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The World of Chinese

Although China has advocated gender equality for decades, the patriarchy is still alive and well. Being a woman in today's society is tough: During each stage of a woman's life, she will be instructed on what decisions to make, to be a perfectly well-behaved 好好小姐 (hǎo hǎo xiǎo jiě, Miss good). She is also more likely to be judged by her gender instead of her personality or achievements.

For many, sexism begins at conception, when parents try to divine the gender of the fetus in creative ways. (Doctors are not allowed to reveal this information, to prevent gender-selective abortions.) After the birth, people may be quick to offer opinions to her parents — even if nobody explicitly says, “I am sorry you had a girl”; their attitudes are unmistakable:

A daughter will bring you less trouble than a son. At least you don't need to save money to buy her a marital home in the future.

Shēng nǚ ér bǐ shēng ér zǐ shēng xīn, zhì shǎo nǐ bù yòng zǎn qián gěi tā mǎi hūn fáng le.
生女儿比生儿子省心，至少你不用攒钱给她买婚房了。

As the girl becomes a toddler, she begins to explore the world, sometimes making a mess in the process. Her elders admonish her for not behaving like 女孩子家 (nǚ hái zi jiā, girl), and conforming to certain standards:

Why are you so mischievous for a girl?
Yī gè nǚ hái zi jiā, zěn me zhè me táo qì?
一个女孩子家，怎么这么淘气？

You're a girl, so act like a girl!
Nǚ hái zi jiā yào yǒu nǚ hái de yàng zi!
女孩子家要有女孩的样子！

When the girl is old enough to go to school, she is a good student: hardworking, disciplined and good at exams. Her teachers seem pleased, until one day she overhears:

Female students outperform male students now because they are better at rote learning. When the courses become more difficult, they may fall behind.

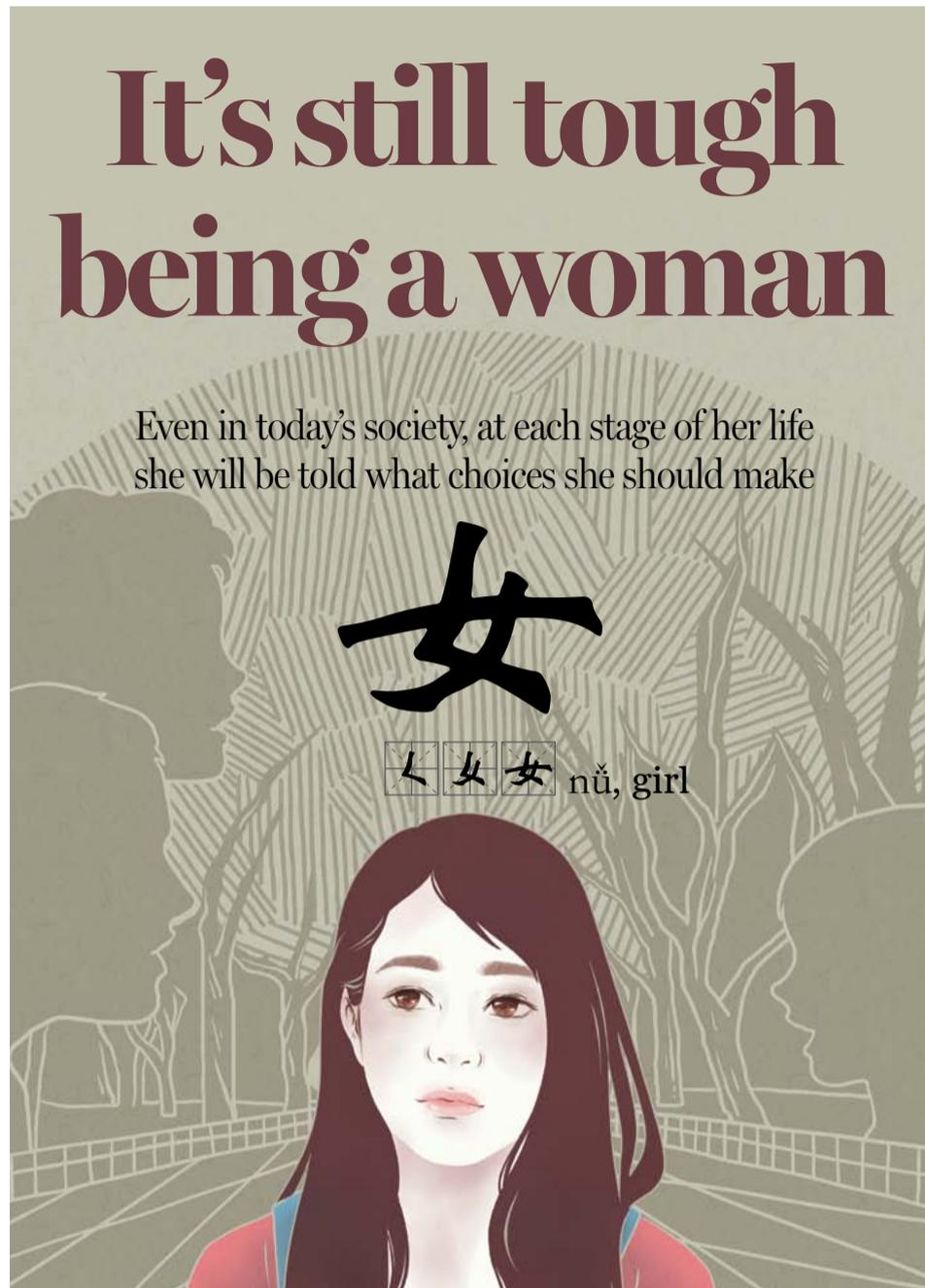
Nǚ shēng xiàn zài bǐ nán shēng xué xí hǎo shì yīn wèi tā men gèng shàn cháng sǐ jì yīng bèi, děng kè chéng nán dù jiā dà le, tā men kě néng jiù gēn bù shàng le.
女生现在比男生学习好是因为她们更擅长死记硬背，等课程难度加大了，她们可能就跟不上了。

The girl is upset to hear that her achievements are just a gender-based fluke, but instead of speaking up, she knuckles down and works harder, preparing for her university entrance exams, or *gaokao*. A good score allows the girl to attend a top university — but which major to choose? As usual, everyone is ready with their two cents:

Girls aren't suited for science. You're better off choosing from the liberal arts.
Nǚ shēng bù shì hé xué lǐ kē. Nǐ zuì hǎo hái shì xuǎn gè wén kē zhuān yè.
女生不适合学理科。你最好还是选个文科专业。

They also have opinions on which university she should attend:
Why does a girl need to go so far from home? Just select a local school.
Nǚ hái zi lí jiā nà me yuǎn gàn má? Xuǎn yī suǒ běn shěng de xué xiào jiù xíng le.
女孩子离家那么远干吗？选一所本省的学校就行了。

Assuming the girl accepts their advice, she goes to a nearby university and majors in a



It's still tough being a woman

Even in today's society, at each stage of her life she will be told what choices she should make

女

人女女 nǚ, girl

“soft” subject: She makes the most of it and has a great university experience. However, after she graduates, she must again make a tough decision: Aim for higher education or join the job market? But for the adults around her, that isn't even a question:

Why does a girl need so much education?
Nǚ hái zi dú nà me duō shū yǒu shén me yòng?
女孩子读那么多书有什么用？

Don't tell me you want to be a female PhD. You'll never be able to get married.

Bié gào sù wǒ nǐ jiāng lái xiǎng dú chéng nǚ bó shì, nà nǐ gāi jià bù chū qù le.
别告诉我你将来想读成女博士，那你该嫁不出去了。

So, rather than risk her marriage eligibility by getting “overeducated”, the girl looks for a job instead. There are plenty of options: some are challenging and stressful, but well-paid; others are stable and easy, but with little room for career advancement. She is urged to choose the latter:

Girls don't need to push themselves too hard. A stable job is good enough.
Nǚ hái zi méi bì yào tài pīn, gōng zuò wěn dìng jiù hǎo.
女孩子没必要太拼，工作稳定就好。

If she makes a mistake, gender is the cause: This task shouldn't have been assigned to her. Women are “long of hair, short of brains”.
Zhè gè gōng zuò jiù bù gāi jiāo gěi tā. Nǚ rén dào dì shì “tóu fa cháng, jiǎn shǐ duǎn”.

这个工作就不该交给她。女人到底是“头发长，见识短”。

If she gets into a disagreement with a colleague, it's because she's a woman: Wherever there are women, there is drama.
Nǚ rén duō de dì fāng shì ér jiù duō.
女人多的地方事儿就多。

Meanwhile, the girl's family and friends are pressuring her to get married:

“A man at 30 is a flower; a woman at 30 is tofu dregs.” If you don't get married soon, you'll end up a spinster.

“Nán rén sān shí yī zhī huā, nǚ rén sān shí dòu fu zhā.” Nǚ zài bù jié hūn jiù chéng chéng le.
“男人三十一枝花，女人三十豆腐渣。”你再不结婚就成老姑娘了。

So she duly gets married before turning 30, and soon her husband suggests that she should spend more time at home:

Since ancient times, it has been “men outside, women inside”.
Zì gǔ yǐ lái jiù shì “nán zhǔ wài, nǚ zhǔ nèi” ma.
自古以来就是“男主外，女主内”嘛。

For women, family should come first.
Nǚ rén hái shì yào yǐ jiā tíng wéi zhòng.
女人还是要以家庭为重。

Simultaneously, the media tell her: A woman is supposed to be a virtuous wife and a good mother.

Nǚ rén yīng gāi zuò gè xián qī liáng mǔ.
女人应该做个贤妻良母。

But even if the girl gives in and becomes a full-time housewife, it is difficult to live up to society's expectations:

A good woman should be graceful in the drawing room and skillful in the kitchen.

Hǎo nǚ rén yīng gāi “shàng dé tīng táng, xià dé chú fáng”.
好女人应该“上得厅堂，下得厨房”。

And the nagging doesn't stop there. Soon everyone is expecting the patter of tiny feet:

You have been married for so long. It's time to have a baby or you will get too old.

Nǐ dōu jié hūn zhè me jiǔ le, gāi yào hái zi le. Zài bù shēng nǚ jiù lǎo le.
你都结婚这么久了，该要孩子了。再不生你就老了。

A woman is incomplete if she doesn't become a mother.

Méi dāng guò mā ma de nǚ rén shì bù wán zhěng de.
没当过妈妈的女人是不完整的。

This once high-achieving student and successful employee is now pregnant — congratulations! Unfortunately, it's a girl. At the hospital, people offer glib words of comfort: “A daughter is not so bad...” Only now does the girl think of the comebacks she should have used years ago:

A daughter is as good as a son.
Shēng ér shēng nǚ dōu yī yàng.
生儿生女都一样。

Girls can also be playful and mischievous.
Nǚ hái yě huì tān wán ér, yě huì wán pí.
女孩也会贪玩儿，也会顽皮。

Girls, like boys, can be creative and logical.
Nǚ shēng hé nán shēng yī yàng yǒu chuàng zào lì hé lǒng jí sī wéi.
女生和男生一样有创造力和逻辑思维。

Girls can go anywhere in the world.
Nǚ shēng yě néng zǒu nán chuāng běi.
女生也能走南闯北。

Girls also have the right to seek higher education.

Nǚ shēng yě yǒu quán lì jiē shòu gāo děng jiào yù.
女生也有权利接受高等教育。

Women should care about their careers, too, and seek out challenges.

Nǚ rén yě yǒu shì yè xīn, yě néng shèng rèn yǒu tiǎo zhàn xìng de gōng zuò.
女人也有事业心，也能胜任有挑战性的工作。

Women have the right to decide when, or whether, to get married.

Nǚ rén yǒu quán jué dìng zì jǐ shén me shí hou jié hūn, huò zhě bù jié hūn.
女人有权决定自己什么时候结婚，或者结不结婚。

Women can also be breadwinners.
Nǚ rén yě kě yǐ zhuàn qián yǎng jiā.
女人也可以赚钱养家。

A woman is more than just a wife and mother.

Nǚ rén bù zhǐ shì qī zǐ hé mǔ qīn.
女人不只是妻子和母亲。

Women and men are equal.
Nǚ rén hé nán rén shì píng děng de.
女人和男人是平等的。

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