



逢甲大學學生報告 ePaper

## Women in the Tang Dynasty

作者：曾孟誼

系級：外文四

學號：D9370373

開課老師：沈薇薇

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## 中文摘要

此篇文章的主要目的是在於研究唐代女性的生活與地位來探討當時女性主義的變化與現象。在作此報告之前，已事先寫出主要的大綱和研討方向，再經由指導老師細心地修訂與不斷地提供意見。在研究時，參考了許多關於唐代女性的網站文獻以及書目再從其中選出較切題的幾本書籍來參與研究之過程。由於這是第一次完成較學術性的研究報告，在內容上難免會顯得較吃力、生澀、且不是那麼的成熟，但對我而言，在努力地作完之後最大的收穫則是發現原來這門知識的淵博不是能藉由幾本書就能夠全盤了解的，因此相信未來還會花更多的時間來更深入地探討此領域的知識來幫助自己寫出更好的研究報告。

### 關鍵字：

Tang Dynasty、Women、Social Status

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## Women in the Tang dynasty

### Introduction

Since the ancient time, women have been seen as lower than men either in physical consideration or in social status. Generally speaking, men as the indispensable members of a family are usually bound to dictating and decision making, while women the housekeeping and obeying. In addition to this fact, there are still other main reasons that result in women's low status and they will be developed much deeper below. However, surprisingly, women in Tang dynasty started to get better off and shared much higher social status, which had brought great acclaim to the history of women.

Women have been treated unequally since the dawn of human's history, which is quite conspicuous in working, studying, living and so forth. Because the issue of feminism has been widely discussed for years and also has arose the writer great interests and consciousness about it, she is going to put spotlight on women's low social position in ancient time and women in the Tang dynasty.

In this paper, the writer will explain more on this topic and, at the same time, give accounts of marriage, prostitutes, the most renowned women and so forth.

### Marriage

As to marriage, the engaged women should be well-behaved and, most

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importantly, they should be pure virgins, or they will risk being despised or deprived of dignity. According to the Chinese traditions, after getting married, wives are mostly subjective to their husbands. That is, they should accept whatever their husbands say and agree whatever their leads of family ask just as a saying that goes “A woman shares the fate of the man she married, no matter what he is.” And this view of point has brought a big impact on the way men and women are treated differently for a great deal.

It is mentioned in the book, *TangSong Nuxing Yu Shehui*, that in ancient time polygyny was commonly practiced, and what’s more, women were bound to take on their father’s surname, and were valued less than men. That is, almost everything was done in the favor of men, of the patrilineage, which made women’s status even humbler. Most importantly, all of these things further men’s desire for control (Teng Xiaonan 7).

## Prostitute

In Tang dynasty, there were a lot of brothels where men spent money on prostitutes for flash pleasure, where they boasted about their wealth. Indeed, this even worsened the status of women because of the fact that women were commodified. In

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order to meet the customers' satisfaction, the prostitutes tried hard to act appealing and talk in a very seductive tone to draw the customers wishing for long-term custom.

Among the prostitutes, those leading ladies who were ordered most frequently were supposed to be very beautiful and also versatile—the more gifts such as playing the instruments and singing they have, the more famous and wanted they'll become.

## Financial activities

It is mentioned in the book (Teng Xiaonan 235) that women's jobs in Tang dynasty ranged from the highest such as the emperor, the princess to the lowest, the labor or the prostitute. Basically, their jobs could be classified as smalltimers, entrepreneurs, vendors, labors, hand-made industry, service industry— which focused on hotels and restaurants— and business. This shows that women had come to realization that they could feed themselves instead of completely relying on men.

Among those, the emperor, Wu Zhào, was one of the most remarkable Tang woman. She changed Tang to Chao ever since she was crowned, and she was the first-ever female emperor in the Chinese history, which could have never happened in the man-centered society before. However, her being an emperor had been a controversial issue at that time. It's because the fact that it was a patriarchy society in

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which men were those who ruled, who dictated, and who rejected women's leading in politics. In the writer's view, it could be seen as a breakthrough in women's history.

That is, she had shown all the men ranging from her time to nowadays that women were also capable of the men's occupations, or jobs.

### The most renowned woman

Yang, Kui-fei, the concubine of the emperor, Tang, Hsuan-tsung, could be seen as a symbol of a raise in women's status. At that time, Yang, Kui-fei was the emperor's pet and he made much effort and spent much time pleasing her. The most well-known thing about her was the fact that her favorite was lichee from Ling-nan.

She liked lichee so much that she dispatched her Majesty to go to absurd lengths to bring fresh lichee back to Chang-an from Ling-nan. From this point, the writer perceives that this brought up great significance in women's history. Yang, Kui-fei's zeal for lichee propelled her to stick to her own wills and ordered the Majesty to meet her own needs. As to this, she knew clearly what she really desired and aspired to satisfy her own must by speaking out what she bore in mind, which was a lot different from more ancient-time women. That's why Yang, Kui-fei could be depicted as the dawn of more equality for women.

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### Dressing style

Because of Tang women's pursue of the true meaning of beauty, fashion had been widely discussed at that time. The predominant trend in Tang dynasty ranged from unrevealing to revealing (referring to the dressing style), and from delicate to plump (referring to the body shape). During Tang, Hsuang-tsung's ruling, to make them look fuller, robes for women are usually baggy and make them pretty lantern-like. Later, although clothes for women were various, they were all based on the three kinds including narrow-sleeves, long robes, Hu-style wearing, and cross-dressing. What's more, the robes at that time were quite colorful and red, green and yellow were the fundamental colors.

In addition to colorful robes, Tang women also favored in capes which were more like silk strings. These lithe capes and the colorful dressing made women in Tang much more sexy and attractive. That's why when most artists and sculptors drew or carved the fairies, they usually put spotlight on the capes.

### Conclusion

Above all, through this investigation into women in Tang Dynasty, we may see much more notion and make some comparison on the changing status of women



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from the ancient time up to today. However, the writer suggests that more facts about today's women's position in the society can be furthered, which would make the topic on feminism even stand out.

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