

**Barnard College Presents**  
**The Kang Tongbi Commemorative Symposium:**  
**Women Changing China**  
**Beijing, China**  
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**Debora L. Spar**

In December, Barnard College received an application from a young Chinese-American woman who wrote—and I'm quoting her application here—"the words of my mother became instilled in my head. 'You can be the next Kang Tongbi.'" She went on "As I began my college search, I was astonished to find that Kang Tongbi—my lifelong idol—was a graduate of Barnard College."

The director of admissions—who had not seen an application quite along these lines before—did some research, told me about this story knowing of my own interest in China and international students. And on the spur of the moment, and perhaps somewhat foolishly, we decided that it was time for Barnard to honor Kang Tongbi on the centennial of her graduation—she graduated in 1909—and to celebrate her legacy by discussing her intellectual descendants: the women who are changing China today and working on behalf of women in China and around the world.

We have, therefore, been extraordinarily lucky that from many thousands of miles away we managed to lure four of the most impressive women in China to be with us here today and to share their thoughts. And we were equally lucky to have the law firm of Paul Hastings generously offer to celebrate with us, and to host the symposium here today.

So, before we get started, I just want to briefly extend my thanks on behalf of both Barnard College and Columbia University to David Livdahl, who is partner and chair of the Beijing office of Paul Hastings—along with his entire team—who have been fabulously helpful to us in doing all of the logistics long distance. To professor Xiaobo Lu, who is a Barnard College professor and director of Columbia University's Global Center Beijing, which as many of you I hope know is having its formal launch tomorrow. To Savio Tung, a Columbia University Trustee who is generously joining us here today. To Harriet Tung, a beloved Barnard Alumna, who hosted me in Hong Kong several days ago and has traveled to be with us here today. To Nina Sun of the Sunnybund Corporation, who is co-president of Columbia's Shanghai Alumni Association. To Jean Magnano Bollinger, to

Ambassador [Lin Sao-Tung], and to Mr. Lloyd [Xing Hong]. I'm very grateful to you all, and very grateful to all of you who've come to be here with us today.

Kang Tongbi was a remarkable woman. Born the second daughter of an intellectual and well-connected Chinese family, she followed early-on in the reformist path of her father, the famous Kang Youwei. After the defeat of the Reform Movement in 1898, Kang followed her father into exile, traveling with him to Hong Kong, Canada, and Japan. In 1903 she arrived in the United States determined both to further her education and to generate international support for her father's Reform Party.

When she was only 15 or 16 years old, she was already making speeches before large crowds in both English and Chinese. "Cats stand by cats," she was quoted as saying, "and dogs help dogs. Why should not we women stand together and help each other?" In 1905, she journeyed to New York and became determined to attend Barnard College. She graduated, as I mentioned, in 1909, the College's first Asian student.

Like most Barnard students, though, graduation was only the beginning for her. She wrote poetry, supported women's suffrage in the United States, and returned to China in 1911, where she continued to agitate for women's causes. She was an editor and major contributor to *Women's Education*, the first women's journal in China, and took a public and passionate stand against the practice of foot-binding.

Kang remained active as a poet, a painter, an activist, a wife and a mother until her death in 1969. Today, Kang's legacy remains important, both to China and to Barnard. She stands for the determination of women—in China, the United States, and around the world—to take the world they inherit and each in her own way, make it a little bit better. At Barnard we celebrate these women, and dedicate ourselves to giving the next generation of women and girls the education and the confidence and the skills they need to follow their own passions and strive for excellence in all they do.

We are incredibly lucky, therefore, to welcome today a most inspiring group of women, each of whom is working in her own way to make the world a little bit better. So the plan for the next little while is I'm going to briefly introduce each of the panelists to you. You have their full bios in your materials, so I will just give them each a very brief introduction and a much shorter introduction than they each deserve. But they have chosen to have short introductions so we can save more time for conversation. And then they will each say a few words about what they do

and what they've done to involve themselves with the status of women in China today. And then we're going to throw the floor open for some conversation, and hopefully as many comments and questions from the audience as we have time for.

So, let me introduce—as I said, our panelists—very briefly. To my immediate left is Ms. Geling Yan, one of the most acclaimed contemporary novelists and screenwriters writing today in both Chinese and English. Recipient of Sina.com's Best Writer of 2008 award, among many other honors.

Next to her: Yang Lan, chairperson of Sun Media Group and the Sun Foundation, graduate of Columbia University, who has devoted herself not only to building a pioneering media empire—shall I say—in China, but... a pioneering media empire in China, and also dedicating herself to a range of social causes and women's causes across the country.

Next to her is Ms. Ruby Yang, an Academy Award winning Chinese-American filmmaker who is known worldwide for her bold and controversial films as well as for her incredible documentary work on behalf of HIV/AIDS prevention, and other public service causes.

And, finally, but far from least, Professor Wu Qing, who as I've already learned in my short term in China, has clearly been one of the most esteemed and beloved professors ever to serve in this country, at Beijing Foreign Studies University, and also a long-serving deputy to the Beijing Haidan District People's Congress, where she's focused on the rule of law and transparency in government, and continues to fight through a variety of venues for the rights of women and for all Chinese people.

So, without further ado, I give you Geling.

### **Geling Yan**

Thank you everybody for coming, and thank you for organizer, and for bringing me here. I thank you!

Well, it is a very... I'm very excited to hear actually, what my... how do you say?... co-speakers to say.

I'm a novelist and I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself. I became a school drop-out at seven when the Cultural Revolution started. And I became a soldier and a dancing soldier at age of 12. And I became a work correspondent before I

reached 20. And I became a lieutenant colonel at age 23. So... things like... It's hard to pack so many experiences into such a short time. Then I went to the United States for my graduate study in 1989, so that's all about me.

What I'm going to talk about today is women writers in China. This is to me is a very fascinating topic. Since Kang Tongbi came back, organized this... liberate the foot-binding women association—I don't know how you call it in... *Tianzuhui*. And then since that time, Chinese women writers were born, since early '20s... then from their... the boom, came in '30s, when professors' mother, [Xebin Qing], was the female lead... one of the female leads.

Before that, Chinese women were not supposed to have thoughts, much less to voice their thoughts. And then, after the Cultural Revolution, there were so many more women writers were born. Were not born, they were just... very interested in expressing themselves and I was among them.

Well... after 20 years, I came back from the US and I was amazed by how these female writers—the young female writers—write. They not only express their thoughts, they express their needs, their body needs, their desire. Their everything! There is no limit to their expressions. So, it seemed to me to me that this road was paved by Kang Tongbi, but now to the female young intellectuals, young writers, such a... Within a century, it's such a great... how do you say?... progress. A leap forward. A great leap forward! And it's amazing.

And now I think, as a person like me, living in the US basically, to say that the career of being a writer... it's almost a shift—I'm talking about abroad, not in China—a shift to females. Because it seems like they have more freedom, they have more free time, so then they are free to explore themselves—explore their psychology, their emotions, their experiences, their internal and external experiences.

So, sometimes I joke that female writers are a side-product of the Women's Association, you know [Fu Lien]? You know [Fu Lien] should sponsor female writers, because in the US, when you go to a writer's association, you only see female writers. So this is so interesting to see a female... It's only 100 years, and now you have so many female writers. The audacious ones like Wei Wei or Mian Mian, these writers, they do what we call body writing. It's amazing.

So, I think I better stop here. I don't know where I'm going to drift into. Okay, so later we will have a conversation, that will make it easier for me.

Thank you.

### **Yang Lan**

I'll just take the liberty to grab over the microphone.

Well, again, thank you, President Spar and all the guests here. It's such a great privilege to join the panel with three... actually four women I deeply admire. I happen to be the student of Professor Wu Qing at Beijing Foreign Studies University, so it's always like intimidation to be seated beside her. So, I secretly put Ruby between us, so that I can speak out!

And also, Ruby and Geling are such talented artist and writer that I had the privilege—and great time—interviewing them for my show before. So it's a great pleasure.

Today we're here to commemorate Kang Tongbi, the first Chinese woman who was enrolled at Barnard—probably the first woman to receive Western higher education—100 years ago when most Chinese women were locked indoors at home with bound feet. Looking back at her journey to advocate for women's rights, and also to oppose foot-binding, it's a little bit surreal, because sometimes it's impossible to imagine the journey Chinese women have covered during the past century. A lot of things have been compressed during the past few generations. I think we should here give our appreciation to Mao Zedong's policy of "women should hold up half of the sky," in spite of many of his wrong-doings.

Well, so, my generation of Chinese women grew up taking for granted that our mothers work. And it didn't appear in our mind that we should go without working. So, it's like a condition given. And then there's the impact of another policy, influencing an even younger generation, which is the One Child Policy. Although many people have criticized that policy, and we see a lot of abuse incurred during the whole process. But one interesting fact is that in urban areas, because of One Child Policy, we see a generation of young girls who have much better access to education and the working opportunities, the priority of which was usually given to the boys in the family.

So, we have a very strong and aggressive and ambitious young generation of women who see no boundaries of their dreams. They love to seek all sorts of opportunities and potentials to grow, so they have Li Yuchun, the very tomboyish girl, as their icon or role model. So, in the background of the past 30 years of

market economy and open policy, I do see the progress in women's rights, and the opportunities that young women are enjoying to pursue their freedom and their dreams. Thanks to the pioneers like Kang Tongbi, I think we are enjoying more such possibilities.

Reflecting on some of my personal growth, I think I'm so lucky to grow in the era which accompanied the starting of the market reform and open policy. When I was graduating from Beijing Foreign Studies University, CCTV, the national network, held its first open audition for college graduates. And I was lucky enough to be chosen out of 1,000 other candidates to host the most-viewed, the most-watched show at that time, on CCTV, which was about to see world.

It's about traveling around the world, bringing back questions, and we have celebrities and live audience in the studio to answer those questions, like why the Irish men are wearing skirts? And I still remember at that time, most—I think 99 percent of—Chinese people didn't even have a passport. So they haven't got the chance to travel around the world and see how the other people are living. The most... I received a lot of letters from women saying that the most fascinating thing is to see the kitchens of the American people, "see how their kitchens are bigger than our living room" is their most fascinating idea. So, you can see that was only 19 years ago.

And today, in our company, the other day I overheard my secretaries and editors and producers talking about where to spend their Chinese New Year holiday. In Singapore? They said, "no, Singapore is boring, let's go to Europe." So, now they can afford it, which is remarkable.

And then, of course, I had the opportunity to go to Columbia University and study international relations and affairs at the School of International and Public Affairs.

And a month ago I had the opportunity to interview former President Jimmy Carter, who revealed a lot of details about his talks with Deng Xiaoping. He said that one evening, midnight, he was called up in his sleep with some urgent voice from Beijing, his representative, saying that "Deng Xiaoping asked about how much should be the quota for Chinese students in the US. Is 5,000 fair enough?" And then Jimmy Carter, who was very frustrated being interrupted in his sleep said, "why don't we just give them 100,000?" So, that incident produced a lot of opportunities for Chinese students to see the world, including me! Yes! I said "I'm very grateful that you didn't say 4,000."

So, another very interesting dialogue between him and Deng Xiaoping was that he was complaining about the former Soviet Union forbidding some of the Jewish people going abroad, and then Deng Xiaoping said "why don't we give you 5 million Chinese?" And then, Jimmy Carter, in response, said "no, in that case I will send 5,000 American lawyers to China."

Well, all these things truly happened. But, today when you look back it all sounds quite surreal to see the magnitude and speed of change taking place in the past 30-some years. So, I think education and exposure to the world do bring women to have a better understanding of themselves and better understanding of this world. It's both eye-opener and mind-opener. I'm so lucky to have interviewed more than 500 movers and shakers around the world, including Hilary Clinton when she was here a few weeks ago. And I have visited 30-some countries. So, the other day my mother was looking at me and saying "I didn't dare to imagine this at my age."

For the past two years I have been dedicated to build the biggest cross-media community for Chinese career women, or women professionals—or, sometimes we call them office ladies—whose number has now exceeded 80 million in China. Office ladies who are working in the government, in hospitals, in schools, in private business field, and also work as social entrepreneurs. So, since last year, associated with some very renowned survey companies, we are doing constant surveys on the living status and the career sustainability of Chinese working women.

According to our survey, when being asked about the willingness to work if husbands have full financial support to the family, 70 percent of the women interviewed answered "yes." Because, they say "we're not just working for the money, we cherish the sense of fulfillment and also financial independence, as well as the control of my own time."

According to another survey in the urban areas, 79 percent of women believe that they are in control of the family savings and expenditures. And believe it or not, in... I believe it's a number out of the big cities, 70 percent of divorces have been initiated by women. So, they are not only taking control of the money, they are taking control of their marriage!

Well, this year our survey is very concentrated on the handling of global economic crisis, the pressure from the workplace. And when asked the question "what if you're unemployed during this financial crisis, what are you going to do?" Thirty percent of our interviewees said they would try to start their own business.

So we find women very active in all aspects of life in China. And I always believed that the best way to empower women is to show them empowered women. So, for the past two years, associated with the National Federation of Women, we are selecting Women's Achievement Award nationwide, through website and also through our panel of judges. More than 200,000 women participated in such voting. And this year we celebrated 10 outstanding women. Actually they're all in their mid-30s or early 40s.

For example, one of them was one of the chief commanders of the Shenzhou [Qihou] spaceship project. And only to my surprise, I learned that 40 percent of the engineers of spaceship program are women, with the average age of 33. The chief engineer for the Water Cube—the swimming stadium for the Olympic Games—was a woman, only 34. She had to be the deputy-chief engineer for the first half a year of her assignment, because nobody believed that a woman at such a young age could do that. But after half a year, even including the construction workers, they were very convinced that this is the true leader, so she assumed the title of the chief engineer.

And so on and so forth. And it's so inspiring to see all these young women so confident and so brilliant in their own career. And at the same time they have their families, they have their children, they look fabulous. And I think it's the very spirit you can see in them, who sees no boundary of what they can achieve. Because only ourselves can stop us.

And of course we also see dilemmas and pressures. According to our survey we found out 60 percent of our interviewees have sleeping problems out of pressure, mostly from workplace. And we also see college graduates who are difficult to find jobs now, it's even harder for girl graduates. And some of them believe they have to go to plastic surgery to have a good look for the jobs, which is very sad.

So, what I mean is that this country is going through a very dynamic, very significant transformation in all aspects of life. I think later on Professor Wu Qing can give us another perspective from the more disadvantaged, underprivileged women in China. But nevertheless, it's also true that in urban areas we see a generation of young women aspiring to succeed. And I think they will make great contributions to the transformation of this economy, this society, and the way to bring up our children.

Thank you.



## **Ruby Yang**

Thank you. It's a privilege to be among the co-speakers, and it's honor to be here. Thank you, President Spar.

I speak about—I've been only in Beijing for four years, so I only speak about my personal experience growing up in Hong Kong and in San Francisco. First of all, I'd like to recall my grandmother.

My grandmother was born only 10 years after Kang Tongbi. She had bound feet when she was four years old, by her mother. And meanwhile, her brothers went to college in the US. She received only four years of schooling at home. And that was 100 years ago at the turn of the century. So, women today are very different, and they have choices.

When I was growing up in Hong Kong I saw my mother. She worked all her life, even though at that time women were not... most of the time they spend their time at home. She actually worked starting when she was... from just graduated from high school. And she worked her way up and being quite successful business owner. She told me she never gave up.

And when I was a kid I always followed her to all these resettlement areas in Hong Kong. There was a lot of refugees then, in the '60s, when a lot of people escaped from China. And a lot of the families—they were of course very poor—and the women were having their... what do you call it? They do the plastic flowers or their handiwork at home to support the family. And all... They were families in the settlement area, they were like 10 stories with all little homes. And they all... They would—because there was not so much work at that time—so they would do their work. And women, a lot of them, supported the families through their hard work.

And, at that time, my mother would be... would spend a lot of the time talking to these women and encourage them to try to get more work. Through hard work, they can attain a better life for their children. I actually got inspired from my mom and that... You know, it's always through your hard work you can have a better future for yourself.

And in the '70s, at that time, my mom was very concerned about... I was very much into art then. And she said "you cannot go into art school. You have to get a degree in business." And I cannot rebel against her. So, I went to college for two

years, in business school, and then minor in art. So I finally satisfied her. And later on, then, I applied for school in the US, to art school. And to her dismay—she never forgive me!

And when I start doing film, she always tell people that "she's going to apply for MBA one of these days." So, anyway, my father was the one who support me throughout to doing art. And so I was... I spent my time in San Francisco doing film, and working in film and doing a lot of... at that time, a lot of documentaries about injustice, and also issues concerning Asian-American and Chinese-American. At that time—not long ago—US still about 100 years ago they had the Exclusion Law. And a lot of the Chinese were not allowed to be citizens.

And so, when I first arrived in the US, I saw a lot of older men—bachelors—in the park. And I was amazed, coming from Hong Kong, which is very prosperous city, and you go to the US and San Francisco, and you see all these old men, very lonely. And I was struck by that. And when I got the chance to do documentary, there were quite a few. And actually, there were a few of them talking about this bachelor society and the history of Chinese-Americans.

Then in 2004 I got a very... it's not intentional that I got an opportunity to work on AIDS awareness work in China. So my husband and I decided to come to Beijing and work. And throughout these four years I met a lot of very heroic—heroes, I'd say—and heroic women, who push for the AIDS awareness and who work in the field. Who also help a lot of the AIDS orphans.

And one of the characters in *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, [Jian Ying], she's one of the heroes. And also, Dr. [Go Wuji] who really without her the AIDS awareness would not be so openly discussed. So my work is also being... only the doors are opened by these women. So, I would say, *The Blood of Yingzhou District* is really made with the help of these women.

So, I would say... Anyway, that's all I'm going to say.

### **Wu Qing**

First, I would like to thank Barnard College to invite me to be a panelist at this symposium.

Next, I would also like to thank Barnard College to introduce Kang Tongbi as a woman's rights fighter, as I didn't know enough about her.

Now, talking about ideas, about beauty and sexual attractiveness, we are still in man's world. Now, for example, now, in North America, even now in China, men like women to have large, firm breasts. So some of our women and girls are going through surgical, plastic surgery just to make themselves look beautiful. Of course, foot binding happened several centuries ago. Trying to disfigure women. But men admire women having tiny, little feet. They couldn't even walk properly, let alone to be economically independent.

So I think we are still in man's world, which is very difficult for women to break away from the sexual constraints, to be themselves. I think I'm very lucky to have a mother like [Bin Ching]. She was born in 1900. And yet when she was a little girl, her father was against having her feet bound. And having piercing ears. Whenever he introduced her, he would say, "This is my daughter, as well as my son." So when I was a little girl, my mom told me I am a human being first and a girl second. So I have never thought that I am a girl, but I know that I am a human being. A human being like any single person. So even when I talk to boys or men, I think they are human beings. I think that's something very, very important.

I'm going to tell you another side of China I've been telling people. In terms of the economy, there are two Chinas. The rich and the poor. And yet I know the poor much, much better. That was, because in 1990, I became a CIDA, Canadian International Development Agency's gender specialist. That provided me with the opportunity to go to the rural areas. My first trip was to [Gansu] [unintelligible], one of the [property state] level poverty-stricken areas.

There was not enough water. People didn't have enough to eat. And they lived in very shabby housing. Usually a family will have three or four or five children. The last kid was a boy.

That was a first time for me what poverty really meant. Because I come from an elite family. And since then, I've made up my mind to devote the rest of my life to serve women, girls and, now, people from the rural areas. Because in our constitution it says, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China should be treated equally." And yet it has never been. Never.

Citizens born in rural areas, especially women, I think are treated as fourth-class citizens. Because of the policies. For example, now, women do not have right to land. The newly born boys and girls have no land. It is very difficult for girls to go to school, especially after forced merging of 10,000, about 10,000 townships. It

means there's only one central school, primary school in the township. I think in—yes, in the township.

And then the [incomes plead] schools in many places are being wiped out. So children have to walk long hours, three or four hours, just one trip. It takes about 7 or 8 hours to go back and forth. It is impossible for girls to go to school. Why? Because they can't walk alone. They might be raped on the way. And that's why when we—when I say “we,” Beijing Cultural Development Center for Rural Women, it's an NGO—we have literacy classes for rural women.

It's a comprehensive one. We not only teach them how to read and write, we include political participation, because we think in the final analysis, women have to get into the decision-making process. Making policies that are inclusive. Making sure that there's enough [budget] that every single person can enjoy the rights clearly stated in the constitution. And we also encourage economic independence. And that's why we have marketing classes. And then we also include environmental protection, peace. So it's comprehensive—that's why we got an award from Pro-Literacy Worldwide, which is based in the United States.

And then in those classes, I often find girls of 11, 12, 13 up to 18, up to 29, and yet our compulsory education law came out in 1986. '86. Twenty-three years ago. And yet we still have so many illiterates.

I do not use the figures given by our government, because our government tends to blow up figures. So I use World Bank's. In China now, actually there are still 0.13 billion illiterates. So we have a literacy project, we have suicide intervention projects. Because China has the highest suicide rate among rural women.

And then on the side, we have a scholarship program for girls between 16 and 20. First we empower them. We tell them they are a human being before they are a girl. And we also talk about the constitution. We talk about transparency, accountability, democracy. And especially human rights.

I think the Chinese government, in a way, has improved itself in terms of law. Because since 2004, we have added a very important concept into the constitution, that's in Article 33—“The state respects and protects human rights.”

I got into trouble in 1997, when I was invited by some NGOs from Sweden or in Denmark to talk about human rights. Because we are not supposed to. So on the day I was leaving, the chairperson of the English department at Beijing Foreign

Studies University got a phone call from our foreign ministry saying “Wu Qing should not leave the country.” But I left.

Because why can't we talk about human rights? We've made some progress. Yet we still have a lot of problems. But no country in this world is free from human rights problems and issues. So I went and I spoke. It was very—all the talks were well-received. But on my way back, when I was going through the Customs, I was stopped for about half an hour. And then I was prevented from getting out of the country for about three years. I know that I'm blacklisted.

But to me I feel if you really want to fight for [durable] democracy, transparency, accountability and to speak the truth, you have to pay for it. I just think what I got from my parents was social responsibility. Actually, my dad got his M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia. My parents met on a slow boat to China. Boat to the United States, instead of vice-versa. Yeah, I think you all know, when you are old enough you know that song, “Slow Boat to China.” But they met on a slow boat to the United States ...

Then I think I better end now, thank you very much.

[applause]

### **Deborah Spar**

[unintelligible] all the panelists. I think if I had to come up with one common theme that runs across all four conversations, it's that having a good mother helps. There's really no more important role than a mother who does the hard work of making sure that her daughters as well as her sons grow up to do the right thing. So we should all put that back of our minds.

Let me, before I—I want to turn the floor open for questions in just a moment, but there's one question I can't resist asking here, because all four of our panelists have discussed how, since the time of Kang Tongbi women have moved into leadership positions. As writers, as artists, as entrepreneurs, as activists and politicians. And we know the numbers bear that out, in China, as well as in the West, women are increasingly leading. But do women lead differently? When women become the people who run the businesses and get more active in the arts and in political organizations, do things change in any substantive way? Or are we just seeing greater equality between the sexes? I would just love a few moments' thoughts on that and in the meantime, you can all be getting your questions ready.

## **Yang Lan**

Well, actually, we discuss such issues on our TV shows, whether women's leadership will be different. And, actually, I discussed that issue with some of the political leaders in different countries. What I find out that, in the real world, you have to be a leader, no matter you're a man or woman, so there are certain rules who apply to both genders.

But, interestingly enough, according to our survey, more women choose to start their own business out of interest or passion or hobby for something than men do. And maybe it's because men seem to have more social obligations to succeed or to receive social recognition, more than women do. And also more women love to give back to society than men. At least according to some of the statistics. More women entrepreneurs are willing to give back to society than their male counterparts, no discrimination at all.

So I think in offices or in the governments, you have to do whatever leadership requires. But then we should encourage more women to take leadership as to the proportion of the population. At least the voices of women should be more heard.

In China, although we have about half of the government employees as women, but if you count the higher leadership, you see fewer and fewer women and that is something that should be changed in the future.

## **Wu Qing**

To me, I feel the most important thing is that you have to depend upon yourself. Whether this person has a purpose in life, whether you know your mission and vision very clearly and you always have to revisit your vision and mission, no matter what happens. I think this is very important. I think, for me, because I have more white hairs, I have experienced so many political movements, I've gone through so many things. I see people suffer. Or historically, I saw many people purged, commit a suicide or beaten to death, disowned by members of their family. And that's what I want to change. I want to change the system itself. It has to be changed. Because enough is enough. And yet we know no one person can change it. And that's why I think unity is very important.

So if you should come to our school in [Chang Pi], [unintelligible] I'll give you the address later, and if you go in, you'll see the [marble bust], solidarity comes first. Solidarity, self-reliance, sharing and building up together. We want our girls or our women to be global citizens.

I think the goal is to have people with love. This is what we lack in China. Social responsibility. Knowing that live and learn is important. And to be a global citizen. Because so many issues facing us go across national borders. We belong to the same species. We face more or less the same kind of problems and issues. The right to life. Enough clothing. Having a roof over your head. Education. Jobs. Like in 1988, I held a press conference. Because at that time, even in 1988, our girls found it very difficult to find a job. Even now, a lot of institutions, when they come to recruit their employees, they openly say “we want boys.”

So in 1988, I tore down all their ads. And then the school party committee, the secretary had a talk with me. And then he said, “Why did you do it?” I said, “I’m protecting my girls. Because they are also human beings.” That’s why I think it’s so important to have a very clear vision and mission that you are just an ordinary person. You have to work together with others.

Just think, something bigger than yourself. That’s just good enough. Thank you.

### **Deborah Spar**

Questions? Comments from the audience? Please feel free to just put your hand up, and address a question. Yes, right on the aisle? If you wouldn’t mind just standing up and telling us who you are. And there’s a microphone coming for you; just one second.

### **Ling Dzu**

Good afternoon, everyone. I’m sorry I’m so nervous, and my arms and my legs are actually shaking, but my feelings tell me I must stand up and ask a question, because that is so lucky for me to be here, and so honored for me. My name is Ling Dzu [53:26]; I’m from [unintelligible] School, and I’m a Barnard freshman applicant this year.

My question is, Miss Qing, Miss Yan Geling, Miss Yang Lan, Miss Ruby Yang, and Miss Deborah, as the most renowned and shining women who changed China as well as the world in different fields, and as a former Barnard student, what kind of characteristics do you hope to see in today’s Chinese young women generation? And what is our mission to change today’s China? Thank you very much.

### **Deborah Spar**

Who wants to take that first?

### **Yan Geling**

Oh, God, this is so abstract! I think for me, I rather want to narrow it down to myself, okay? As a woman writer, as a writer. I don't see myself as a woman writer, because nowadays there are some people who are called writers and some people who are called women writers. I don't know why these categories are divided or how.

I think there were so many things throughout history of, how do I say it? After liberation, there were so many issues, so many things that are still haunting my mind. Like my character in my novel called *The Ninth Widow*. She is a widow. She rescued and hid her father-in-law, who was executed by the government for his business owning and land owning. At the time it was called [INAUDIBLE 56:08], a land reform campaign.

So she hid this man for almost 30 years, until after, well into another political campaign, when all these landlords could take off their hats. Each political criminal has a hat in China. During this time, in my mind is, is there anybody who just, this is wrong, but there's nobody said, there's nobody declared that campaign in which people are wronged.

So, I think I still want to question these issues into these things which are unsolved. So, of course, my form of pursuing this kind of justice is my writing, is my fictions. While I heard lots of real stories, these are the seeds of my novels. Then I got inspired by these real stories of examples that the young widow who hides her father-in-law is a real story. So, I heard it and then I wrote about it. I want people to examine this history after liberation with me, and ask why.

### **Deborah Spar**

Let me add a couple of things. I think you already demonstrated the most important characteristic, that all of these women up here have demonstrated, and that I know I hope for in our students, which is courage. Which is the ability to stand up when your arms and legs are shaking and do what you want to do, and do it with confidence.

And I think every one of the women up here, and so many women out in other places who are following their dreams have to have the passion and then the courage to act on their passion. And I think if you have those two things, nothing can stop you.

### **Yan Geling**

Did I answer you what about my mission? This is my mission.



**Yang Lan**

You did introduce your novel.

**Yan Geling**

I did advertisement. It's all right.

**Deborah Spar**

Yes, way in the back there?

**Elise**

Hi, my name is Elise. I do theater here in Beijing, so I don't really need a mic; I could just shout. I actually think one of the big issues in China is not with teaching women about being people. Because I look around at the women I know both in the cities and in the countrysides, the women from the countryside who now work in the city, and they seem to be like women almost everywhere else. They think of themselves, like you say, as people first, and women second.

But I see the men in China as being the problem here. Not that men in China are bad, but I think that they need to learn about becoming people first and men second. And I think that we shouldn't forget that women hold up half the sky, but men hold up the other half. And I think that they need to be taught how to be people, too. I really love the work that you guys are all doing, but I think men need some of this, too, in China. I guess I just wanted to raise that issue.

**Deborah Spar**

Sounds like a reeducation campaign.

**Ruby Yang**

I just want to answer the question about how to set an example. I think that for students, maybe start doing volunteer work. There are a lot of NGOs you can volunteer your time and learn a lot of the issues. There are many issues in China, public health. Hepatitis B, how people have no knowledge about how it's being transmitted. AIDS orphans, all these environmental issues that students can, maybe after college. At this time, maybe, with the financial crisis, is a good time to spend one year not searching for work, for a job, but to go out to the countryside, go to volunteer your time and learn about other people, what other people are suffering, what other people are doing.

**Wu Qing**

I think it has a lot to do with the Chinese history and society, because we are a family-oriented culture. In a family, the daddy has the final say. In a village, the Party secretary. In a nation, the President. They are all men. That's Confucianism. You have to know your place.

And we don't have individual rights. So, when you talk about human rights, it's totally a new concept in our culture. When we say every person should be treated equally, very often those government officials, they should be equal. Some people are always more equal than others. And some people always enjoy more freedom than others. They enjoy all the perks and privileges.

And that's why, wherever I go, I reach out to men. It's every single person. And when I talk about every single person, I do not think of you who are here in this room, because you are all privileged. You are all privileged. I'm thinking of the women and men that I met out in [INAUDIBLE 62:45], in [unintelligible], [urban] minority areas, in mountainous areas, who are illiterate.

I'm thinking of those people. And that's why I think it's important for everybody here just to think a little bit bigger than yourself. Because if we just know how to take care of our young, our friends and relatives, we are just like all the animals. All the animals know how to take care of their young, with their instinct. They don't have to go to schools, go into these workshops. No, they don't. And that's why I think it's just something very simple. Start with something very simple. And that's why I've been telling people that I am a verb. I'm not a noun or an adverb or an adjective. I'm a verb; I'm an active verb.

We need people to do things for others, because talking is so simple. Shouting slogans. We have so many slogans, empty promises. We need something concrete, but a step at a time, one person at a time. And that's why I think it's so important to change people's mindsets.

This is the motor. If you change here, you change everything. And that's why I've been telling people, if I want to change China, I want to change the rural areas. If I want to change the rural areas, I want to change women. Because a lot of the men have already left the rural areas.

Women are the ones, the elderly, the pregnant, the married women are there, out there. But if you educate one woman, you educate the whole family and generations to come. Because they are mothers of their children. Because we have heard stories about our mothers. They're our teachers. So, that's why I think there

are so many things to do in China now, and it's so exciting. There is room for us to make changes. But you have to know how to do it. Thank you.

**Deborah Spar**

The microphone maybe could come to this cluster right over here. We'll collect several questions and then turn them all over to the panelists, where the microphone is. Why don't you just start?

**Speaker**

Thank you. I'm from [INAUDIBLE 65:31] News Agency. I'm also a senior student at Beijing International Studies University. I would like to see that when I was 10 years old, I had already read Yang Lan's autobiography, and I really admire her. I wanted to be a television anchor like her. I also read books written by [unintelligible], and today I have the honor to see her talk, and it's really a great honor.

My question is, firstly for the four ladies who are now very successful. I wonder, when you were young, did you have a strong desire to be a successful lady, and did you want to hold up half the sky? And the second question is, can you share with us the stories that, when you were in the process to be successful, and you met some obstacles, how did you conquer them? Thank you.

**Deborah Spar**

If you could just pass the mic behind you. There was another hand up.

**Speaker**

Thank you so much. I'm a student from Shanghai #3 Girls' High School, and I will be a freshman at Mount Holyoke College, which is also a women's institution in the U. S. My question is, Miss Yang, I know that you are a very successful entrepreneur, as everybody here knows. Also I know that you are a very successful mother and a wife, with a very happy family.

**Yang Lan**

How do you know that?

**Speaker**

Actually, I've also read your autobiography [INAUDIBLE 67:08], when I was seven. My question is, how do you reach a balance between your career, your vision for this world and your career, and your family? And also, just like Professor Wu just said, women should have a love for the suffering, for the world

around you. I think maybe it's kind of easy for some women to neglect the people next to them, the family, the father and the mother or husband and children. So, how do you reach a balance between these two? Thank you.

### **Deborah Spar**

Thank you. We are just about out of time, so I'm going to ask each of the panelists – I know this is very hard – to sort of very briefly collapse these two questions and give us some final thoughts on how you become successful, overcome obstacles, and balance work, family, children, and elderly parents. In a minute or less. Should we just move down the line? We'll start with the professor.

### **Wu Qing**

I don't think I am successful. By successful I mean that when every single person in China can live the way that I'm living, having the right to do what they want to do, and by then that I will be successful. Because I've been telling people that I am on the long march, much, much, much, much longer than the Party took. Because I have to fight against 2,400 years of feudalism. It's hard. Totalitarianism. It's hard. But I'm quite confident.

Now, talking about balancing family and work. My grandmother told my mother when she was young, You have to balance it. It means, then, you need to find a husband who also has a mission and vision. And that's why my mother said, You have to have a career, or a mission that holds you together, and then you will love each other.

And that's why when my mom was hospitalized, she was hospitalized for about five years. But I never missed any classes or meetings. When I was away, my husband took over. And my son also supported me. Like when he took a phone call, then he would say, Deputy Wu, it's your phone. Then people at the other end started to ask me, a lot of people asked me, Hey, Wu Qing, do you have a secretary? I said, No, definitely not. So, I feel you need to find someone who really supports you. You have a common goal in life. And that kind of marriage lasts. Thank you.

### **Ruby Yang**

I'm very fortunate enough to have a very supporting husband, truly. He's also in film. He understands the long hours and the time away, and I think it's true that your partner plays a very important role in doing one's work that took a lot of your personal time. That's my advice.

## **Yang Lan**

So, finding a good husband is your advice. First of all, it's very hard to answer that question. I think I'm very lucky to do something I truly love. Without true passion to your own career, you can't do it for 20 years and still enjoy every minute of it. So, I think to choose something you truly love, then you won't be complaining about the difficulties you have to go through, because that passion or the dream itself will push you forward.

In my years at Foreign Studies University, at college, I didn't have a big dream. My dream was to be self-established, to use the knowledge I have learned in college and find a decent job. But I graduated at the year of 1990. If you can remember, that was a year even harder than today to find a job, especially with English major backgrounds.

So, I was turned down by six or seven different companies and organizations until I ended up in this audition. So, I tasted the flavor of being rejected and turned down and not even given an opportunity to try and to demonstrate your capabilities.

But I think that's good for me, in retrospect. I'm very thankful for those days when I was riding bicycles against the very strong north wind in the coldest weather in Beijing, and traveling from the east part of the city to the west part of the city.

I was complaining to my father. I'm saying, Why can't you find some connections and find me access to some decent job? And my father said, Daughter, I have given you everything. You have a good education, and you're very well brought up with your values, and you have everything inside yourself. Go around, and you will find your way.

So, I'm still very thankful for his teachings, that being a girl doesn't mean you have to rely on anyone else to get your dream come true. Not a man. In my TV show, I have interviewed many women who were not confident enough to create happiness themselves. So, they think, Oh, if someday I had these good looks like some actress, I'll definitely find a good husband, a loving man or Prince Charming.

Or, Someday, if I was born into certain families, I would have the money to start my little career, and so on and so forth. No such things happen. There is a report saying that if a woman doesn't have confidence in herself before plastic surgery, she's not going to have that afterwards. So, everything is in yourself. And I also

think that good things will attract good things. And if you're very strong and confident and beautiful in your own heart, you will attract the same kind of man.

### **Yan Geling**

The English expression goes that where there is a will, there is a way. I think my husband and my father and everybody in my family supported me. And I always, I'm the person who is easily satisfied. I think on the one hand, you have to struggle for your dream, and on the other hand you have to be satisfied by what you become, so you can be happy.

When you are happy, the people around you, your family around you are going to be happy. Then it's more harmonious for everybody. And I think, for my husband, he is American, and he is a business major, and I think first I just have this passion, and I talked him into reading more literature. I think I brainwashed him. Now he is so much into literature. Then we talk. We just – allow me to say this – bullshit every night about literature. So, that's a very happy life. Your passion sometimes is contagious.

### **Deborah Spar**

I worry a little bit that there's some reporters here, and the headlines might come out that "Barnard Panel Supports Brainwashing of Husbands." So, hopefully we'll get a little bit more nuance around that.

Let me take the chair's prerogative to just throw out two comments echoing what my colleagues up here have said. I think one of the most important elements in success is failure, and recognizing that virtually nobody has success land at their feet. Even from the outside, if you look at someone and say that they're successful, they may not see themselves that way at all.

One of the things that's critical, if you want to survive as an entrepreneur, as an activist, as an artist, just about anything, is getting used to failure, and learning how to pick yourself up and dust yourself off and try all over again. I think the more comfortable women can become in trying again and remaking themselves and dealing with the obstacles that will land in everyone's way, the more successful and the happier they will be.

The last point, which I think gives us a wonderful opportunity to tie things back to Kang Tongbi, is the importance of family. And what I found so interesting, reading Kang Tongbi's work and some works about her, is that although she was, on the one hand, a progressive and a reformer, she was also a very traditional

woman in many ways.

She was deeply devoted to her father, deeply devoted to her husband, they had a long and apparently very happy marriage, and deeply devoted to her children. So, maybe that, in some ways, answers the question raised in the back of the room, that we really do need, each gender, both to hold up one half of the sky. And certainly, in a family, everybody's got to be holding up their own piece of the sky. And, in the end, that really is what nourishes us all and gives us the courage and the confidence to go on.

I would like to thank you so much, everyone here, for coming. I would like to give a final rousing round of applause to our panelists for their wonderful comments. And I would like you all, please, to join us for a reception celebrating this event, where we can continue our conversations. It's hosted at the offices of Paul Hastings, and there are going to be kind and generous people out there who will show you the way back to the reception. Thank you very much.

[END]