

GENDER INEQUALITY AND FOUR GENERATIONS OF
WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN A RURAL CHINESE VILLAGE

Haigen Huang

Dr. Peggy Placier, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to contribute to scholarly understanding of generational change and individual variation in women's educational experiences when encountering gender inequality. The guiding framework is a feminist concept—intersectionality. I adopt a phenomenological multiple case design to examine 1) how women across four different generations from the 1930s to the 1990s experienced gender inequality in their educational experiences in Shancun (pseudonym), a rural village in southern China, 2) how these women interpret their experiences, and 3) how educational reforms and policies implemented between the 1930s and the 1990s shaped their experiences.

A focus on individuals reveals the complexity behind the macro level patterns and the agency exercised by parents and their daughters. In comparison with the previous generation, women who were born in the 1950s and 60s had better access to schooling. Little progress in increasing women's schooling was made between the second and third generation. The fourth generation witnessed a sharp increase of educational attainment over the third. The nonlinear progress of women's schooling was associated with the women's movement, government advocacy of gender equity driven by a nationalism discourse, the collective farming, and urbanization.