


RESEARCH

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INFORMATION ABOUT FEMALE JOURNALISTS AND WORKERS
IN THE NEWSPAPER *ER ZHONG* (1988-2008): A STUDY FROM THE
FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Información sobre Mujeres Periodistas y Obreras en el periódico *ER
ZHONG* (1988-2008): un estudio desde la perspectiva feminista

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ABSTRACT

This investigation focuses on studying the information offered by the Chinese newspaper *Er Zhong* about two labor roles of women, i.e., journalists and workers. Our study motivates us to find, in areas and forms of reporting, whether the female journalists suffer discrimination, and to what extent the information reproduces gender stereotypes. Qualitative analysis is carried out from the feminist perspective. A sample of 1185 articles published in print editions in 1988, 1998 and 2008 has been examined. In this context, the subordinate representation of female journalists and workers is analyzed, then sexist gender strategies are identified. It is observed that it's necessary to involve gender perspective and technological knowledge in training newspaper reporters, so as to avoid gender-biased language and respond to the demands of the workers in time.

Keywords: journalistic information, female journalists and workers, feminist perspective, gender stereotype, heavy industry.

RESUMEN

La presente investigación se centra en estudiar las informaciones ofrecidas por el periódico *Er Zhong*, desde dos roles laborales de la mujer: las periodistas y las obreras. El objetivo de estudio es averiguar: el área y forma de cobertura de las mujeres informadoras sufren o no la discriminación, en qué medida las informaciones producen o no el estereotipo de género. Se realiza un análisis cualitativo desde perspectiva feminista. Se ha examinado una muestra de 1185 artículos publicados en las ediciones impresas en 1988, 1998 y 2008. En este contexto, se analiza la

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representación subordinada de las periodistas y obreras, se identifican las estrategias sexistas de género. Se observa que es necesario formar a las y los periodistas de la industria pesada con perspectiva de género y el conocimiento tecnológico, para que se evite la redacción con el lenguaje androcéntrico y se detecte a tiempo la reivindicación de las trabajadoras.

Palabras clave: información periodística, mujeres periodistas y obreras, perspectiva feminista, estereotipo de género, industria pesada.

Informações sobre as mulheres jornalistas e trabalhadoras do jornal *Er Zhong* (1988-2008): um estudo numa perspectiva feminista

RESUMO

A presente investigação centra-se no estudo da informação fornecida pelo jornal *Er Zhong* na perspectiva de dois papéis profissionais das mulheres: as jornalistas e as trabalhadoras. O objectivo do estudo é descobrir: a área e a forma de cobertura das mulheres repórteres são ou não discriminadas, em que medida a informação produz ou não estereótipos de género. É efectuada uma análise qualitativa a partir de uma perspectiva feminista. Foi examinada uma amostra de 1185 artigos publicados nas edições impressas de 1988, 1998 e 2008. Neste contexto, é analisada a representação subordinada das mulheres jornalistas e trabalhadoras e são identificadas estratégias sexistas de género. Constata-se que é necessário formar os jornalistas da indústria pesada com uma perspectiva de género e conhecimentos tecnológicos, a fim de evitar escrever com uma linguagem androcêntrica e detectar atempadamente as reivindicações das trabalhadoras.

Palavras chave: reportagem, mulheres jornalistas e trabalhadoras, perspectiva feminista, estereótipo de género, indústria pesada.

1. INTRODUCTION

The non-traditional female image has long been present in the history of communication. By the end of the 19th century, women were already contributing to the feminist magazine titled *El Álbum-iberoamericano*, where they expressed demanding ideas, insisting that "education is the foundation for human development" (Qiu, 2018, p. 207). Later, during the 1920s, women were fighters against the Japanese invasion in the magazine *Liang You*. They provided support on the home front of the war, assuming diverse identities such as social activists, nationalists, and protesters (Qiu, 2021). In the 1960s, 1980s, and 2000s, more women joined the workforce while also balancing their private and family lives, as documented in television programs (Gutiérrez et al., 2014).

Despite women constantly having new experiences in life, the media does not pay enough attention to women's advocacy aspects due to the desire for control by men and a male-dominated society. Generally, "women were portrayed with respect and within their context, with clear child protection..." (Ibid, p. 225). Previous studies on the press do reveal the ignorance and sexism in journalistic coverage of women, but

few focus on those originating from the heavy industry in China or from certain representative industrial factories in Chinese history.

This article takes information published by the newspaper *Er Zhong* as study examples. This semi-weekly newspaper is distributed free of charge to employees and retirees of the factory of the same name, aiming to inform them and their families about recent events. The factory itself is a state-owned representative of the heavy industry located in southwestern China and has experienced nearly all the important stages of industrial development in China since 1958. It currently employs over 10,000 active employees (*Cronología del desarrollo de China Er Zhong*, 2023). Studying the journalistic information about women that have been released by this factory in China during a specific period in history provides a basis for observing in detail the industrial world's opinion of women, the work position of female journalists, and the viewpoint of propaganda regarding female contributors.

The article concludes with some final remarks highlighting the undeniable need to improve society with a culture of equality. Providing compulsory and higher education with a gender perspective, especially in the field of journalism, is an essential method to achieve an equitable family, work, and professional environment. Furthermore, it is crucial to prepare journalists in the industrial framework with significant knowledge of science and technology. In this way, they can capture, at the right moment and with nuance, scenes that demonstrate women's intellectual competence in the workplace.

Moreover, the inclusion of women directors with equal opportunity training in the news sector and the industry will help timely reject discriminatory activities and ideas at work, ultimately creating a more women-friendly professional environment. Inclusive language and non-discriminatory photos in journalism are fundamental to conveying non-sexist ideas. Neutral terms, speeches by women, unbiased comments, and photos featuring both sexes equally are important factors in establishing an equitable environment in the press.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this article is to explore, from a feminist perspective, the coverage of women journalists, the production of informative messages, and the evolution of journalistic ideas about female contributors through news articles. We investigate the areas and forms of coverage of women journalists, whether female reporters experience gender discrimination in their work or not. We examine how women participants in the industry are represented, what their images are, and how these images are constructed. We also examine whether gender stereotypes exist in the process of constructing these images and to what extent the news articles contribute to inequality if gender stereotypes are present. In the 21st century, progress is driven by science and technology. It is important to understand whether women are involved in science and technology within the heavy industry or not. We will also analyze whether progress towards gender equality has been made during different periods, aiming to identify potential changes in the representation of women. Lastly, we will explore

what needs to be done in the future to prevent sexism in publications within the industrial field. This study is based on five main approaches:

1. Women journalists are not always visible and often lack a gender perspective. Considering the relevance of the press in promoting gender equality, the exclusion of women in reporting on scientific and technological topics worsens gender inequality.
2. Marginalizing women workers in managerial and technological positions, and valuing their traditional characteristics, are common yet sexist strategies observed in news articles from three different periods. The androcentric language used in writing reveals the paternalistic hierarchy that dominates the newspaper, and the same applies to the accompanying images.
3. Granting women prestige for their excessive workload is a way to maximize their labor force, considering that an abundant workforce is crucial for the industrial development of a developing country. However, this sense of honor undermines their right to make decisions for themselves.
4. Portraying outstanding female workers as feeling guilty for their absence from domestic roles is a manifestation of a sexist system. Restricting women from the domestic sphere is an effective method of belittling their professional achievements and intelligence.
5. Considering women as subsidiaries of men highlight sexual discrimination in informative messages and reinforces women's inferior identity. This imposes gender stereotypes in the industrial factory, particularly regarding intellectual prowess.

3. State of the issue

The gender stereotype in the press is closely related to the androcentrism that has permeated cultural ideas. The influence of patriarchal knowledge on various journalistic sectors leads to the prevalence of androcentric ideals in the world of information. Sexist culture is reflected in a series of symbolic prohibitions, where the characteristics attributed to women and men are well classified in terms of thinking, roles, status levels, prestige, and competencies (De-Miguel et al., 2017, p. 498). Practices, ideas, discourses, and social representations are the basic elements that shape human behavior and construct images of women (Lamas, 2007). Discrimination against women is present in every public sphere. Education, employment, and politics are areas filled with gender segregation.

Language "is a cultural element that reflects society and the way of thinking of its speakers" (González, 2017, p. 230). The existence of sexist language is a socio-cultural problem that highlights the unequal power relationship between men and women. If society continues to be sexist, language will not escape being anthropocentric. As explained by Tajahuerce et al. (2017), "Language also conveys subtle imaginaries that construct a world of power and submission" (p. 129).

Using inclusive language is crucial to develop a neutral perspective, stopping questioning the authority of women, and avoid discrediting, blaming, or infantilizing

them (Tajahuerce et al., 2021). The use of inclusive language, the incorporation of disaggregated data by gender, and the critique of gender stereotypes are not widely practiced in news writing or the study of the press. The issue lies in the fact that male authority and the concept of power are perpetuated in journalism (Tajahuerce and Yanna, 2019, pp. 178-179).

Informative explanations with stereotypes are a problem that is linked to "a specific approach that reproduces a hegemonic androcentric model, built by positively/negatively defining others based on different social divisions" (Rovetto and Simelio, 2012, p. 31). Therefore, the equal incorporation of women into the public sphere helps drive change in language. As Lemus (2001) has highlighted, women's access to media power is an effective remedy for achieving equality in language. Resolving discrimination and inequality of opportunities in society is a priority step toward eliminating the sexist nature of language.

Women journalists and workers have been part of the workforce for a long time. However, their working conditions remain to be explored and reflected upon from a feminist perspective, especially in the heavy industry. Academic studies on women journalists are far from abundant. Previous studies with an egalitarian outlook focus on the visibility of women journalists. Occasionally, they are fighters who challenge authority and defend unbiased reporting. However, they are predominantly found in intermediate or lower-level positions due to the fact that "the male voice continues to prevail in setting the agenda" (De-Miguel et al., 2019:1829).

Politics, sports, science, and technology are the most valued topics, but they are less occupied by women in the press. Despite more women reporters starting to cover hard news in the political and economic field, the majority have been assigned to be responsible for soft news such as art, education, health, or female-oriented stories that do not empower women (North, 2016). Unequal pay, long working hours, age and gender limitations in key positions, and more are the issues that concern women journalists. Moreover, the inability to maintain a balance between family care and unstable working hours is the essential pressure they endure, even though they greatly enjoy being dedicated to the journalism profession (Elmore, 2009).

Journalistic information tends to focus on adult males who dominate political, economic, and cultural power, rather than approaching women and observing the social changes and family transformations they have experienced. As a result, the presence of women in the press remains very low, and they rarely become the protagonists of the news. "Passive and patient victims, in anecdotal situations or as objects of irony," are the main images of women created in the media (Rovetto, 2010, p. 46).

Regarding women workers in the industrial sector, their inferiority in managerial positions and their significant participation in tasks that only require manual skills are unforgettable (López et al., 2009). Gender division and structural barriers in the workplace are closely related to the patriarchal professional system. Furthermore, "the

social devaluation of the work performed by women is a defining characteristic of the inequality and oppression they experience" (Ferguson, 2020, p. 17).

The researcher Llaguno (2007) describes the suffocating condition that women have found themselves in if they want to advance in their careers. She believes that being a woman is a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining administrative jobs, even worse than being young or having no education. She concludes that sexist culture and ignorance about women's administrative capabilities push male directors to form gender stereotypes in their minds:

Male executives believe that there are not enough qualified or willing women to take on leadership positions, and because there is no supportive culture for women to access executive positions, few women are willing to accept those roles... (pp. 444-445)

Due to the androcentric culture, women have no choice but to take on low-paying and less qualified jobs, which reinforces their subordination to maternal roles (Scott, 1993). Women have been used as a cheap and productive tool whenever there is a need. In response to the demands of the country's industrial development, women who were previously restricted to family care and child-rearing are taking on new roles. The need for human resources takes them away from their homes and turns them into laborers (Gutiérrez, 2000).

4. METHODOLOGY

The article is developed through qualitative analysis. A selection of information published in the newspaper *Er Zhong* is made and subsequently studied. Written language is the fundamental factor used for message capture, while the importance of images in information analysis should not be overlooked. Texts, topics, titles, and photos complement the data collection. When discussing journalism, it is primarily about men, as "men are still the majority object or subject of the news" (Franquet et al., 2011, p. 275). Considering the significant role of the media in transmitting ideologies, studying journalistic information from a feminist perspective draws attention to the existence of gender inequality in the press.

According to the conclusion of Cucklanz and Erol (2020) regarding feminist methodology, in order to free oneself from inequitable experiences, those of "marginalized individuals under racist, sexist, heterosexist, patriarchal, and imperialist conditions" are the ones that must be made visible (p. 211). Therefore, our study will investigate what women endure in the newspaper to highlight how information constructs the unusual gender power dynamics. Among all aspects, the activities, discourses, comments, and criteria regarding women are unavoidable data to be examined.

Cucklanz (2016) confirms that evil, sexuality, and harm are ideas that are constantly associated with women directors in the press. Criticizing the male gaze that assesses the worth of women is a way to expose the sexist ideology. Therefore, we cannot

disregard the prejudices experienced by women in power, as challenging them is a means to oppose male authority and the concept of male power.

According to Lamas (1996), in order to identify hierarchy within the family and society, and to analyze the consequences of gender classification throughout life, it is necessary to study personal roles, as different and stereotyped roles hinder the implementation of equality. Therefore, studying the direct presence of women in the newspaper is essential to perceive their discriminatory representation.

This study will investigate, on one hand, the messages written by female journalists to determine the scope and coverage areas of women reporters. On the other hand, it will analyze articles that involve messages from female workers, in order to examine the images of female workers and the treatment they receive. It is also important to consider articles that only feature men, as the absence of women in the newsroom reflects a gender hierarchy within the news structure.

As Bengoechea (2003) points out, verbal associations can be one of the structural phenomena that act against women and worsen the influence of language on sexism. Assimilating women to weakness, portraying them passively, and perpetuating expressions about women and children are methods that diminish femininity in language. Therefore, this study will focus on identifying sexist language in writing to uncover gender stereotypes that are embedded in written language, while also examining androcentric comments and criticisms regarding women.

Our study only includes the information published in 1988, 1998, and 2008. On one hand, these three years represent the periods following the implementation of China's Economic Reform at the end of 1978. Taking each 10-year interval as a time limit will facilitate the identification of possible changes in gender equality over a fixed period. On the other hand, *Er Zhong* Factory lost its independent decision-making authority since the second decade of the 21st century (Chronology of *Er Zhong's* Development in China, 2023), which resulted in significant modifications in its corresponding newspaper, such as the transition from print to digital version. Moreover, the focus of the interviews has shifted toward the leadership of the parent company. Therefore, the documents from the mentioned three years ensure a reliable and stable study environment. The identification of the documents is carried out through the *Er Zhong* Factory's newspaper archive. The sample of collected and analyzed articles comprises a total of 1185, with the following distribution (Table 1):

Table 1

Basic data of the selected sample (1988, 1998, 2008).

Year	Number of Articles
1988	62
1998	345
2008	778
TOTAL	1185

Source: Author's own work.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Women journalists and restricted coverage

Female journalists working for the *Er Zhong* newspaper used to have diverse roles and identities. On one hand, they could be workers or low-ranking administrators who also took on the task of disseminating news related to their own department. On the other hand, they might be secretaries primarily responsible for compiling documents from subordinate offices. There were only a small number of women who worked as full-time professionals, but they were rarely identified in the newspaper.

The messages conveyed in the same newspaper over the course of the 3 years showed little change and mostly revolved around the factory's work-related issues. The disseminated content was presented in a simplistic manner without delving into the substantial problems of the factory, and certainly not explored in depth by the female journalists. The majority of the information accessed by the journalists throughout the 3 periods was mainly found in short reports and not on the front pages. The topics they covered were always far removed from technology or ethical and philosophical debates about the concept of workplace equality. Often, women were forced to focus on frivolous and marginalized content, such as retail events, production updates, conference celebrations, and entertaining activities involving employees.

This issue was also present in the columns written by female workers in 1998 and 2008. Instead of voicing their opinions on professional inequality, these writers focused on their nostalgia, sadness, personal emotions outside of work, and the sensitive and vulnerable idiosyncrasy of women, which undoubtedly fit perfectly into the imagination of a sexist society about women. The narrative thread that did not question the submissive condition of female workers in various industrial areas perpetuated sexual segregation in the division of labor, further exacerbating the devaluation of women in society.

The exclusion of female journalists from technological and industrial-political topics demonstrated men's fear of losing authority in the areas they already dominated. Faced with the possibility of fighting for equal opportunities, the phenomenon of silence among all female writers indicated the control of male power in the industrial environment, as well as the usual indifference of a male-dominated culture towards women's demands for equality. Additionally, Ramírez et al. (2019) believe that the inculcation of an inequitable social system is the origin of gender segregation. The male gender is a gender of control.

It is a system of beliefs within which specific characteristics are assigned to men and women, defining their roles and positions. What happens with these characteristics is that they often end up placing men in a superior position to women in terms of access to and use of power.

The lack of gender-focused training among journalism professionals facilitated the representation of women with obedient characteristics. Without an equality perspective, it was easy for the journalism group to align with sexist ideas through

their writing and stereotypical reviewing mechanisms. In 1998, the case of skilled technicians (Guo, 1998 and Wang, 1998) demonstrated the ideological limitation of women journalists in their writing. The entire article focused solely on praising the hardworking nature of women in those roles, without acknowledging the scarcity of female experts in the technological sphere and in key positions. It is crucial to incorporate gender equality in journalism education and in the industry as a whole, as this will help construct revolutionary images of women in the industrial environment.

In 2008, the coverage area of women journalists did not experience much variation compared to previous years. The contents assigned to women still remained subtle and did not contain reflections on equal rights. Gender-based classification continued to perpetuate the division of labor. In May of the same year, during the earthquake rescue organized by the factory, it was common to see female correspondents assigned to the rear, who also served as volunteers. Through an article titled "I am dedicated to rescue work in the earthquake" written by a woman using the pseudonym Ya-Tou (2008), we understood that the volunteers were expected to provide basic and repetitive services that required little academic knowledge, such as distributing food and cleaning.

Despite the fact that correspondent Ya-Tou described the striking energy of the female volunteers in the background, she did not emphasize anywhere the intellectual capacity of the women's group in the services they provided. Throughout the text, she also did not criticize the disappearance of women journalists and volunteers on the front lines of rescue. Therefore, it is important to incorporate a gender perspective in journalism training so that the journalistic team knows how to fight against "stereotypes that have traditionally considered certain tasks as feminine" (Ufarte, 2007, p. 420).

On International Women's Day 2008, an article titled "They Sing in the Workplace" was published, signed by journalist Xü. It is true that women journalists had the right to report on their own affairs, but the entire text was developed with a superficial and androcentric judgment. The entire writing praised the selfless quality and tolerable attitude of the female workers, as they met the demand to work overtime on their day off. Even the word "sing" in the title was used as evidence of the pleasure and satisfaction of the workers with the extended working hours. This term is imaginary, as the absence of women's opinions on excessive work empowered a sexist point of view in the writing, preventing the expression of the true ideas of the interviewees.

It is worth mentioning that, in the same month, an interesting article was found that had a rather advanced gender perspective. Journalist Gu, in her article, called for educational progress for women and highlighted the importance of equal education. She believed that well-educated women would create an egalitarian society. It was one of the few articles that spoke about gender equality according to our research, and it was the only one in 2008 that advocated for women's rights.

The group of journalists may be complicit in sexism by not incorporating a gender perspective. It is very possible that such a team protects the privilege of masculinity through discriminatory linguistic strategies. As a result, charming but imaginary

figures of women emerge in the press. It is essential to modify the educational system of journalism with an egalitarian concept and remove the sexist planning, as it is "the way to make women's struggles visible and give value to their discourses" (Tajahuerce et al., 2021, p. 66).

5.2. Working Women

5.2.1. Taking advantage of the workforce: exploited female workers

"The feminization of employment and the labor market is not temporary or purely quantitative phenomena; they respond to profound structural changes, both economic and social" (Chávez, 2010, p. 52). In countries experiencing a rapid and typical period of economic advancement, women and men play a key role – the workforce. Bringing more women into heavy labor means a substantial increase in GDP and easier per capita investment (Lawson, 2008).

In the new China, under the urgent demand for national reconstruction after the war, "women were encouraged by the government to do what men could do. Gender balance was given too much attention, while gender differences were slight, and even criticized" (Wu, 2009, p. 71). However, the pursuit equality during that time was an ideal concept that did not bring true liberation to women because it focused more on an equal number of participants rather than addressing gender discrimination. The contributions of women had little essential impact on scientific and technological advancement. Moreover, the government rarely appreciated women's independent spirit in heavy industry (Zhang and Liu, 2015).

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in China, there was a significant collaboration of women in heavy industry. The women who participated during that period were commonly known as the "Iron Girls" (*Chicas de Hierro/Tie Guniang*). According to Zhang and Liu (2015), the Iron Girls did not care about their physical appearance; they were often tall, robust, and performed physically demanding tasks while embodying a revolutionary spirit. Their emergence perfectly aligned with the popular Chinese proverb: "Women hold up half the sky" (*nü ren neng ding ban bian tian*).

In the analyzed newspapers, female workers still embodied the characteristics of the Iron Girls. Acquiring a sense of honor was considered one of their spiritual pillars in the face of difficult tasks. Driven by prestige and the wave of gender balance, the information from the three eras insisted that disregarding health and sacrificing rest was an effective method to showcase women's professional capability that was no less than men's. Due to androcentric propaganda and the scarcity of an egalitarian ideology in the social environment, both the female workers and the readers believed that physical exhaustion would contribute to achieving gender equality. However, instead of promoting gender equality, such absurd beliefs only served to exploit women's workforce to the maximum. The journalistic information that disseminated such misguided ideologies was nothing more than tools for the exploitation of cheap labor.

On February 10, 1988, the case of the telephone operators (Jun 1988) highlighted the androcentric aspect of the news messages. The young telephone operators constantly

worked overtime and stayed overnight in the office. The article praised their spirit of sacrifice and instilled in them the belief that performing repetitive and non-technological tasks would contribute equally to national development. It also exploited the sense of honor as an excuse to abuse the energy of women with long working hours but with little scientific impact.

The will and passion of women in their work were highlighted in the information, which actually encouraged them to remain in the lowest class of the industrial system without considering any change. The entire text neglected the opinions of the female telephone operators regarding the unstable working hours, let alone their ideas of fighting against economic dependence through such strenuous work. The narrative of the text did not incorporate a gender perspective and therefore did not criticize the labor abuse perpetuated by the excessive positions that barely allowed for promotion.

The article titled "The Strong Woman" (*Lei Feiming*) was another example that propagated the personal valorization of the Iron Girls while completely omitting gender equality. It was published on November 28, 1988, and written by journalist Zhang. Although it was titled after the protagonist, the writing was done from a male perspective. In the article, Zhang described in detail the extra workload undertaken by Director Lei in the cement workshop, without mentioning her professional skills or contributions. Focusing solely on admiration for the amount of work is an androcentric trick. The disregard for women's labor capacity only served to subject them to the order and rules established by men.

The language was also used to convey sexist social hierarchy and the humiliation of women. The words used to present the excellence of Director Lei were ironic and sexist because they were filled with stereotypes of sexist men. To evaluate her, journalist Zhang even quoted the absurd opinions of one of Lei's colleagues, completely disregarding the value of women's discourse. The colleague expressed discriminatory ideologies, believing that gender equality came from one sex dominating the other, usually from men dominating women. Furthermore, he believed that if a woman could command a man while also obeying him, she could be considered "strong." At the end of the text, the same colleague made a scandalous comment about Lei, stating, "(...) She is so strong that she controls us men strictly."

On the other hand, in the same year, we found an interesting article titled "There is a Working Woman like this..." that aimed to empower women by giving respect to their less traditional discourse. It is true that the visibility of women with adventurous opinions expanded the existing boundaries of equity in traditional Chinese culture, but in a very limited way (Zhang and Liu, 2015), as their emergence did not change the patriarchal system.

Although the aforementioned article praised women with appreciation, it lacked a gender perspective and did not present them with ideas related to equality. On one hand, the author, Li, praised the protagonist, Hu Weibei, for her physical contributions to the extra work, which undoubtedly favored the abuse of women's labor force in industrial tasks. Among Li's words, Hu was described as a skilled and proactive

worker. She made efforts to increase work efficiency twofold and willingly took on urgent tasks during her rest time. On the other hand, the same author propagated the absurd idea that doubling the women's labor force was equivalent to gender equality. Therefore, Li attempted to express the worker's willingness to work in her own words in order to highlight her "advocacy" identity, stating, "Now everyone says that times have changed, that men and women are equal. Why don't I do something to change stereotypes about women?" (Li, 1988).

Based on the analyzed articles, fully dedicating oneself to work at the expense of health became an accepted atmosphere in 1988, as such a level of dedication would illustrate a woman's responsible attitude and facilitate the realization of the "gender balance" of that time. However, the information failed to realize that women were experiencing labor abuses through overtime work, possibly without receiving corresponding compensation. They also failed to recognize that providing women workers with prestige and honor was a trick to attracting more cheap labor to the workforce. Nonetheless, the efficiency and performance of labor under these conditions remained questionable. The extreme and absurd work environment persisted until 1998 and 2008. Enduring physical and spiritual torture became a highly valued attribute for women during those years.

In 1998, "enjoyment" was a term with negative connotations and became a symbol of shame for women workers. On February 20th, we came across an article about a female director who had to work on New Year's Eve. The journalist, Zhou, portrayed her as a "perfect" woman. He praised her by saying that working willingly on the old night without complaining or protesting was an attitude of "affection and emotion." The writer also maintained a rather patriarchal view, believing that women should be hardworking, quiet, and shy. In his prejudice, persistence and tenacity were seen as female advantages, rather than intellectual talent. The lack of gender perspective training led the journalist to perpetuate gender stereotypes to his female and male readers. Aside from the absence of equitable concepts, there was no interview with the director to understand her true thoughts, nor was there any mention of the reasons behind her presence at work during such a special time. The invisibility of their voices prevented women workers from daring to challenge the unsatisfactory work situation.

On May 8, 1998, an article titled "For a Noble Job" was another sexist example that used a sense of honor to exploit women's labor and justify their choices. It was about a young woman who had suffered a miscarriage the previous year but continued to work in a cutting workshop filled with harmful chemicals. Without focusing on the young woman's opinions or discussing them from a gender perspective, the unidentified journalist appreciated her choice and concluded that she continued to endure that environment willingly because it was a noble job. Furthermore, motherhood was portrayed in the writing with an extravagant and sexist criterion. For example, "for her, if she can become pregnant again, she will know the feeling of being a mother, and she will hold her husband responsible." Towards the end of the text, even a metaphorical phrase was used, such as "for women, weakness is the passport of the coward," to encourage the young woman not to seek professional change.

In 2008, 30 years after the Economic Reform, the role of the newspaper *Er Zhong* in recruiting labor for industrial construction became weak. The sense of honor was no longer seen as an attractive motive to drive female workers to endure physically inconvenient working conditions. However, the gender stereotype continued to be propagated through the published articles. Female workers continued to enter the professional field as labor forces with secondary identities, even if they held managerial positions. They lacked bodily autonomy and even the corresponding respect. The oppressive ideas portrayed about them in the news reflected the cruelty of a hierarchical society, where women were considered absolute servants.

In an article dated March 4th, we are introduced to Monitor Chen, who worked on completed metal parts. She had to perform the difficult tasks that male colleagues didn't want to do. To praise the "contribution" of this monitor, the male journalist, lacking an egalitarian perspective, quoted the "admiration" of her male colleagues, implying that male ideas were more persuasive and forceful. In reality, the admiration from men was not genuine; it was ironic. The selfish remarks of the men highlighted the harsh reality of the inferior social status of female workers. They said, "Every time we mention Chen, there is no boss who doesn't speak highly of her, no colleague who doesn't admire her. She is the strongest one who works every day, risking her life" (A-Ming, 2008). It's worth mentioning that such absurd discourse was rarely seen in articles featuring male protagonists.

The omission and belittlement of female discourse clearly demonstrate the misinformation surrounding women in the public sphere. As a result, the true voices of female workers in the industrial factory were heard less and less, while imaginary voices invented by male power prevailed. Thus, it becomes sadly apparent that if a woman wants recognition in the industry, she must obey men in any situation. If she wants men to speak highly of her, she must dedicate herself to fulfilling their demands.

5.2.2. Praising traditional roles: outstanding female workers imprisoned

Performing traditional roles well was one of the criteria used to judge the personal qualities of outstanding female workers. When they were unable to fulfill their family responsibilities due to excessive work, a sense of guilt would be forcibly imposed on them to meet the expectations of a discriminatory society towards women.

Outstanding female workers were those who achieved extraordinary accomplishments in their work or showed touching efforts in completing tasks. They were passionate about their work and spent most of their time away from home, prioritizing collective interests. Information about this group of women in 1988 was scarce. Between 1998 and 2008, these exceptional women occasionally appeared in short chronicles, but not on the front pages, where their feminine identity was still associated with domestic matters.

The article from May 1998 titled "The Consecration of Pioneers" explained the captivity experienced by outstanding women. The article aimed to create an imaginary woman who was skilled in engineering design work while also taking good care of her elementary school-aged child. Furthermore, the writer emphasized that the

protagonist, Xie, was a quiet woman. She didn't complain or cry in the face of challenging conditions but expressed her gratitude by saying, "We all work happily to contribute to the development of the company, regardless of fatigue and exhaustion" (Peng, 1998).

The article portrayed designer Xie in a submissive manner. It didn't praise her intellectual capacity to handle difficult tasks or appreciate her struggle in a job that was typically dominated by men. It also failed to question the role of the father at home or consider what a more suitable arrangement could be for family members of different genders. The androcentric writing conveyed disrespectful ideas from beginning to end, depicting outstanding women as tools without any personal identity.

The other case titled "The Welding Woman" published on March 18, 2008, exposed the malicious intention of that industrial newspaper towards outstanding women in the workplace. The article was signed by the Metrology Department (Ji Liang Suo), where the welder Qin worked, and it was accompanied by a photo of the protagonist (Figure 1). In the photo, Qin had a typical image of the "Iron Girls." In the same workplace, her hair was disheveled, and she wore a dirty and mismatched uniform. This photo was one of the few representative ones found because it directly showed the modest figures of women workers.

Figure 1

The welder Qin works in the workshop.



Source: Ji Liang Suo, 2008.

According to the article, Qin had a paralytic mother to take care of, and her brother was very sick. She had no choice but to take care of her family and work at the same time. The narrative completely omitted any mention of the father. Instead of advocating for male involvement in family matters, the text presented a rather conservative perspective.

Misfortune did not defeat Qin; instead, she achieved a certain triumph in her work thanks to her steadfast efforts. However, the writing quoted ironic and paternalistic comments from her male colleagues to emphasize the magnificence of the female worker. The men thought that dedication to work was a strange matter for a woman,

but she "leaves early and returns late every day like the male workers." The related observations indicate "the preeminence of patriarchal thinking, in which the belief in male superiority opens the door to undisguised mockery" (Puertas, 2020, p. 1351). Furthermore, the entire text mocked Qin's dedication to work, reinforcing gender segregation in the workplace and the confinement of women to domestic duties, further worsening the social acceptance of female wage earners and equal pay.

A month later, on April 24, 2008, the sensationalist headline "The Female Workers Handling Transformers" highlighted the specialization and scarcity of female workers in non-traditional fields. The article, written by journalist Wang, deepened the inferiority of women despite the progress made by the female workforce. It remained silent about the brave contributions of women in new industrial programs. It also did not criticize the previous lack of information about female workers handling heavy machinery. Instead, the writing focused on the balance between family and work. According to the article, female workers should feel guilty for not being able to take care of their families due to excessive work. Such irrational thinking stems from a patriarchal culture in which women are perceived as the weaker sex, not only in terms of their personality but also in physical appearance. As a result, "they were pigeonholed solely into household work, which has been considered economically non-productive" (Ochoa and Guevera, 2020, p. 5).

In the headlines, terms with delicate connotations such as "golden flowers" (Tang, 2008) or "the rose" (Ouyang and Yue, 2008) were used as a metaphorical substitute for outstanding women. Such monotonous and superficial metaphors were products of a society with a sexist culture, as "fragile, vulnerable, and delicate" could never be the exclusive adjectives used to describe women.

In contrast, when it came to outstanding men, the related headlines often consisted of words with heroic and ambitious concepts, empowering the traditional male identity as dominant. For example, on August 12, 2008, an article written by journalist Yan was titled "The Extraordinary Swordsman Guo." In the same article, the male writer's focus was on Guo's sense of humor and relaxed state in challenging work situations, rather than his family responsibilities. This highlighted a significant gender inequality that existed in the mindset of journalists.

5.2.3. Ignoring intellectual talent: serving female workers

According to the research, in 1988, 1998, and 2008, female workers were always inferior to men in the workplace. The tasks performed by female workers in production areas tended to be far from fields that required high educational qualifications. In the analyzed articles, traditional behaviors of women were valued, believing that such disciplines were sufficient for the assigned tasks.

Dismissing equal rights in the workplace and disregarding women's intellectual capabilities occurred even on March 8, 1998. Ignoring the significance of International Women's Day and the struggle for gender equality, the author Kong described in detail the domestic service provided by female workers in a specific column for that day. In the article, women were portrayed as those who mend the torn uniforms of male

workers to commemorate the special day. In the accompanying photo (Figure 2), the female workers appeared in a subordinate manner. They gathered in the messy workshop, sitting on low and uncomfortable chairs, either sewing by hand or using a sewing machine. Meanwhile, the men beside them appeared as indifferent spectators.

Due to the lack of equal education, the hardworking nature of women was believed to be a precious virtue that was welcomed by everyone. The author commented that this type of service "was well received by directors and employees," without ever criticizing the gender stereotype associated with such activities and the work environment. It was also ironic that these humiliating activities were organized by a committee composed of the female workers themselves. The discriminatory practices indicated the lack of effective norms against sexism in organizations, as explained by Morales and Hernández (2020). In such cases, gender training for participants in industrial groups was presented as a priority task in order to highlight the intellectual capacity of women.

Figure 2

Women workers sew torn uniforms for male workers in the factory.



Source: Gu, 2008.

Women workers were also depicted as those who knew how to manage the economy better, but not because of their expertise in the field, but rather due to their domestic skills. In 1988, an article titled "The Economic Planner - Yan Suzhen," which was signed by the Women Workers Committee, perpetuated this discriminatory idea. The article simply described the cause and result of money-saving efforts at work, without commenting on Yan's proficiency in the task or explaining the source of her professional capabilities. The text also failed to mention the challenging process of saving money. Additionally, the headline deserved criticism as it only referred to a woman as a "planner."

To understand why a high-level technical woman could achieve success in her work, an article from 2008 continued to interpret the reasons with a discriminatory mindset. In the writing, the characteristics of a maid were attributed as the exclusive property of women, stating that "the perseverance and specific delicacy of women helped them

fully dedicate themselves to the preparation of technical tasks" (Chen, 2008). In this case, intelligence was never considered a decisive factor in interpreting women's success. The complete denial of female talent in journalistic language reflected one of society's flaws, as Salazar (2020) concludes regarding inclusive language, stating that it emerged as "the result of a demand from a part of society that does not feel adequately represented" (p. 218).

News about competitions held among women were another testament to the disregard for female talent. To increase productivity in production, the challenge directed at female workers was to "compete with their colleagues in working hours and service quality to be the best" (Zhou, 2008). Diligence, patience, and meticulousness were described as the only goals that women could compete in. Although the technological competition was completely absent for women, the article never criticized sexism in the technology sector. Tajahuerce et al. (2017) explain why the female group is always absent in scientific aspects, concluding that "technology, after all, is the work of human minds that impose the ideology of power" (p. 138).

According to our research, such a competition would never have appeared among men. Competing based on the ability to serve was highly discriminatory because it excluded male counterparts, relegating women to a submissive role. As a result, more and more innocent and incompetent female images would be constructed, which were not true representations.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, a review and analysis of information from the newspaper *Er Zhong* about women journalists and workers appearing in 1988, 1998, and 2008 have been conducted. The analyzed women were generally portrayed with images of tolerance and obedience. The investigated messages frequently reinforced the submissiveness of women, highlighting the authority and privilege of men in the field of journalism. The sexist ideas did not undergo a noticeable change, constructing imaginary women based on gender stereotypes.

Journalists and workers were often assigned repetitive tasks that required little professional training. They experienced clear restrictions in their work due to being women. Women journalists were invisible in scientific and technological news. The soft topics assigned to them revealed a clear gender segregation in the distribution of jobs, both in journalism and heavy industry.

The lack of understanding among journalists about true gender equality was a common issue, which deepened gender discrimination in the treatment and interpretation of information. The absence of an egalitarian perspective in the newspaper *Er Zhong* in 1988, 1998, and 2008 resulted in the stereotypical roles of women and sexist comments. It is important to incorporate gender equality training into journalism studies to prevent the publication of unequal ideas and to recognize women's excellence at the right time. As a result, sexist culture in the world of information will be reduced.

The information, paying attention to the process of technological innovation and the relevant details in which female workers collaborate will increase the reliability of women's intellect in the heavy industry. The collaboration of professional journalists with technological and gender equality training will be an effective method to ensure that the representation of women in the newspaper and the industry is nothing less than equal.

The androcentric language and sexist images established a paternalistic hierarchy in the analyzed newspaper. The sexist words of male colleagues were cited to demonstrate the distinguished success of female workers. Irony-filled phrases were used to praise the invincible spirit of female workers in the face of difficult tasks. The presence of male roles in the family was concealed to highlight the challenges faced by female laborers in achieving professional success. Empowering women in the workforce, confining them to the family, and undermining their intelligence were the popular methods used to portray them in the aforementioned newspaper.

Therefore, we conclude that using inclusive language and egalitarian images in the information is essential to eliminate gender stereotypes from journalism. Quoting the speeches of women in the newsroom would grant them the right to expression. Making unbiased comments would help understand the discriminatory working conditions that female workers are facing. Men should be encouraged to share family responsibilities so that female workers can pursue the jobs that interest them. Moreover, maintaining an open and progressive mindset over time is the premise for discovering revolutionary images of women.

The information created the image of hardworking yet silent female workers through spiritual stimuli. The sense of honor portrayed in the headlines and comments were nothing more than a tool for the androcentric society's mental control over women. In reality, the labor efforts made by female workers under such stimulation did not contribute to technological advancement or labor rights equality. Therefore, we must reject the granting of honor as the sole reward for women's labor, as it would not facilitate equality of rights. Protecting break time, ensuring equal pay, compensating for overtime work, and providing equal opportunities for promotion are what should be disseminated in the information to achieve gender balance.

The analyzed information hardly made any comments or discussions regarding what the roles of female and male workers should be in work and family. Outstanding female workers were known in the newspaper for their distinguished achievements at work, but they were burdened with a sense of guilt for not being able to take care of the family, which further reinforced the auxiliary identity of women and undermined their personal value at work.

The restricted freedom of choice for female workers deserves scrutiny because such limitations never appeared in the case of men. It is necessary to open discussions between women and men from a gender perspective to make it known that women have the right to decide how to lead their own lives, instead of being confined to the family. Such activity will also provide a friendly scientific and technological

environment for women. In news reporting, the sense of guilt imposed on women must be rejected at all times. This feeling is a trap set by a patriarchal culture to exploit the female workforce.

Superficial headlines and sexist content often placed female workers in subordinate roles. Praising their traditional characteristics highlighted male dominance in the professional sphere, completely disregarding their intellectual talent. Therefore, focusing on the assertive actions of women will defend their more advanced presence, for example, in science and technology. Highlighting female images with neutral or feminist language in the headlines will reduce sexism towards women from the very beginning.

The majority of the women investigated held low-level positions at work. There were few female directors. Increasing the number of women in managerial positions in the industry and journalism is crucial for women to have a voice in their own affairs. It will also reveal female power in professional fields. Having more diligent individuals with gender training is an appropriate way to reduce sexism in the work environment.

This study on journalistic information from a feminist perspective lays the groundwork for opening up labor, social, cultural, and even political debates about gender equality in the heavy industry. However, we cannot conclude without mentioning some of the most significant limitations we encountered in this work:

- The selected samples consisted of information published in three different periods. While the copies include qualified messages (in terms of written language and images) related to women journalists and workers, they exclude newspapers from other factories and areas, which may have different levels of reach and informational content.
- The self-selection of samples cannot be fully controlled. The information used for our research is at risk of being limited by this circumstance.
- The detection of messages does not encompass the issue of salary or female unemployment due to time limitations. In 1988, 1998, and 2008, in many parts of China, the system of lifetime employment (Iron rice bowl/Tie Fan Wan) was still guaranteed.

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Information about female journalists and workers in the newspaper ER ZHONG (1988-2008): A study from the feminist perspective

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