as subjects. Furthermore, not all the women writers of the 27th generation fully embraced feminist ideology, but they fought for the dignity of women. For instance, Rosa Chacel consistently fought for women to have access to opportunities in art, science, politics, and philosophy. In her work *Esquema de los problemas prácticos y actuales del amor*, she questioned the viewpoints of Karl Gustav Jung and Georges Simmel, suggesting that there are no biological differences between men and women in terms of spiritual composition. According to her, both genders share the same spiritual makeup, which makes each individual a unique and irreproducible entity. The only possible distinction lies in the variations of spiritual attributes that each person possesses, and these differences are identical in nature and essence since both halves of humanity cannot evolve differently.

> Until now, all cultural contributions have been made by an individual with his or her own individuality, entirely unrealizable for the rest of mankind. Therefore, it can be

> said that the purpose of each one is to realize themselves, simply achieving something that no one else had achieved until then; in matters of the spirit, we can truly admit nothing more than the irreducible individuality of each being (Chacel, 1993, p.453).

In conclusion, the female writers of the Generation of 27 endeavored to pioneer new content and literary forms that set them apart from their male counterparts. Their writings often served as a reflection of their contemplations on the female experience and the societal milieu in which they were embedded. Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, they made significant contributions with numerous literary works. However, during the dictatorial rule of Franco, many of their creations were subjected to censorship and prohibition within Spain, leading several female authors into exile. Notably, even while residing outside of Spain, these writers persevered in their craft, producing a wealth of exceptional literary works.

5. The Beginnings of Feminism in China

5.1. Female Education in China

As the late Qing dynasty unfolded, China found itself on the brink of an impending crisis. On one hand, Western bourgeois states were rapidly advancing, propelled by the forces of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, China's sporadic adoption of isolationist policies during the Ming and Qing dynasties, originally designed to safeguard the Qing government and national sovereignty, unintentionally hindered its assimilation of new technologies.

Meanwhile, the Qing rulers disregarded the escalating national crisis and resisted political reforms, steadfastly clinging to outdated mandates that increasingly diverged from the evolving society. This stubbornness played a role in the failure of the Opium Wars, resulting in political, military, and ideological conflicts. As Chinese society underwent transformation, there arose a growing curiosity about Western ideologies. This shift in the comparison between China and the West extended beyond material aspects to encompass cultural, educational, and societal values. This profound change prompted a reevaluation of traditional Chinese culture and set the stage for the emergence of women's education (Dai, 2016).

After the Opium Wars (1839-1842), colonial powers embarked on a cultural offensive with a primary focus on promoting religious ideologies, in addition to their material wealth exploitation in China. Within a series of coerced unequal treaties, foreigners acquired privileges to establish schools in the treaty port cities. From a Western perspective, they perceived the lack of education among Chinese women as a violation of natural order. Consequently, they founded girls' schools and enrolled Chinese female students. Missionary Ernst Faber (1839-1899) expressed in his work *A Brief Discussion on German Schools* that:

> In Germany, the foundation of global governance rests on harmonious families, and harmonious families hinge upon women. Therefore, women's education holds equal importance to men's education. At the age of eight, irrespective of gender, it is imperative to enter schools and engage in studies (as cited in Sun, 2001, p.131).

From 1847 to 1860, the church established a total of 11 girls' schools in the five major commercial ports of China (Zhao, 1999). The first of these schools was known as the Yongjiang Religious School, founded by Mary Ann Aldersey (1797-1868), a member of the Society for Promotion of Female Education in the East, in 1844. The establishment of these schools addressed the lack of female public education in China's feudal society. Considering that missionary activities were inherently geared towards cultural penetration, the education provided in these girls' religious schools became a means of disseminating Western civilization, serving as a bridge for female students to understand the Western world and its

culture. As noted by scholars like Qiao Yigang et al., "Writers of the Movemente of May Fourth era, having witnessed the darkness of society, gained redemption through faith, hope, and love" (2017, p.123).

By 1869, the number of female students in Christian schools nationwide had reached 576. This number increased to 2100 in 1876, but slightly declined to 2064 in 1877. Simultaneously, the Catholic Church established 213 girls' schools between 1878 and 1879, accommodating a total of 2791 students. After the signing of the Treaty of Tientsin in 1876, the number of Christian girls' schools in China once again rose. By 1902 alone, the number of female students in church schools had reached 4373 (Sang, 1995).

The failure of the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 dealt a blow to the Self-Strengthening Movement, pushing China into semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions through the Treaty of Shimonoseki. This sparked strong protests from the population, demanding reforms like abolishing the civil service examination system and modernizing education, and the intellectuals recognized the need for a new educational system, leading to increased discourse on women's education. Reform-minded individuals advocated for women's education from capitalist and gender equality perspectives (Zhao, 1999). As missionaries established girls' schools and Western women's education thrived, the sentiment grew for China to establish its own girls' schools. According to the *China Education Statistics* published by the Society for the Advancement of Education in 1924, statistics on the number of female students in schools during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China period are as follows: In 1906, there were 306 female students; in 1907, there were 1,853 female students; in 1908, there were 2,679 female students, and by 1919, the number had increased to 12,164 female students. During the early years of the Republic of China, women's education experienced significant development. According to incomplete statistics, in the first year of the Republic (1912), there were 2,389 women's schools with a total of 141,130 female students. In 1913, there were 3,123 women's schools with 166,964 female students. In 1914, the number of women's schools increased to 3,632, with 177,273 female students. In 1915, there were 3,766 women's schools with 180,949 female students (Chen, 1983). Despite these efforts, women's social status remained limited, primarily championed by male intellectuals and politicians focused on Western education systems and national reform rather than women's liberation.

The 1911 Xinhai Revolution led to the collapse of the Qing government but didn't entirely eradicate feudal forces. Capitalism began developing, and the proletariat emerged as a political force. During this period, various women's education ideologies emerged, representing different classes and factions. Newspapers and magazines nationwide discussed women's education, introducing global feminist theories. The debate shifted from whether women should be educated to the purpose and objectives of women's education. After the Xinhai Revolution, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) believed that women's education was fundamental to gender equality and democracy. In his speeches, he mentioned:

> China has a population of four hundred and ten million people, and each one of them needs education. To achieve this, education must be given more attention. Therefore, the establishment of 'normal schools' is urgent, especially girls' schools. Through education, we can promote national development, achieve gender equality, and support the construction of the Republic of China (as cited in Fang, 2011, p103).

Apart from the efforts of revolutionary pioneers, female students actively sought opportunities for higher education. In 1919, Deng Chunlan (1898-1982), one of the female pioneers advocating for women's education rights during the Movement of May Fourth, wrote a letter to Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), a Chinese educator, Esperanto linguist, president of Peking University, and founder of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. She advocated for educational equality and requested the right to enter Peking University (Qian, 2007). On

February 27, 1920, her call was answered when Peking University's official newspaper published *The First Voice for Women's Education* formally announcing the acceptance of female students at the university, allowing female and male students to share the same campus. In the same year, women's normal schools were established, and subsequently, other universities began admitting female students (Zhang, 2009). This marked the opening of higher education to women, and formalized women's education in China.

5.2. Women's Suffrage in China

The journey to attain political rights for Chinese women has been marred by numerous setbacks, with one of the most disappointing outcomes occurring during the Suffrage Movement. Among the women who studied in Japan, Tang Qunying (1871-1937) was the first female to join the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, a revolutionary organization that orchestrated multiple uprisings against the Qing government. Upon returning to China, she actively participated in the Xinhai Revolution and the ensuing conflicts. In early February 1912, the Interim Senate of the Republic of China drafted the *Temporary Constitution of the Republic of China*, but it notably lacked provisions for gender equality. Consequently, Tang Qunying and Zhang Hanying (1872-1915) established the Chinese Women's Political Cooperation Association, advocating for the restoration of women's political rights (Zhang, 2009). During their meeting, Tang drafted the *Declaration of Women's Participation*, which set forth the following provisions:

> 1) Implement gender equality. 2) Promote widespread female education. 3) Improve family customs. 4) Prohibit the buying and selling of slave servants. 5) Implement monogamy. 6) Forbid groundless divorce.7) Advocate for women's industry. 8) Enact charitable activities. 9) Implement compulsory foot liberation. 10) Reform women's adornment. 11) Prohibit coercive prostitution (Tang, 1912).

However, their proposals were not accepted by the Senate, and the new Interim Constitution published on March 11 did not incorporate any gender equality provisions. On March 21, Tang Qunying and her companions attempted to enter the Senate with weapons. A clash ensued when the guards attempted to apprehend them. The Chinese Women's Political Cooperation Association issued a statement disavowing the constitution drafted by the Nanjing Senate. Subsequently, the headquarters of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance relocated to Beijing. She traveled to Beijing, advocating for the government to reinstate women's rights. However, due to opposition from leaders like Song Jiaoren (1882-1913), the 1925 Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) manifesto still did not include provisions for gender equality. Women's rights advocates protested once again, but failed to achieve any progress.

Ultimately, after assuming the presidency of the Republic of China, Yuan Shikai decided to overthrow the organization led by Tang Qunying. From that moment, the Women's Suffrage Movement came to a close. Thereafter, due to the complex and ever-changing political landscape and the turmoil of warfare, the struggle for women's suffrage became increasingly challenging. It wasn't until the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the establishment of the People's Republic of China that gender equality and women's political participation were enshrined in the constitution and put into practice, marking the conclusion of the struggle for women's voting rights.

5.3. The First Feminist Movement in China: The Nature Foot Movement

One significant aspect of the women's rights movement in China is the Nature Foot Movement. For over a thousand years, many women's feet were bound from childhood, stunting their growth due to a longstanding feudal custom. This practice originated in the

later stages of the Northern Song Dynasty and evolved from aesthetic preferences into a cultural phenomenon integrated into the traditional moral framework, serving as a means of oppressing and controlling women (Yang, 2007).

Over time, foot binding extended from the upper strata to lower classes, from the Han ethnic group to minority groups, and from central regions to coastal areas. This transformation resulted not only from the dominant male aesthetic within feudal culture but also from an economic structure where men engaged in agriculture while women were confined to weaving at home. This family and economic structure influenced feudal ethics, intensifying physical and psychological constraints on women, particularly during the Qing Dynasty.

In modern times, driven by rapid societal changes and the influence of the women's liberation movement, the abolition of foot binding became an inevitable transformation. This movement began during the Hundred Days' Reform, with the aftermath of the Opium Wars and the First Sino-Japanese War serving as alarms for the urgent need for political reforms to rescue the nation. Reformers proposed changes like "women's education" and "abolishing foot binding" to strengthen the nation's foundation. They presented three key reasons for abolishing foot-binding (Li, 2007). Firstly, this custom inflicted physical and mental harm upon women. While foot-binding was seen as a measure of beauty, and foot size was associated with sexual allure, the reformers pointed out that such aesthetic judgments contradicted the essence of human pursuit and the progress of the times, deeming it an injurious practice for women.

Secondly, the practice of foot-binding overall weakened the ability of the Chinese nation to resist foreign invasions, "... are there no men left in our country? But if this foot-binding custom is not eliminated, half of our women have already been incapacitated" (as cited in Zhu, 1960, p.88).

Thirdly, this custom is detrimental to racial reproduction, as a mother with bound feet cannot nurture her children effectively. Some advocated the abolition of foot-binding to save the nation and safeguard the future generations. "Today, in order to save the nation, we must protect the seeds. To achieve this, you must remove anything that could harm them. What could that be, if not bound feet?" (Zhang, 1897) On one hand, reform-minded intellectuals openly criticized the harmful customs, especially foot-binding. On the other hand, they took measures to abolish it.In 1882, Kang Youwei (1858-1927) established the first Chinese Anti-Foot-Binding Association in Guangdong. In April 1897, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), Wang Kangnian (1860-1911), and Tan Sitong (1865-1989) founded a significant Anti-Foot-Binding Association in Shanghai. However, due to geographical limitations, their impact was mostly confined to certain areas such as the southern and Yangtze River regions. It was not until March 1912 that the Nanjing Provisional Government announced that reforming harmful practices had become an integral part of political reform (Zhu, 1999).

As a deeply entrenched tradition, the abolition of foot-binding proved to be a slow and challenging process. In the early stages of the Anti-Foot-Binding Movement, few women were involved, primarily those influenced by the "new women" emerging through modern education. However, just like this movement, during the initial phases of educational reform, very few women had access to the outside world. The number of women who could receive school education was severely limited, representing a significant constraint on the Anti-Foot-Binding Movement. Yet, for the common people, their notion of feminine aesthetics remained confined within the realm of foot-binding. Women seemed to voluntarily choose bodily restrictions, but from a deeper perspective, they were compelled to navigate the patriarchal society to safeguard their own interests. Hence, they held a dual identity: victims of the oppression against women and, simultaneously, often perpetrators of the same system (Li,2010).

Before Enlightenment ideals reached China, foot-bound women enjoyed better marital

prospects and higher social status within a mainstream aesthetic and a male-preference-centered marriage system. Lacking education and social training, they didn't own the ability to survive in the external world. Consequently, marriage and husbands became their entire focus and sole aspiration. This naturally led to their voluntary perpetuation of a social structure that favored upper-class males and oppressed lower-class females for their own benefits. So as women sought to regain their place in the public domain, their primary goal was to regain control over their destinies. The awakening of modern feminist consciousness centered on awareness of their agency over their destinies.

Modern-style schools were mainly in major cities, with limited presence in rural areas. These schools had restricted capabilities and impact, leading to gradual changes in people's mindsets. To some extent, the Anti-Foot-Binding Movement and the reform of women's education mutually influenced each other.

5.4. Women's Literature in China

The rise of women's literature became evident in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Western ideas and translated works flowed into China, more women awakened to and embraced the path of women's liberation. During this period, numerous publications emerged with the goal of stimulating societal reflection and fostering women's awakening.

The *Nvbao* [Women's Study Journal], founded in July 1898 by the Shanghai Women's Association with Chen Xiefen (1883-1923) as its founder, stands as the earliest women's newspaper in Chinese history. In January 1907, Qiu Jin (1875-1907) established the *Zhongguo nvbao* [China Women's Daily] in Shanghai, one of China's earliest publications targeting women. She aimed to create an open atmosphere, promote women's education, foster connections, form groups, and lay the groundwork for the future Chinese Women's Association. Additionally, in 1907, He Zhen (1886-1920) and others founded the *Tianyi* Journal in Shanghai, playing a significant role in advocating for women's rights and promoting anarchist ideas.

These newspapers and journals, influenced by new ideas, offered women a platform to exchange thoughts and express themselves. They represented the first formal entry of women into a cultural domain traditionally dominated by male writers. Against this backdrop and within the context of the intellectual liberation movement, China witnessed the emergence of its first group of female writers, comparable to Spain's Generation of 27.

During China's May Fourth Movement, female writers achieved notable accomplishments. In general, women writers of the May 4th Movement remain within the sphere of New Literature writers. However, in comparison with other male authors such as Lu Xun (1881-1936), Li Dazhao (1889-1927), and Hu Shi (1891-1962), most of these writers belong to a younger generation, including examples as Xie Wanying (1900-1999), Ding Ling (1904-1986), and Feng Yuanjun (1900-1974).

On one hand, the unequal distribution of educational resources resulted in a higher number of educated men compared to women. On the other hand, the progress of female education was slow, and these women were among the first students influenced by the New Culture Movement. Simultaneously, their male counterparts had already engaged in political and literary activities, which led them to possess a mature and comprehensive literary theory. Hu Shi's *Literary Reform* introduced eight proposals for Chinese literature rules:

1) All the words must convey meaning.
2) Need to avoid imitating ancient writers.
3) Adhere to proper grammar.
4) Reject nonsensical words.

5) Abandon clichés.
6) Avoid literary allusions.
7) Refrain from using antithesis.
8) Avoid using inappropriate language (Hu, 1917).

Therefore, it becomes evident that the pioneers of the May 4th Movement and the New Culture Movement primarily consisted of male intellectuals. In contrast, many female writers within these movements were students influenced by modern education and the New Culture Movement. Although their educational background included Chinese classical literature, they were also exposed to new ideas through translated works such as *The Study of Feminism*, which was translated by Ma Junwu (1881-1940) from Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) original work, *A System of Synthetic Philosophy - First Principles*. This translation marked the inception of feminism in China.

These female writers transitioned from advocating for the recognition of human rights in general to specifically championing women's rights. Their chosen medium for personal expression was literary creation, and they boldly entered the public sphere to articulate their identities as women, aligning themselves with women's causes. Their literary focus expanded to address women's living conditions, with themes centered on personal liberation, freedom within marriage and relationships, and the broader issue of women's emancipation. Despite these thematic shifts, their literary genres remained largely consistent, encompassing autobiography, novels, poetry, drama, and more.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Comparison Between the Germ of Feminism in Spain and China

In the first place, before the concept of feminism existed, there were voices in both Spain and China advocating for gender equality. In the 17th century, the Spanish writer María de Zayas y Sotomayor paid significant attention to women's issues. She believed that the difference between men and women lay in the amount of education they received. In China, towards the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Li Zhi declared that women were capable of studying, and education could help them understand the world. While neither of them can be considered real feminists, both expressed the importance of women's education and emphasized that there was no fundamental difference in gender, but rather a difference in education.

Secondly, the germ of feminism emerged later in China than in Spain. This was due to China's isolation during the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912), which shielded it from the influence of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The social structure in China was challenging to change as Confucianism clearly divided social classes. According to China's feudal ethics, women were expected to stay at home and serve men, and society did not recognize any other way to treat them. Overcoming the influence of Confucianism posed the most significant challenge to achieving true gender equality in China. In contrast, the situation in Spain was different. The early feminists in Spain were influenced by the Enlightenment and recognized gender equality as a natural right that they should enjoy from birth.

Thirdly, most of the early Chinese advocates for gender equality were men. They believed that women could help them in their revolutionary efforts because women were not yet conscious of the importance of independence and equality. The germ of Chinese feminism was not a spontaneous struggle for women's rights but rather a group of men who had become aware of gender inequality. In contrast, the germ of Spanish feminism is more closely

tied to women's awareness of inequality. Spanish women did not achieve equality through the charity of men; they were spontaneous and directly demanded their rights from the patriarchy in practice.

Lastly, the germ of Spanish feminism sought to establish female identity based on women's own needs and attempted to acquire rights such as education and women's suffrage through their own efforts. In contrast, the germ of Chinese feminism arose from men's needs. The fate of Chinese women was intertwined with the fate of the country, and they demanded rights not for their own benefit but to save the nation. It was the revolutionaries who called for the liberation of women in China, not women who sought to elevate their own status and seek a better situation for themselves.

6.2. General Comparison Between Feminism in Spain and China

Firstly, in both countries, the earliest proponents of gender equality, even before the concept of feminism existed, were intellectuals from the upper echelons of society. These individuals, having received a solid education and possessing ample knowledge and social resources, could transcend everyday concerns and delve into deeper issues. In both Spain and China, female education laid the foundation for the emergence of feminism. When women received education on par with men, they began to recognize themselves and explore their feminine identity. Advocating for women's education became the primary focus for Spanish and Chinese feminists.

Secondly, throughout history, politics has consistently been dominated by men, leaving women marginalized in the political arena. In Spain, women achieved female suffrage with comparatively less difficulty and earlier than in China. The concept of equality was widely embraced in Europe. Furthermore, Spain did not have the feudal Confucianism that prescribed distinct social roles for genders. In contrast, Confucianism has deeply rooted itself in the Chinese mindset for millennia. Across numerous dynasties, emperors hailed Confucius as the world's greatest thinker and believed that Confucianism could assist them in governing the country. Consequently, the acceptance of new ideologies faced significant hurdles and resistance among the feudal upper class in China, as embracing these new ideas might erode their benefits. In Spain, the attainment of female suffrage resulted from the efforts of women in the early decades of the 20th century. In contrast, despite women's repeated appeals to the Qing government and the Nationalist government in Nanjing, China did not secure this right. It was only after the establishment of the People's Republic of China that female suffrage was included in the constitution.

Thirdly, in many respects, Spanish and Chinese women writers share similarities. Both groups advocate for women's education, political rights, and strive to improve their positions within both the family and society. However, due to differences in social conditions, Chinese women writers also campaigned for bodily liberation, including the abolition of foot binding, which marked significant milestones in Chinese feminist history. Nevertheless, given the taboo nature of discussing sex within Confucian culture, Chinese women writers generally avoided the topic of sex until the emergence of the concept of body narrative. In contrast, Spanish women writers explored broader and more liberated themes.

In conclusion, regardless of nationality, all women should recognize the importance of feminism. Feminism remains a contentious issue, and we are still on the path to securing more rights. Achieving true equality still demands significant efforts. While the Spanish situation may be better than the Chinese one, the reality is that nearly no country in the world has achieved genuine equality.

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