

# Gender Paradox and Women's Spatiality : Case Study of Study Mothers at Chiang Mai Chinese Christian Church

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores a Chinese group of 'peidu mama', Chinese study mothers who have been participating in the new Chinese migrant Christian communities in Chiang Mai city, Thailand. Drawing from the case study, the article examines the gender paradox and women's spatiality issue that appeared within the church and community. I applied the qualitative methods of interviews, participatory observation which I become a volunteer at Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church to collect information for several months. This research points out that some church women have been facing an extreme level of gender paradox and gender hierarchy working through church activities. Under the situation which mentioned before, female Chinese Christians have strategically utilized Christianity interpretation, deploying the tactics of 'obedience' and 'reversed patriarchal bargaining' to negotiate with traditional gender and family relationship. This is an attempt, as an ongoing desire, to reduce the inferior status encountered paradoxically by traditional Confucian gender and family values.*

**Keywords:** Gender paradox, Patriarchal bargain, Spatiality

## INTRODUCTION

### Gender paradox in Chiang Mai huaren jidu church

The increasing new Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia in the past 3 decades cause an increasing number of Chinese Christian churches in Chiang Mai. The Chinese diaspora Christian Churches which set up in recent years focus on the member of the new Chinese diaspora with the oversea Chinese pastor, using mandarin as the only language. Among these Chinese diaspora Churches, Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church, set up in September 2015, develop most quickly, with about 60 regular members and 40 flexible members.

Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church is a typical ethnical Chinese diaspora church, which paid a major role in building a sense of Chinese belonging based on the new Chinese diaspora identity. It is operated practically through Mandarin Chinese language, Chinese food, and Chinese culture-based activities, such as Chinese traditional holidays celebration and various family activities, these activities

can help the members cultivating and educating their children during religious participation.

More than 60% of church members in Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church are peidu mamas (or 'study mothers', peidu means 'accompany study', mama means 'mother'). Recently, Chiang Mai has become one popular city for middle or upper middle class Chinese families which pursue the overseas education for their adolescent children, with expectation for better international education resources, the better environment both in nature and society, or a transitional to further study in the western developed countries for their Children. Usually, the peidu mama brave painstaking journeys to the unfamiliar foreign lands, they prepared to weather the transnational split of their households for this purpose (Huang & Yeoh, 2011). They are young, well-educated, and wealthy, usually taking up the role of uprooting and resettling with their children. At the same time, their husbands are 'left behind' in China to continue working and provide financial support for their children.

The Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church is a patriarchal diaspora church directed by Confucianism notions of gender hierarchy internalizing male domination with female submission and instructing Chinese peidu mamas to accept their inferior status adjusts to the Chinese Christian social environment. Under the observation, many peidu mamas introduce themselves as someone's mother rather than their name; their topics usually focus on their husbands and children; and most of their joy come from their children or husbands rather than themselves. Men usually dominate the eldership or leadership in the churches, assume as the role of hierarchy, rationality, control, and exclusivism. Men control all critical decisions, such as church missionary work, development strategy, financial issues, hiring associate pastors, cooperating with other churches, supervising prayer meetings, and church activities. Comparing with the church's men, women inhabit a more pious, submissive role of caretaking, religiousness, and vulnerability in the church; they perform homemaking church duties to create a homelike feeling for the members, such as cooking, cleaning, leading worship choir, taking care of children, and worshipping.

Nowadays, China has continued to witness a religious enchantment in the context of modernity, especially Christianity. Yang (2014) estimated that Christians in China could exceed 160 million by 2025. China will become the largest number of Christians in the world in 2030 in the context of social, political, and cultural changes in China's modernization. So, the puzzle is raised: "why the middle-class, well-educated, and non-religious women, who are brought up in a secular and comparatively equal context in China, didn't convert to Christian in China, but rather attracted and voluntarily choose a patriarchal Christian community that seems to design to perpetuate their subordination in Chiang Mai?"

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars have paid attention to this gender paradox of women's participation in patriarchal religious communities (Cucchiari, 1990; Brusco, 1995; Martin, 2003; Fällman, 2008) have successfully challenged conventional interpretations of feminine engagement with religious patriarchy, giving account for

women's religious activity (Stacey, 1990; Brusco, 1995; Ozorak, 1996; Griffith, 1997; Chong, 2006). Ozorak explores the gender paradox between the female experience of traditional religious teachings; finds the Church community which is mostly built of and by women is supportive of personal difficulties, allowing women to work together and form close relationships with their surrounding community (Ozorak, 1996). Chong explores the meaning of religious submission in the Korean context, focusing on the motivations behind women's consent to patriarchy which are rooted in women's contradictory desires regarding the family system and the ambivalent subjectivities that they evoke (Chong, 2006). Glock proposes that a single mother or a widow may be more likely to get converted to religion for lack of family benefits (Glock, 1967). Alumkal regards the Bible as the primary source of gender hierarchy in diaspora Christian churches (Alumkal, 2003). Kandiyoti refers to the 'patriarchal bargain' as a set of concrete rules and constraints within which women must strategize to survive in a patriarchal society, gives opportunities to reshape gender relationship through 'patriarchal bargain', and opens a new area of struggle and renegotiation in gender relations (Kandiyoti, 1988). Studies also show the relativity between religiousness and marital satisfaction, suggest high church attendance rates relate significantly to lower divorce rates (Mahoney et al., 2001; Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). These studies addressed the nature and dynamics of contemporary gender relations, investigated how religious women negotiate the challenges of modernity and social change, illuminated gender negotiation, and their unpredictable consequences for altering gender dynamics. Through these studies, the views of patriarchy Christianity as monolithic sources of oppression of women, and women as victims of male domination had been challenged a lot. Many studies show the relativity between religiousness and marital satisfaction, suggesting that high church attendance rates relate significantly to lower divorce rates (Mahoney et al., 2001; Lambert & Dollahite, 2008). These studies addressed the nature and dynamics of contemporary gender relations, investigated how religious women negotiate the challenges of modernity and social change, illuminated gender negotiation, and their unpredictable consequences for altering gender dynamics. Through these studies, the views of patriarchy Christianity as monolithic sources of oppression of women, and women as victims of male domination had been challenged.

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the Chinese gender and family norms issues; it focuses on the problems of patriarchal power and how the peidu mamas negotiate with the patriarchy through the ethnographic investigation of their involvement in Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church. The article also applied the qualitative methods, including the formal and informal interviews, fieldwork, and participant observation when volunteering for several months at the Chiang Mai Huaren Jidu Church. The semi-structured interviews with 15 peidu mamas who converted to be Christian members in Chiang Mai and church leaders are conducted ethnographically. Through the ethnographical methods, I give a sociological analysis of how Christianity affected Chinese women's self-identity and self-development and examine how these peidu

mamas interpret Christianity to negotiate with traditional Confucian gender and family values.

### **Context: Gender within contradictions of the modern Chinese patriarchal family**

This study finds that peidu mama's Christianity involvement is positively related to family and gender relations, providing us with a sociological understanding of their motivations of commitment in the patriarchal Christian church. This section uncovers the social and religious context of their religious conversion.

### **Traditional confucian family and gender relations**

The traditional Chinese family system is built on Confucianism principles, which stressed a strict hierarchical order of human relationships based on gender, age, and inherited social status. The principle of gender difference served as the basis for strict gender segregation and role division, with women's 'inner' sphere subordinate to the men's 'outer' sphere. Under this traditionally Confucianism social system, China was a strict patrilineal, patrilocal lineage maintained and affirmed through the rites of ancestor worship and filial piety, with a family line subsequently assured through the birth of male heirs. In the traditional Chinese ideology, men are honored by and women are abased by the society (男尊女卑, nan zun nv bei), as 'Yin/Yang' theory (expressing the idea of Yang/male being superior and Yin/female being inferior). 'Yin/Yang' theory also extending to the family is wife should submit to her husband, the husband must lead the family, and the wife needs to maintain the household and defer to her husband (相夫教子, xiangfu jiaozi). Due to the long tradition influenced by Confucianism values, Chinese gender relations sometimes can be ritualized. It clearly defined female subordination, such as women being deferential, silent, and fertile. However, Chinese men are respected; they consider their wives as their 'face' which means other people's respect. (面子, mian zi).

### **Socialist and late-socialist gender ideology**

Apart from the Confucianism values, the socialist and late-socialist gender ideologies which persisted have affected China recently. Significant transformations have occurred in the structure and ideology of Chinese family and gender relations since 1949. According to Yang's article, during the Maoist-socialist era (1949-1976), women were given equal rights in the spheres of politics, labor, and education through top-down legislation. Chinese women were encouraged by the Chinese state to perform work previously reserved for men; however, women continued to play traditional mother roles at home (Yang, 1999). During the marketization era (1978-present), femininity emphasized as a characteristic of women, and the thinking that 'women belong at home' returned. In this period, the Chinese government encouraged women to compete in the market to cultivate their 'quality' (素质, suzhi) by raising their self-respect (自尊, zizun), self-confidence (自信, zixin), self-reliance (自立, zili), and self-strength (自强, ziqiang). Furtherly, the Chinese government actively promotes gender equality in higher education and employment. Since then, the traditional family and gender roles' ideological basis

transformed into excellent; females have translated themselves into informed citizens of modern society; they upgrade their primary status tremendously. In the family, the Chinese traditional kinship system is replaced by the relationships classified by blood and marriage. The father's authority has weakened; man's superiority is reducing; women are getting more respect. The family structure, the value system, as well as the education and employment opportunities for women, have successfully helped to produce a massive visible change in the sphere of family and gender and the status of Chinese women.

### **Crisis: Central contradictions of the family and gender relation**

With the 'economic open' policy, China has undergone dramatic social changes. It has transformed from a poor, agricultural society into a quasi-modern country with the single-minded pursuit of economic development and modernization. These dramatic changes generated by education and the forces of modernity have brought about enormous social and cultural contradictions. These contradictions can be concentrated expression in the issues of family and gender relations.

Chinese modernity has significantly improved people's material life, which could emancipate women from heavy household duties, enabling them to look forward to their personal life, provoking them to redefine their domestic roles and identity. At the same time, the western values have exerted considerable influence on Chinese family culture, particularly the ideals of romantic love and companionate marriage. The ideas become a force clash with powerful ideas and values of the traditional Confucian family, perpetuated, and refashioned within the modern patriarchal Chinese family. These changes give Chinese women space with quite different expectations and ideas of their roles compared with before. They bring about modern ideas towards marriage and family life based on a bond of mutual love, respect, greater equality, and less patriarchal oppression.

Seemingly, Chinese women are literate, well-educated, enjoying the same modern life benefits as men, can make more decisions by themselves. But if looking inside the modern Chinese society, it is easy to find a tremendous amount of inner conflicts between modern developments inequality with traditional Chinese patriarchy, especially in gender status and relations. As can be seen, Confucianism's ethical codes, practices, and spirits are still working and continuing to contribute to creating the gender-based division and stereotype of the social roles of women and men. Marriage is a requirement for Chinese women and reinforces the ideology of 'wise mother and good wife' to confine women to a private area. Nowadays, the concept of 'wise mother and good wife' had added childcare and children's educational manager responsibilities to her duties, which reflects another aspect of family value. Under this value, it's women's responsibility to instruct their children to go to a prestigious school and making a successful life. As a result, some middle-class women quit their jobs and careers to work or take full responsibility for their children's educational tasks. Also, they do not hesitate to put themselves out of the way to give money for their children's education, fully support children's nurturing and upbringing, which primarily depends on their unpaid labor.

Peidu mamas in Chiang Mai, as well as many mothers in China, take responsibility for ensuring their children's academic success. They take their children to study abroad while their husbands stay in China to provide financial support. Hints the Chinese mother's enthusiasm for their children's education and implies the intensifying contemporary role of Chinese women on Children's education managers in China's neoliberal transformation. Peidu mamas usually exert their economic power and puts tremendous pressure on their children, meddling in school activities, and visiting teachers to ensure their children's education successfully. They pour their energy and time on their children more than their own lives, indicating the associated the patriarchal system that promotes the ideology of self-loss of women's reclaiming self-agency or self-development. In this sense, these Peidu mamas are regarded as the wealth influences extension of their husbands or their husband's social position outside the home.

Although peidu mamas are well-educated, their domestic dilemmas were apparent. As seen, the restrictions and decline of the current patriarchal family system in the modernization process; however, confucianism was resurgent in Chinese society. The burden of child-rearing and education withdrew them from the path of independence and domesticity. They could not make the best of their educational capital and talents and implement their goals. The supervising numerous study activities and looking after the children's basic physical and emotional needs are full of mental stress. Although they have no tremendous economic worries, they live their lives in a quiet dilemma and trap in an ambiguous sense of discontent with their domestic identities. The intensive and stressful child-rearing, which used to be shared among the extended family members, now tends to be exclusively borne by the peidu mana themselves. It can cause lots of social and personal problems, such as class gap, divorce, or extramarital problems out of their couple's separately living.

Nowadays, the marriage morality has risen to be a serious social problem affecting gender roles in nowadays Chinese society; many men try to keeping a second wife (包二奶 *bao ernai*, 小三 *xiao san*) and meeting outside the family. This immoral behavior threatens many Chinese families, but still unable to find a suitable way to solve this social problem. According to the national working committee on children and women under the state council, China's divorce rate increases every year. There have 4.15 million couples divorce in 2019<sup>1</sup>. In this context, many peidu mamas I interviewed have mentioned their nervousness about the extramarital problems because of their couple's separately living.

The Chinese women's participation in religious activities in Chiang Mai is complex. The Chinese socialist and late-socialist gender ideologies, as well as Confucianism influences put peidu mamas in a paradoxical place in the culture of 'Western Bible modernity.' According to the interviews, although their trajectories or reasons for religious conversion are varying differently. Still, most of their domestic crises narratives focused on the relation with husband and unmanageable domestic burdens. These problems reveal the family and gender relation's central contradictions, helping us comprehend the religious participant of peidu mamas in

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nwccw.gov.cn/2020-01/20/content\\_278725.htm](http://www.nwccw.gov.cn/2020-01/20/content_278725.htm)

the patriarchal Christian church in Chiang Mai. The religious involvement of peidu mama is a central means for them to deal with their domestic dilemmas and conflicts arising from the current crisis or contradictions of gender and family in the modern Chinese patriarchal family.

### **Gender paradox in chinese confucianism patriarchal christian church**

According to above, the young and well-educated peidu mamas are subordinated within the patriarchal Christian church. They are kept from authority and decision making, generally relegated to support or services works as church helpers. This study finds peidu mama's submissive status is vigorously sustained ideologically by traditional Chinese Confucianism and Christian requirements of women.

The ideology of the patriarchal interpretation of Christianity with Confucianism instilled gender directive and ways based on women's Confucianism ideology. In this study, the Chinese Christian church asserts as a divinely sanctioned set of Christian beliefs and continues to be deeply rooted in Confucian ideology regarding women as inferior. It reflects the essential Confucianism family and gender relations values, which cover absolute and inherently male superiority, female's total obedience, and endurance as the prerequisite for family harmony and cohesion.

Several pastors attribute the current family crisis to women's deviation from Chinese traditional gender roles and social order, which led to a decline in marriage values. They claim that most family conflicts come from women who have been too strong and smart for their husbands or try to exert too much power and leadership over their husbands. Based on the article, the pastors suggest that church women must follow the Christian faith, try to be a 'good wife and smart mother.' They need to combine the basics of Christian gender order and put themselves in the correct position of a wife, perform the traditional wife's duty, raise children, and submit to their husbands.

Church pastors stress that females should be silent and obedient, encourage church women to conform to the ideal image of the Confucianism virtuous and submissive female, and emphasize the unquestionable necessity of women's submission as encouraging the husbands to love their wives in return. The pastor's wife usually sacrificial her woman- identify-woman identity to give her husband more support and assistance. Together with the pastor's wife, peidu mamas are actively engaging in church activities, such as fundraising, congressional procedure, choir, social works, committed in cook, teacher of children, and look after children. With more in-depth engagement in Christianity, the more willing church women tend to preserve the church's traditional women images.

Church applies seminars and pastor's teachings to reshape women's gender subjection both in the church and family, suggesting women perform household work, to submissive and meek to men. Based on the fieldwork note, in a church family relationships course on 15 September, 2017, the pastor states that women have stepped away from of the traditional gender roles and authority boundaries by violating the basic gender hierarchy principle and order in the Chinese Confucianism context in nowadays. Women assert their desire within the family and

using her way of doing everything have caused a modern family crisis, made women suffer unhappily by themselves.

In the reflections, Lin (2017) refers to the sin of arrogance and impatience which stirred her family's conflicts, she states: "I think I have higher education, have capability in earning good money too, so I thought I didn't need to obey my husband which created lots of problems with my husband" (Lin, personal communication, September 13, 2017). Another peidu mama reflects:

*"Before I converted to be a Christian, I was the 'biggest one' in my family. My husband had to follow me in everything which made us have lots of conflicts. Now, I realize that I am very small, I need to depend on God, follow God's words"* (Wang, personal communication, June 8, 2018). Wang reflects:

*"After the class, I realized that I was too self-centered before. I always drove my husband and children to perform according to my expectations. I expressed too much my ambitious focus towards my children. Now I realize that my control would stir up family conflicts and would hurt the family"* (Wang, personal communication, June 8, 2018).

Through the teaching, church encourages church women follow the women's ideal virtues 'female modesty and humility' to solve these conflicts.

When asked why there have no female pastors, Pastor Wang (2018) answers "The Bible has specifically addresses that the pastor must be a male, and the Bible also addresses the wife of a pastor to be submissive to her husband (Eph. 5:22) and support her husband (Gen. 2:18)" (Pastor Wang, personal communication, June 8, 2018). Many members in the church also use the Bible to explain this question, and consider it as a work distribution but not related to women being inferior to men (Ms. Gao, personal communication, June 8, 2018).

For the question "Does patriarchal gender in Church mean inferiority of the female in a Christian church?" Pastor Wang answers:

*"From the text of Genesis 1:27-28, both men and women were created in the image of God, but men-women character is different, women's desire will be for her husband, and husband will rule over wife (Gen 3:16). God calls on women to submit to their husbands, not as inferior beings, but in all humility to allow their husbands to lead. That is, in the eyes of God women are equal to men..."* (Pastor Wang, personal communication, June 8, 2018)).

Another pastor asserts from the start of the Bible:

*"God created men and then women, this creation order means men is head of women. At the same time, God used the rib of men to create women not the foot bone, it also means men need to love women"* (Li, personal communication, 2018).

Peidu mama also use the Bible in answering this question, as Ms. Luo says: "Women should be men's assistants, ready to support and encourage men [Gen. 2:18]. Females are usually impulsive to make a decision so we cannot assume important decision-making roles" (Luo, personal communication, September 20, 2017). However, some peidu mama use the relationship in discussing this issue, as



Ms. Gao states: "In our churches, we called each other sisters or brothers, we are equal, and we are all children and servants" (Ms. Gao, personal communication, June 13, 2018).

This section describes how the Church uses the Bible and the Chinese Confucianism cultural norms to interpret women's subordinated status in the hierarchy Christian Church. The middle-class Chinese women in this study are young, well-educated, but enthusiastic in Church attachment. Instead of feeling that females are inferior to their male counterparts, peidu mamas think they get more respect in the Church and the Church gives them lots of love. It also means the female members prefer greater psychological comfort over leadership and power in the Chinese peidu mama's community.

### **Chinese christian church: women's space, women's community**

The first stage of Christian encounter in Chiang Mai of peidu mama, which consists of preparatory socialization, provide for them with a Christian-related community. In this community, the Christians which the peidu mama encountered, their Christianity faith, values, or good behaviors could be a positive incentive for the peidu mama to go on with their Christian conversion.

There are more than 40 peidu mamas in the 'WeChat' group of Chiang Mai Huaren jidu church constitute the majority and the most enthusiastic church members, serving as crucial roles in dedicating church helpers and a great passionate evangelist. For some peidu mamas, church participation is a kind of deep Christian commitment in performing 'God's works.' However, based on interview, several narratives suggest their religious involvement is positively related to the support they get from the church for their roles in the family and community, which have a far broader meaning than spiritual and religious (Gao, Xin, Jing & Fan personal communications, June 13, 2018). For them, the church has meaning institutionally as well as spiritually.

The Chinese Christian community has assumed an essential aspect of women's religious conversion. As many Chinese women have minimal contact with local people due to the language barrier, the Church gives them a well-rounded 'Chinese peidu mama-centered community', providing religion and emotional and psychological space of support. Although the Church is patriarchy, the family-like social community which focuses on females' social activities, provides peidu mama with regular face-to-face social interaction and connection. It attracts peidu mama great. For them, Church is more than a place for worship or performance of Christian duties and a social interaction platform or a family far away from home. Church attendance helps them to cope with their emotional lives and solve their family lives' conflicts and restrictions. As can be seen, they are happy in church duties, such as cooking, cleaning, visiting church patients, in which they receive further acknowledgment of each other, sharing information, improving the wellbeing of their extra-domestic space.

Immigration put the peidu mamas under the increasing stresses generated by the modern housewife's reconfigured tasks and their subjective understandings as modern women, left them feeling alone, isolated, and helpless. Pastors assert that the church notices the lonely peidu mamas who bring their children to study in Chiang

Mai by themselves, who are deprived of family and friends. So, the church tries to fill the family or female community's role for them. Church focus on members' social lives, providing with a personal relationship within the church. Church's social activities attract and impress first-time churchgoers. Pastors usually invite the new attendees to have lunch together after the worship, talking with them like family members, giving them helps with their needs, and introducing other members who could help them directly. These attractive social resources influence first-time churchgoers to continue their church involvement. Through the church social gatherings and various activities, peidu mamas set up a long-lasting and close friendships through frequent social interconnection, sharing their lives, solving problems together, setting up further family-like sisters/brothers bonding. In this way, they help each other by exchanging and sharing practical or emotional experiences to improve their family well-being and friendships.

Bible class proves to be another essential channel for setting up women's relationships through mutual faith. Bible study groups function as a 'family within the Church family' in practice, incorporating members' social lives and providing them with a personal relationship within the church. The Bible study groups usually serve as the center of church women's social lives and the site of a strong non-blood family bond. In this family, members develop strong, satisfying friendships via frequent social exchange and regularly share their lives and work experiences.

As Ms. Huang says: *"I really find it was wonderful to experience frustrations, pains, grieved as well as happiness together. For me, Bible doctrines are very difficult, but other members' sharing in the discussing help me to understand the doctrines easier. Learning with them, my faith and commitment to church grows"*. (Huang, personal communication, January 5, 2019)

What Ms. Huang says solidified idea that church is not only a place for social congregation for women, but is also a hub which provides abundant church practices to foster member's relationships.

This study also finds that the peidu mamas' relationship to the church is closely associated with child-rearing. Before the Sunday worship service, peidu mama always share the information about their children's study or living experiences. Then, there is a short prayer ritual for the children where they stand in a line before the members at the beginning of the worship, sometimes the children sing hymns. Usually, the children are taught to be a model of courtesy to other non-Christian children by the pastor. The prayer ceremony for children lasts about ten minutes, and then the wife of the pastor takes the children upstairs, where she leads them in Bible studies or activities. Based on the interviews, peidu mamas share their naughty children's experiences to become calm and concentrate on their studies better after joining the church. The church open; Chinese classes for the children as requested by the parents. In this way, peidu mamas emancipate from looking after and educating the children by themselves. Through these activities, the church empowers peidu mamas to develop their religious identity in a mutual faith big family where the pastor and his wife are always ready to help them. Peidu mamas also take the church as their own home; they clean, prepare Chinese food for all members, and celebrate Chinese festivals together. Through sharing child-rearing,

peidu mamas can make more and better friends in the church, and willing to invite their friends to the church.

Church members also use new technology and social media in setting up digital church communities 'WeChat group', which is a very convenient platform for contacting members, publication, meeting notices, Bible discussing, online worship and prayer. Through the 'Wechat group', the digitization of religious texts, such as the digital Bibles or other digital religious publications, has been widely used among Chinese diaspora Christians. Apart from the 'E-Church' function, 'WeChat group' allows the church to become an E-Community or peers networking. Peidu mama utilize 'E-Church Space' set up a faith-based friend-circles for helping in other favors and interesting, such as fitness, beauty and healthy, and so on.

Church's social family function and faith-based friend-circles attract Chinese women's initial attention; the church groups' practices which act as 'family within Christianity', provides peidu mamas with a social site of extra-domestic space, attracts them to begin and continue attending church, helps them to navigate the conflicts arising from their immigration.

What more, church community provides peidu mamas with diverse opportunities for dedication and destination accomplishment. Peidu mama usually take up 'service section' works, such as kitchen work, cleaning, taking care of children and other service works. Although these service works indicate women's submissive status; however, they display their delight in participation these works which received great recognition from the pastors and other members. It indicates that their church involvements related to a subtle form of Church's social interaction circle or social recognition reward. They describe their self-fulfillment and satisfaction with church involvement and providing church services as the evidence of religiousness, as states: "We perform church services for faith, Bible tell us to believe and to give church service" (Grace, Gao, Yang, Xin, personal communication, September 14, 2017). Despite the existence of women's distinct submissive status in the church, the church's formal and church member's informal 'rewards' encourage the women's enthusiastic participation.

This section finds that the Christian church in Chiang Mai serves as a Chinese women community, attracting the young peidu mamas greatly. Through church services works, they regain their value in the 'church household' and rewarded with other church members' recognition and approval. The next section will continue analyzing how the peidu mamas uses a patriarchal bargain in negotiating with traditional gender and family relationship.

### **Dynamic gender paradox through patriarchal bargain**

This article has tested Kandiyoti's theory, finds that peidu mamas attempted to renegotiate their material relationship powerfully in the Christianity and traditional Confucian patriarchal contexts by employing submission. They use the submission as a tool to bargain for family harmony, influencing family members' better behavior by subtle suggestions. They show their sincere obedience and other well-doing to their husbands, inspiring their husbands to correct and improve their behavior.

Peidu mama's marriages face challenges from the dramatic changes associated with the immigration process since their husbands stay in China. From the interviews, the most serious challenges stem from a lack of effective communication between couples. To help the members solve this problem, Church arranges many courses on improving family relationships, to provide church women with the specific methods and effective tactics in carrying out obedience suitably and efficiently. Pastors suggest women's submission by teaching peidu mamas to obey their husbands, which is an efficient way to reshape the gender hierarchy. The church teaches churchwomen to abide by the Bible doctrines and submit to her husband to attain family harmony and advises the husband to love and respect his wife in return. Through the wife's submission, the husband gets a significant amount of respect and a feeling of having 'face' (Mian zi 面子). Husband's authority in the family is re-established, and the paternal system is recovered. Male privileges seem hard for a man to give up; they find their male privileges in the Christian church and give their wife more love in return.

Pastors assert that a wife submitting and obeying her husband sincerely which giving the husband a superior position and authority, and reshaping family order. As pastor Zhao elaborates:

*"Without the wives' submission to their husband, God would not use the family. The wife would need to obey her husband unconditionally, she should obey her husband like she obeys Jesus Christ, and the husband should be the leader, both in the spiritual and the material sphere". (Pastor Zhao, personal communication, September 6, 2018).*

The peidu mamas who had previously questioned the Christian female submission doctrines, now have accepted the church's calling to use obedience as an instrument in solving their family conflicts. They come to highly endorse the Church's gender ideology because the submission proves to be an effective instrument in negotiating love and respect, especially in negotiating better marital relations. They assert that their marriage get improve after they accept submission tactic. As one interviewee elaborates: "the family relationship course teaches me how to develop family loyalty and respect; before that I decided everything, but now I learn to solicit my husband's opinions which makes us more harmonious" (Gao, personal communication, September 6, 2018). Another peidu mama shares a similar experience: "Pastor Li addresses the family problems with the biblical teachings of gender role as the husband is head of the family, he teaches us that the wife should follow her husband, and one husband one wife" (Huang, personal communication, September 5, 2018).

Besides that, many narrations state their sincere willingness to submit brings about their husband's solicitude. As Jiaojiao states

*"The relationship between me and my husband is quite intense, especially after I moved to Chiang Mai with my daughter. One day I just followed the pastor's words to wash feet for my husband when he visited us. I tried to put my ego down to obey him. My husband moved and has changed a lot. He gives me more respect and warm love than ever, he also follows me to the church and*

*received baptism in the end*" (Jiaojiao, personal communication, August 4, 2018).

It indicates the peidu mamas gain more than they lose by voluntarily obeying men both in the church and family life; they get more of what they need in the marriage through the patriarchal bargain.

The pastor couples act as the best models for the church members. The pastor always give enough respect to his wife, and his wife always supports the pastor no matter what in regular duties of a pastor or in daily life and never quarrel. One interviewee gives a clear example: "The pastors give us a very good sample. I realize that when both of us have the same belief, we can set up a foundation for family values and commitment" (Fen, personal communication, September 6, 2018). Also as Ms. Yue states

*"I recommend to my friend to marry with a Christian, Christian marriage can give you a true happiness, and only [when] two persons have the same beliefs, can you get real harmonious, I will let my daughter marry with a Christian when she grows up"* (Yue, personal communication, September 6, 2018).

The church arranges activities focusing on tenets of marriage morality such as 'one husband, one wife' and 'abstain from sex before marriage' attract peidu mama to take their husband and children to join the church services together. Through these courses, they improve their marriage stability by abiding by Christian marriage morality. While both husbands and wives submit to rather stern Christian morality, women usually start from marginalized positions both in the church and in the family. However, in the end, they typically gain more of what they need in their family and healthy marriage lives, rather than losing it, and their married lives have improved significantly after they decided to obey their husbands.

Additionally, many peidu mamas state that the church can help them to improve the relationship with their children: "Before that [course], when my children were very naughty, I was always angry to him, but now, I learn to pray. I become calm, and my son also understands me most of time" (Zhang, Yue, and Wang, personal communications, October 20, 2018).

The Church teaches the peidu mama to pray and invite their husbands to attend Church, stresses women's submission to their husbands and loves their wives. Through these teaching, their family relationship has improved dramatically, which encouraged them to attend Church devoutly. For peidu mamas, Christianity promotes their marital commitment and satisfaction. They accept the Christian gender submission doctrines, using 'obedience' to resolve their domestic conflicts. Their church participation functions as an essential means for them to reconcile their domestic situations' constraints, representing an acceptable option for them to deal with personal contradictions, especially for negotiating family problems.

### **Woman and christian enchantment**

Although, women are hold inferior status in the church, they play a greatly important role in religious enchantment. They take their children, husband and parents to the church, inviting their friends and newcomers to join the worship or church activities. Based on the interviews, several peidu mamas in the church say

they want their children to marry a Christian after they grow up (Doris, Zhang and Xue, personal communications, December 20, 2017). The church women devote themselves to promoting Christianity to others, as one church member describes it:

*“After I got converted to be a Christian, I gradually understood why the leaders of the church are zealous in preaching. Now I understand that it is a duty of a true Christian to let the non-Christians recognize the true God”* (Yue, personal communication, September 5, 2017).

Peidu mamas show their zeal and abilities in all the churches' events, successful evangelization, and conversion of their friends and family members to be Christian as well. During the church practices, they express their sincere faith in the love of God.

## CONCLUSION

Through analysis of the dynamics of Chinese women's participation in patriarchal Christianity and the paradox of submission in Chiang Mai Christian Church, this article suggests that Confucianism patriarchal gender values are prevalent in the Chinese Christian Church in Chiang Mai. The pastors and the members of the churches refer to the Bible when explaining this prevalence. Churches usually use love and use "sister" and "brother" calling in setting a women community for the peidu mamas, which can balance hierarchy. Peidu mam use a patriarchal bargain in negotiating. Although women are inferior in patriarchal churches, but they are more enthusiastic in the church's activities and Christianity enchantment. Patriarchal Christianity provides women with a double-edged sword, as subjugation through patriarchal ideology, and as a patriarchal bargaining tool for better gender and family values.

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