**Feminist Perspectives in the book ,*“Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China* (960-1368)’’ by Bettine Burge.***[W]omen have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics. But this creative power differs greatly from the creative power of men. And one must conclude that it would be a thousand pities if it were hindered or wasted, for it was won by centuries of the most drastic discipline, and there is nothing to take its place. It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how could we manage with one only?
 Virginia Woolf, 1929*

 **Abstract:** To justify the oppression of women, Chinese Song dynasty society allots certain traditional gender-roles to women, which are different from the roles given to men. The researcher adopts Simone De Beauvoir‘s theoretical framework, outlined in her book “*The Second Sex*”. This study seeks to ascertain how Bettin Burge in her book “Women, property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and yuan China (960-1368), portrays the social attitude towards women and how the Sung dynasty’s society differentiate among women and men in assigning different gender-roles to them.
The researcher carried out the content analysis of the selected work and he concludes his research study that the prevalent social attitude towards women, as portrayed by Bettin Burge, is different from the men in the Sung dynasty society. The women were not considered to be the peers of men. Moreover, majority of women were limited to inner sphere of domestic chores and reproductive labor: taking care of food, clothing, birth, and Child rearing. While, men were exposed to public sphere, or “outside,” sphere, of scholarship, government, and commerce. The study also high-light the fact of women sub-ordination, as, the women were expected to obey their fathers when at home, their husbands after marriage, and their sons in old age.

**Introduction:**

 There exists much historical evidence revealing the extent to which women have traditionally been controlled and oppressed by men, in differing societies at differing times. Inequalities of many sorts characterized Chinese society such as social, political and economic inequalities. The topic of inequality has not been a neglected topic in Chinese studies. The imperial institution, the civil service recruitment system, the distribution of landholding and the ideology of class and gender differentiation, have all been studies in detail but, unfortunately, little research has been devoted to the social inequalities happening with women in Song dynasty.
The formation of Sung dynasty society has been concurrent with the oppression of women ranging from having been given away as mean to establish reciprocal relation , in marriages, or having been made to serve the interest of their male counterparts. This is the reason that, the notion of womanhood has been tied up with submissive and compliant attitude. Mostly women in Song dynasty society were complacent with their roles as submissive ones.
The reason for that that lies in the fact that they were culturally programmed to believe that their existence is a mean to a large end; that is to serve patriarchy.
The characteristics, considered as essential to Sung dynasty women’s nature, such as maternal instinct, obedience and subordination are attributable to the cultural programming of females. They are considered to be other and incomplete. This is the reason that the patriarchal Sung society see femininity as analogous to inferiority and weakness.
Owing to negative attitude of male-dominated society towards women is such that they are dominated they are confined to a specific set of roles. In other words, almost every society, women are allotted some traditional gender role. They include being a mother, a wife and damsel in need of protection. Society is structured in a way that it perpetuates the roles. The works of a number of feminist writers addresses these issues. Bettine Burge is one of them.

**Research Problem:**

 The suffering and oppression of females have remained a constant fact in China’s history, taking many forms. Song dynasty society justify their oppression of females by constructing a category called gender in the light of reviving Confucianism. In this way, certain characteristics are ascribed to females and males. Men are considered to be the Masters, while the females are considered to be the subordinate ones. In the same way, maternal instinct and household chore activities is common to women. Contrary to the premise that inequality between the genders is perpetuated through social programming; men and women are not different, except physical differences. The Confucian tradition stressed an exaggerated differentiation of sex roles and set up relational boundaries between men and women to divide both physical space and function. This ideal leads to the subordinate and secondary role of women in Song dynasty.

**Significance of This Study:**

 This study is significant because there is no research work done on the book *“Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China (960-1368).”* This study is important for the fact that it seeks to provide new insights to the selected work. That is; it seeks to highlight feminist perspectives in it.

**Research Objectives**:

 This paper contribute to the field in the following ways
 First, to find out how society view women in Song dynasty in the light of “Women, property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China (960-1368). Secondly, to highlight how women are assigned certain traditional gender-roles according to *Bettine Berg.* Thirdly, to highlight how the revival of Confucianism effects the living condition of women in Sung dynasty. And finally, to highlight how the Confucian revival in the Sung reiterated the physical separation of the sexes and made it a foundation of their philosophy.

**Limitations and De-limitations of the Study:** There are some limitations to this study. The researcher is confined only to “ Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China (960-1368) by bettine Birge).
Moreover, the researcher only analyzes the selected work from the feminist perspectives, adopting the theoretical framework of Simone De Beauvoir in her book *“The Second Sex”.*

**Literature Review:**

 This section revolves around constructionist feminism, social expectations and attitudes towards women. more-over, it addresses the issues of gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles.

Simone De Beauvoir outlined her theory of feminism, in her book *The Second Sex,* in a brilliant and rigorous way. She is a constructionist feminist, that is; she believes that the present condition of women is not because they are females, but because society imposes it upon that hem (Beauvoir, 2011). She asserts, “One is not born a woman, but one becomes (one,Beauvoir, 2011, p. 330). She does not deny the biological differences, but she believes that they should not determine women’s destiny (Beauvoir, 2011). Referring to men’s assertion about female passivity, that, according to them, stems from their instinct, Beauvoir (2011) repudiates the notion. She says, “It is false to claim that there lies a biological given; in fact, it is a destiny imposed on her by her teachings and society” (Beauvoir, 2011). In simple words, there is no such thing as feminine, passive, emotional, and maternal instinct (Beauvoir, 2011).

While a girl is a child, society determines what she can do and what she cannot. Beauvoir (2011) asserts that different destinies and roles are deemed fit for a girl and a boy. “whether ambitious, scatterbrained, or shy, the young boy leaps towards an open future; he will be a sailor or engineer, he will stay in the fields or will leave for the city… the girl will be wife, mother, grandmother she will take care of her house exactly as her mother does” (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 360). Beauvoir (2011) states that there is one destiny for a girl, in the eyes of society, that is; to marry someone and have parasitic relation with him. This is the reason that she is brought up and dressed differently from boy, even a posture imposed upon her; she is told to walk in a particular way (Beauvoir, 2011). in addition to that, since she is destined to do chores, she is asked to lend a hand in the house-works even when she is a child (Beauvoir, 2011). She is prevented from taking part in the activities, such as: climbing trees, race, fights and so forth, because she is a girl (Beauvoir, 2011). She is expected to obey (Beauvoir, 2011).

Martin (1990) carried out a study to assess behavior towards tomboys and sissies and to explore causes for different evaluation of tomboys and sissies. Martin (1990) distributed questionnaire among undergraduate students to find out their attitudes towards tomboys and sissies and their expectation of future adult behavior of tomboys, sissies, typical boys, typical girls. The result reveals that sissies are more negatively viewed than tomboys (Martin, 2011). Martin (2011) states that one reason for negative views of sissies may lie in the fact that there is more concern for their future outcome. In simple words cross-gender behavior is not tolerated in girls because they are to become wives and mothers. The study shows that Sissies more than tomboys are expected to show cross-gender behavior in their adulthood (Martin, 2011). In addition to that, there is an assumption that the latter are more likely to be homosexuals when they reach their adulthood (Martin, 2011). Martin (2011) observes that this attitude towards sissies has implication for child-rearing practice.

This study is commendable for revealing different attitudes towards boys and girls, but it definitely has some weaknesses. First of all, it does not seek to throw light on the different gender roles, that girls and boys are expected to performed.

West and Zimmerman (1987) aims at developing a new understanding of gender as a routine phenomenon that is rooted in everyday interaction. They assess the prevailing perspectives on sex and gender. more importantly, West et al (1987) draw distinctions between gender and sex; the former is a social phenomenon while the latter is biological one. West et al (1987) argue that the analytical independence of both the terms must be recognized to understand the interaction of each gendered person. there should be theoretical reconceptualization of both the categories (West et al, 1987).

Yu (2015) explores the issues faced by Chinese female students from psychological perspectives, adopting Helms’s womanist model and berry’s acculturation model. Yu (2015) argues that after implementation of one-child policy in China, Chinese female students, in America, are faced with pressure on two levels; their parents want them to keep face to face with men, while men and their parents expect a marriageable to live up to social definition of perfect woman, that is; to be submissive, dependent and so forth. This situation precipitates conflict in their identities, which in turn leads them to redefine themselves as a gendered person (Yu, 2015).

Undoubtedly, this study is an invaluable contribution to the existing literature on feminism. Especially, it distinguishes between sex, which is biologically given, and gender, which is imposed by a particular society. But it’s focus is mainly on interaction between males and females in society. They do not seek to highlight how society gives different gender roles to its members in accordance with their sex, not to mention what are their implications.

Connie (1979) argues that to aspire to be a leader for woman, is a difficult feat. The reason lies in the fact that society do not expect and approve of leadership behavior in women (Connie, 1979. And it cannot be denied that the society is, even in present age, has a powerful influence on individuals’, as well as, groups’ lives, this is the reason that social discrimination on the bases of gender badly affects those women who aims at becoming leaders (Connie, 1997). Connie (1979) asserts that socialization and discrimination serve as barriers to the recognition of women as leader in larger sociological settings. Connie (1979) adopts Simone De Beauvoir’s theory as a theoretical framework for the study.

Her study is important because it shows how women men is viewed different by the society. Although her focus is on social discrimination as a barrier to women being recognized as leaders, but her study still reveals social practice of determining gender roles. The study would have been more valuable, if the researcher had sought to highlight general expectation or attitudes towards females and males. To put it in other words, her focus is a bit narrow, targeting only leadership.

Donofrio (2013) traces gender roles and gender stereotyping in recent Dizney children’s films. Donofrio (2013) argues that in past, dizney promoted gender stereotyping, for instance Sleeping Beauty, in which the heroin is the representation of perfect girl; who is submissive, feminine, pretty and dependent on male protagonist. But in recent years a progress has been made, that has endowed disney’s female character with power (Donofrio, 2013). Yet it cannot be maintained that Disney serves as the perfect example of gender representation, since its films are characterized by male overpopulation (Donofrio, 2013). In addition to that, after having them break free from the the traditional gender roles, the females characters at the en,are placed in domestic sphere (Donofrio, 2013). Notwithstanding its gender stereotyping, Disney cannot be harshly censured for it, since they are making progress towards more balance representation of gender, more-over, the gender misrepresentation is not only common to it, but it can be found in other films, such as; harry potter (Donofrio, 2013).

This study is an invaluable contribution to the existing pool of knowledge. By focusing on Disney’s films, it reveals social expectations and attitudes towards women. it also shows their resistance an inclination towards breaking free from the shackles of traditional gender roles. But this study addresses the issue of social expectations from women, in European context, which is irrelevant from the vantage point of a Pakistani.

The importance of this study is evident from the fact that it highlights the dilemma of modern women. On one hand, they have aspiration and opportunities to succeed in their lives, but on the other hand, they are subject to social expectations and gender stereotypes. They are torn apart between the two extremes, as a result, they experience identity crises. Not downplaying the importance of the study, but its focus is on psychological perspectives. It does not seek to reveal social practice of constructing female gender. more-over, like Donofrio’s study, it is American oriented.

Allessio (2011) carries out textual analysis of episode one of season four of Mad Men to highlight feminist motifs in the series. Allessio (2011) uses Hurwitz’s social codes and Barthes’s model of semiotics for the purpose. the study reveals that the production values in the series underpin feminist motifs, the most promanant one being the male gender as the norm (Allessio, 2011). This motif conveys the idea that sex is the definition of masculinity and the latter defines the worth of women (Allessio, 2011). Female characters owe their existence to men’s willingness to objectify them (Allessio, 2011). Although some female characters do work in offices, but they do not have feminine traits, as if to suggest that authority is only the prerogative of men (Allessio, 2011). On the other hand, if men are reluctant to objectify women, their masculinity is weak (Allessio, 2011).

the researcher takes pains to reveal social attitude towards women, but his study is only confined to one episode of the series, this is the reason that its validity lends itself to criticism.

Palma (2006) carries out content analysis of television shows to highlight the evolution of sitcom parents. Palma (2006) argues that notwithstanding the changes in the overall appearances of Sitcom parents, traditional gender roles are reinforced in each decades. In nineteen fifty’s the father was portrayed as independent and the only breadwinner, while wives wer the typical representation of housewives (Palma, 2006). Nineteen syxty’s and seventy’s were characterized by resistance to break free from the existing social values about gender roles (Palma, 2006). In eighty’s the roles are changed; the fathers shares houseworks, but women’s work outside home creates tention between couples (Palma, 2006). Palma (2006) argues that in recent times, husbends have been shown as weaker, fools and subject of jokes, but they are still breadwinner as a result traditional gender roles are reinforced.

Klewin (2007) analyzes reality shows The Bachelor and The Bachelorette to ascertain whether gender stereotypes are reinforced in reality shows. The study suggests that the reality shows are characterized by a lack of stereotype reinforcement, that is; both male and female roles surface non-stereotypical behavior (Klewin, 2007). But still stereotype reinforcement exists in the shows, that is; women are often younger and thinner than men, and female role still remain stereotypically feminine (Klewin, 2007). In addition to that, Klewin (2007) notes that patriarchic heterosexuality is reinforced, since male initiates marriage by proposing to his bride-to-be. In general, in both the shows, gender stereotypes are depicted as normal and sought-after, more-over, female stereotypes outnumber and outweigh male stereotypes (Klewin, 2007). The researcher is commendable for revealing gender stereotypes in the reality shows, no matter how veiled and weaker they are. But like some other studies in this section, he does not focus on third-world countries, such as; Pakistan where the situation is too bleak.
 Daoism in the course of its history has had a multifaceted and complex relationship with the feminine. Following mainstream Confucian society, it accorded great honor to mothers and matrons and placed high value on fecundity, nurturing, caring, and other aspects associated with motherhood. It also followed the Confucian lead in placing married women secondary to their husbands, barring them from joining convents and allowing their initiation into the registers of the Celestial Master only with the husband’s consent,

Daughter similarly were treated in traditional ways and could only join a Daoist association or convent with their family’s consent.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This section is useful to the researcher because he derives his theoretical framework from Simone De Beauvoir’s theory cited here. Further-more, the review of related literature serves as map for the researcher, that is; it facilitates him to carry out the analysis of Women, Property and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China (960-1368).
**Research Methodology:** The researcher’s adopted model is situated in the domain of feminism. Since feminism signifies a large field, with a few offshoots and branches, to avoid ambiguity, he adopts constructionist feminist model. There is no denying the fact that there are more than one constructionist feminist theorists, and as a result a number of models exist. To be more specific, the researcher adopts Simone De Beauvoir’s model of constructionist feminism. She has outlined and employed the model in her book The Second Sex in detailed and rather a brilliant way. The researcher has adopted Beauoir’s model because it is in harmony with his research objectives and questions. In simple words, it facilitates his endeavour to find answers to the study’s research questions. It explains how, in a particular society, the attitude towards women is negative and different from its view of men. In addition to that, the model describes traditional “gender-roles” for women. the roles can be very exacting and confining, with the potential to create hurdles for them, in their path of success. The study will be qualitative in nature and the interpretation is opinionated. It follows that it does not rely on numerical representation of data, such as: tables, charts and so forth. Thus, there is no need of quantitative method. The researcher will conduct content analysis of Bettin Birge’s book *“Women, Property and Confucian Reachtion in Sung and Yuan ( 960-1368 ),* to obtain answers to his research questions. **Textual Analysis:**

 Notwithstanding the bleak condition of women, there lot has seen improvement in large scale, especially in Western Societies. But, the developing and third world countries tell a different story. Social attitudes are far from vaporizing. The roles of women assigned to them in the Sung dynasty are best exemplified by Bettine Birge.

Confucian teachings about women:

 “Early Confucian texts laid out patriarchal principles that gave men authority over women and dictated that succession to status and transmission of property follow male patrilines. [[2]](#footnote-2)“Page 60[[3]](#footnote-3)
The above passage points to the fact that, according to Confucianism, men is superior to women. Thus, men have the authority to mold the future of women according to his own needs. Women are poorly represented in the ranks of power, policy and decision- making .The women are submissive in nature and the privileges are enjoyed by the men. Giving women the means to regulate their childbearing enhances their ability to shape their own lives . And, women now spend less time married and fewer years bearing and rearing children.

According to status and transmission of property law, the Patrilinies is the ideal way.

Confucius’ ideal gender-roles:

 “The Confucian tradition stressed an exaggerated differentiation of sex roles and set up relational boundaries between men and women to divide both physical space and social function. It separated women and men conceptually by proclaiming their “natural” realms to be the “inner” (*nei*) and the “outer” (*wai*), respectively. Women were understood to be uniquely suited for the inner sphere of domestic and reproductive labor: taking care of food, clothing, birth, and child rearing. Early writings assigned women attributes that rendered them unsuited for public leadership or work outside the home. Throughout history they were thus excluded from government schools, private academies, officeholding, the civil service examinations, and almost any kind of legitimate political power.74 Men were assigned the public sphere, or “outside,” sphere of scholarship, government, and commerce.” Page 26-27

 The above passage shows that, according to Confucianism, there is a clear difference between the nature of males and females. The women are uniquely designed to do a different job from men. Female does not have such luxury at her disposal and her life plays out on small stage, with few, or even no option to choose from. Women are left to provide child care, to provide food and health care, to prepare and process crops, to tend gardens and livestock and to weave cloth. Much of this work does not benefit from investment, making it very inefficient and forcing women to work very hard for meagre results It means that, the job of women is to do household-chores like making food for the family, clothing, birth and child rearing. We could say that, the idea of Confucianism about women was negative; as it unsuited them for public leadership or work outside the home. And thus, the history proves that, this stereotypical idea about women excluded them from government schools, private academies, office holding, the civil sphere, or outside sphere of scholarship, government and commerce. On the other hand, men are expected to perform different roles in the society. Male, so-called (protector), is allowed to choose his career.

Daughters and sons in family division:

The half-share rules.

 “According to the law, when the mother and father have died, the sons and daughters divide the property, and a daughter gets half as much as a son.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Page 80

According the laws of property inSung dynasty, males and females are treated differently. The half-share rule of family property division, the daughters gets half of the shares as boys gets. This difference in the proportion leads to the sub-ordinate position of women in the respective society. As the less proportion in property realizes the women that they are different from males. In another case, the family property female were not considered to get the equal share. As, Ch’eng I wrote, “ancestral property must not be divided but must be put in charge of one person.”
This idea is discussed in Chapter 2 how a little later Kao K’ang (1097–1153) opposed equal division among brothers and inheritance by women, which he believed threatened the family altar and continuance of the house.

Chou feudalism and Confucian ideals:

 “Political power was passed down through the male line. In a loose system of feudal organization, the Chou state made the first son of the principal wife heir to the fiefdom and ritual head of the lineage. A system of hierarchy within the family, superiority of first-born sons over their brothers, seniors over juniors, men over women, was part of a combined religious and political order centered around patrilineality.’’[[5]](#footnote-5)[[6]](#footnote-6) Page 43

Not only the roles allotted to women are limited, but they pave the way for their subservience to men. Their existence is the result of men’s desire and need to be served. To put it in other way, they are only recognized by men as their necessity. They do not have lives for their own sakes. Thus, their destiny is to serve their fathers and brothers, while they are in the former’s home, and to do the same in their husband household, after getting married. From the above passage we could see that, political power was passed down through male line. It means that the order of political and religious practice was centered around patrilineality.
——Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, “Introduction,” in *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press, 2003): p21

**Conclusion:**  To conclude, in the light of the above mentioned textual evidences from the book ,*“Women, Property, and Confucian Reaction in Sung and Yuan China* (960-1368)’’ by Bettine Burge, it is plausible to maintain that a very negative attitude towards women is found in the Sung society. The revival of Confucianism played a vital role in the subjugation of women to their peers.They were regarded as inferior to men, and weak and dependent on the latter. In addition to that, they are allotted certain genders-roles. That is: they are expected to serve male patriarchy, and were only limited to household chores and activities, and to direct the aims of their lives to satisfy men’s desires.

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3. Birge, Bettine. *Women, property and Confucius reaction in Sung and Ming Dynasty, 960-1368. Coloumbia University press 2002.. Page 26-27* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Birge, Bettine. *Women, property and Confucius reaction in Sung and Ming Dynasty, 960-1368. Coloumbia University press 2002. Page 80* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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