

# **How has the coverage of women in *Southern Weekly* changed during the past 25 years?**

## **Introduction**

The researcher had always been interested in how the media portrays different demographic groups differently, and had noticed the existence of gender stereotypes in media reporting both in America or China. Much research has been done on gender media portrayal, but most of the media content examined was from English-language media outlets. With her understanding of the Chinese language and Chinese media, it would be a great opportunity for her to analyze Chinese newspapers and contribute to the universal topic.

From college study in mass media communication, the researcher learned that media presentation evolves from the perceived reality, and in turn has an impact on how people understand the world. As more Chinese women take in high-level political and business positions compared with two or three decades ago, how the media portrayal of women has shifted across the years becomes an important and interesting topic to study.

That's why the researcher wanted to look into how the media presentation of women has changed in the past 25 years, hoping to shed some light on the possible social changes on gender issue. The past 25 years have been a critical period for China's Reforming and Opening Up policies, which started in the late 1970s and early 1980s, so the external cultural and social impact brought by the economic forces is gradually reshaping the ideas and values of Chinese society. This time of change makes the period an interesting timeframe to examine. The researcher was looking for a newspaper that has a general topic interest, is targeted at national audience and has a history of more than 25 years. Few newspapers met that criteria, and many were unavailable either digitally or in print copies. The researcher narrowed the option down to *China Youth Daily*, *People's Daily* or the *Southern Weekly* (which was launched in 1984), and eventually chose the *Weekly*.

The researcher chose *Southern Weekly* to analyze for multiple reasons. *Southern Weekly* is not a Party newspaper, but is an influential one that is famous for its progressive ideas and bold critical coverage, and is one of the pioneers in the media industry. Its headquarters is located in Guangzhou, one of the earliest economically opened up areas in China's Reforming and Opening Up policy. Since its foundation in 1984, the *Weekly* quickly

enhanced its national influence and became a well-recognized newspaper. As a weekly publication, the paper has more in-depth and feature stories, which allows it to have more dynamic coverage.

The researcher worked at the International Women's Media Foundation in fall 2013, and this professional experience brought some thoughts on her research project. The goal and mission of the IWMF is to support female journalists worldwide, and promote women's leadership. The researcher helped tell their stories through IWMF's website and social media in order to let their voices be heard. The work at IWMF enhanced the researcher's perception that women were largely underrepresented in many places, especially in those less developed countries. It also encouraged the researcher to think about the social expectation on professional women, including their ability to handle marriage and family aside from work. The media coverage of IWMF's Courage in Journalism Award banquet in Los Angeles also showed how much attention was given to the pretty looks of Hollywood Stars, especially the female ones. These thoughts, among others, had been helpful for the researcher in understanding the research project better and designing the analyzing techniques.

## **Research Question**

The researcher's main focus is to find out how Chinese news articles portrayed Chinese women and men differently, and wants to make a historical comparison and find out how media portrayal of gender changed during the past 25 years.

The researcher wants to analyze the general media presentation for Chinese women and men, so she could understand the basics of media gender portrayal in China. Research on media portrayals of women could be a frame or starting point for later more specific research into how gender portrayals differ depending on a woman's role in society, whether that is politics or business or as a homemaker and mother. This research examines one newspaper.

In the analysis, she will examine six years of articles including *Weekly*'s articles from every five years in the past 25 years: 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013. The researcher will explain the sample selection and specific method of analysis later.

In the analysis of female figures, the researcher will consider multiple aspects including their age, profession, family role, social status and overall tone etc. To further the research, she has developed some specific research questions.

- (1) How often are female figures mentioned as the primary subjects in the articles?
- (2) What's the engagement level of the female Chinese figures in articles? Are they essential characters, or complimentary ones?
- (3) What's the difference, if there is any, in the profession of the female and male characters?
- (4) What's the difference in family roles and social role for female and male Chinese figures in news articles?
- (5) Does the image of female characters vary from feature stories to news stories and opinions?
- (6) What's the overall tone for female Chinese figures in Chinese news articles? How is the language?

The term “Social roles” and “family roles” will include information about their professions and career development, social engagement and social status, and family responsibilities.

## Framing and Stereotype

In order to understand the different portrayal of female and male figures in the media, we need to look into some theoretical background that may help explain the different nature of news reporting. Framing theory is essential to the discussion of the portrayal of Chinese women in the media.

Entman (1993) gave a detailed explanation of how media frames happen in news reporting. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (p.52). By selecting certain content and making it more salient than others, media can present the information about a story subject in a way they want and thus build the frame of the story.

So media are inevitably leaving out some content in this process. Tuchman (1978) defined media frames like this: “The news frame organizes everyday reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality...” (p.193) The process of selecting “essential” information and leaving out the rest can differ largely between journalists with disparate backgrounds.

Some scholars have pointed out the reasons for news frames. Gitlin argues that media frames, as journalists' working routines, allow them to quickly identify and organize information and "to package it for efficient relay to their audiences" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7).

Scheufele believes that Tuchman's study provided "some tentative support for the assumption that organizational structure or media and work routines of journalists have an impact on the way news stories are framed," though her study is limited in some way (1999, p110). Scheufele argues that Tuchman's work lacked a definition of framing that can serve as a guideline for future research, and the dependent variable in her study was "the act of making news"(p.12) rather than the framing of reality, which was a sub-dimension of the former. According to Tuchman, frames are decided internally by both journalists themselves and externally by the organizations they work for. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) argue that the formation of frames can be explained by the interaction of journalists' norms and practices and the influence of interest groups, which introduces another possible factor for the disparate frames. Interest groups in my study can mean groups with political agendas and interests.

Another related concept is stereotypes, which explains a lot about why different journalists write stories and portray female figures in their own way. According to Walter Lippmann, a typical person would define first and then see, not the other way around. "In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture. " (Lippmann, 1922 p.81)

Lippmann believes one of the reasons people tend to see things in a stereotyped way is generalizing and categorizing things is a more "economical" way to learn, compared with attempting to find out all the details. This argument echoes Gitlin's point that media frames partly resulted from the need for "efficiency". Besides economy of efforts, there is another reason why people hold to their stereotypes: those stereotypes define who they are. As Lippmann said, "The systems of stereotypes may be the core of our personal tradition, the defenses of our position in society."

With the understanding of the theory of frames and stereotypes, I am ready to start my research. With content analysis on selected newspaper articles, I will compare how Chinese media frame Chinese women and men differently and examine the stereotypes for each gender in media coverage. This research will be limited, as

it will not be able to establish a causal relationship between observable portrayals and possible reasons for those portrayals. This research will provide opportunities to establish what portrayals exist and how they've changed at one Chinese newspaper

## Literature Review

Gender bias in media has been widely discussed during the past few decades, and many scholars from different countries and regions of the world have identified and analyzed gender-based reporting in newspapers and other media formats.

Scholars from all over the world have been discussing gender-based media reporting focusing on different angles and points-of-view. News reporting on women has been closely tied to the political, cultural and social backgrounds of the women being covered.

Len-Rios and her colleagues used a feminist framework of masculine cultural hegemony to examine women's portrayal in news and photos, and concluded that newspapers analyzed reflect the masculine cultural hegemony (Len-Rios et al., 2005). Len-Rios examined the overall representation of women in a medium-sized newspaper and a large newspaper.

Some scholars have used a more narrow focus in their studies. For example, Noh and his colleagues analyzed U.S. newspaper portrayals of battered women who killed their partners, and discovered "simplified, sensational and conventional understandings of crime causation drove to the social construction of 'the battered women who kills'." The researchers also found that females were rarely portrayed as reasonable (Noh, Lee & Feltey, 2010 p. 110). Wozniak and McCloskey compared newspaper articles reporting female-perpetrated intimate partner violence (IPV) homicides with those reporting male-perpetrated IPV homicides, and found that female-perpetrated IPV homicides, although relatively rare, were not portrayed as more newsworthy nor did they receive more coverage when compared to male-perpetrated IPV homicide. The research found there was no gender bias in favor of male perpetrators. Female victims were more likely to be portrayed as innocent when compared to males (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010). Elizabeth Zanoni talked about the gendered representations of fashion, food and Fascism with the U.S. Italian language newspaper "Il Progresso Italo-American" during the 1930s, and found the representation of women's consumerism, national identity and the impact of Fascism

on Italian American women in the newspaper (Zanoni, 2012). Macleod and Feltham-King analyzed South African newspaper articles from 1978 to 2005, found out how the subjects of abortion are referred to and how does this connects with the localized and historical politics of abortion (Macleod & Feltham-King, 2012). These researchers chose a specific topic on newspaper portrayal of women.

Unlike these scholars, Vincent and his colleagues didn't just focus their study on female figures. Rather, they made a comparative study, which analyzed English soccer team's star player Wayne Rooney, his fiancée, the captain David Beckham and his wife in their study on gender and national identity in English newspapers during the 2006 World Cup. The study focused on the four celebrities and examined how the newspaper's gendered narratives intersected with nationalistic discourse. Researchers identified women's role as traditionally subordinate, with the case of Wayne Rooney and his fiancée, and also challenging, with the case of David Beckham and his wife Victoria (Vincent, Kian & Pederson, 2011).

Matud and his colleagues studied the contrast between the general female and male portrayal on a large scale. They analyzed 4,060 articles and advertisements in a Spanish daily newspaper and concluded that men were more commonly featured in the articles, photos and advertisements than women. Their study supported their hypothesis that there will be gender-stereotyped occupational differences between men and women who appear in the texts. Specifically, they found that men were more likely than women to appear as leaders or high-ranking positions such as athletes, soldiers or clergy, and if the subjects of the articles were models or winners of beauty contest, only females were found (Matud, Rodriguez & Espinosa, 2011). A recently published study with an even larger sample of 34,235 news articles in Spanish online newspapers revealed that women were "linked to traditionally 'female' sections, such as people, society and culture" and appeared more frequently in shorter news and Sunday news (Mateos de Cabo, Gimeno, Martinez & Lopez, 2014). Their study concluded that online newspapers continued to reinforce gender inequality.

Aside from newspapers, television programs and magazines are also analyzed by scholars to cast light on women's media representation. Among the numerous studies, advertisements and photos are very frequent subjects for researchers. Examples include Lindner's study on the images of women in *Time Magazine* and *Vogue Magazine* advertisements from 1955 to 2002 (Lindner, 2004). She found that overall, advertisements in a *Vogue*, a magazine geared toward a female audience, depict women more stereotypically than do those in *Time*,

a magazine with a general public as a target audience. She also found only a slight decrease in the stereotypical depiction of women despite the influence of the Women's Movement. Some scholars analyzed television commercials and found that more women than men are frequently shown as being unemployed or having traditionally feminine jobs (Furnham & Bitar 1993; Kim and Lowry 2005), and women are predominantly portrayed as sex objects with no obvious change in stereotypes (Coltrane & Adams, 1997).

Newspaper analysis of female characters is less focused in advertisements in general, with text analysis and photo analysis both very popular. A considerably large number of studies focus on women's portrayal in political contexts, such as political campaigns and in the women's movement.

The differences in the reporting for male and female candidates in the U.S. have been constant since the 1910s, when Jeannette Rankin was elected to the U.S. House as the first woman (Braden, 1996). Braden pointed out that "media continues to emphasize gender at the expense of other qualifications" and played to the "sentiments" that women shouldn't be president "in the way they frame stories, in the facts they select, and in the language they use to describe women politicians" (Braden, 1996, p18).

Scholars and researchers discovered media bias toward female candidates both in quantity and quality. Some found out that female candidates receive less news coverage than their male counterparts (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Overholser, 1999), but others have opposite opinions. Carroll and Schreiber discovered that newly elected women received more mentions in major papers than male counterparts (Carroll & Schreiber, 1994). Media have been selectively reporting about female candidates. Some pointed out that media focus more on viability of women and less on issue positions (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991), some identified media's ways of undermining female candidates' professional capacity in politics (Carroll & Schreiber, 1994), others argued that media pay more attention to personal traits such as women's personality, appearances and family connections (Braden, 1996; Devitt, 2002).

In a recent study on the 2010 British General Election, Ross and her colleagues found that women were much less likely to be featured in news stories than men, even when controlling for Party Leader coverage. The study showed that women were much more likely to be mentioned or quoted in feature articles focused explicitly on gender issues, made interesting because of their sex and couture rather than their political abilities and experience. Their conclusions mostly echoed their American counterparts (Ross et al., 2013).

Other than analyzing the features of reporting, some scholars also examined the tone of the articles and compared the tone toward female and male candidates. Heldman, Olson and Carroll found that female candidates are more likely to have negative representations in horse-race coverage, in which female candidates were portrayed as less competitive. (2005). A study examining the news discourse about Hong Kong female officials showed that they were portrayed in a highly positive manner (Lee, 2004). The study discussed how newspaper coverage has portrayed female officials as perfect women, who excel in everything they do, with excellent career and family performance, and serve as models for other women in the society. Even though the positive portrayal concurred with Hong Kong's high percentage of female top officials, Lee criticized the seemingly positive media treatment of female officials with several arguments, one of which is that women politicians are not representative of women in general, and another is that the media coverage showed the expectations and assumptions the media hold about how women should behave when they become politicians.

Mendes used a feminist perspective to "make political statements about how gendered hierarchies function through media discourse" (Mendes, 2011, p.81). In analyzing the framing of feminism in the news coverage of the women's movement in British and American newspapers (1968-1982), Mendes argued that the circulation of patriarchal and capitalist ideologies worked to prevent women's equal partnership with men in both countries.

Mendes' study is just one example among the numerous cross-cultural studies on this topic. Scholars have conducted comparative studies between different countries or among various ethnic groups to find out the uniqueness of newspaper female portrayal in each country or group, and the comparison has brought some interesting results.

Furnham and Bitar (1993) found that sex role television stereotyping in Britain was more or less constant across time compared to studies done 5 to 10 years ago, but was weaker than in Italy and comparable to North America.

Wu's research on the portrayal of women in Chinese and American newspapers showed that newspapers in both countries have multi-angle positive representation of women's images in the public sphere, but there are differences resulting from disparate culture, history, politics, economy and social background (Wu, 2010; Zhang, 2012). Pang analyzed Chinese women figures in 151 articles from five major U.S. newspapers between 1998 to

2005 and found that young Chinese women and rural-area women draw more attention than other groups. She also pointed out that weak victims and female heroes are two typical images in the U.S. media's reporting and have been over represented (Pang, 2006).

In some cases, race and gender have been interwoven in intercultural studies, creating a more complicated research picture.

Coltrane and Messineo examined the race and gender imagery in 1990s television advertising and found a continuation of stereotypes, including "Exclusion of Asians and Latinos, and denial of romantic and domestic fulfillment to African Americans" (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000, p386). In a study that examines the portrayal of gender and ethnicity in New Zealand's television advertisements, Rubie-Davies and her colleagues discovered that "white actors dominated the screen with Maori and Pacific Island people only being proportionally represented in advertisements that presented negative stereotyping" (Rubie-Davies, Liu & Lee, 2013).

Although newspapers' gender bias is repeatedly found in previous research and seems to be dominant in the results, there are contradictory findings in sports coverage. A study comparing newspaper coverage of male and female athletes during the 1996 Summer Olympic Games found less egregious bias than has been noted by previous studies of media coverage of female athletes (Kinnick, 1998). The study analyzed profiles of athletes in five leading U.S. newspapers and found no evidence of gender bias in terms of quantitative representation of female athletes, or in the placement and prominence of stories.

A later study measured press coverage during the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in the largest circulating Belgian, Danish, French and Italian daily newspapers, and found that the newspaper coverage was similar to the distribution of participating athletes and events, and no significant gender differences were found with respect to article size, page placement, accompanying photographs, or photograph size (Capranica et al., 2005). These studies showed that there was a trend to overcome gender inequities in media coverage during the Olympic games, but a general examination on female portrayal in newspapers has shown that males were mentioned more, and were placed at more prominent locations such as upper parts of the newspaper pages (Matud, Rodriguez & Espinosa, 2011). Researchers have seen an improvement in gender equality in newspapers' sports reporting, but it hasn't been generalized in other topics and areas.

A lot of the studies tried not only to analyze how were women portrayed in media, but also to find out possible reasons behind it. Political and cultural contexts certainly can explain part of the gender-biased reporting. However, that's a very broad idea and some scholars have more specific ones.

Matud and his colleagues found a greater male presence in the reporters' gender, and male reporters were almost twice as common as female. They didn't conclude there is a causal relationship between the gender structure of reporters and the gender-biased portrayal of Spanish women; however, there appears to be a strong correlation to gender-biased portrayal of women and coverage by male reporters. They also found men were more likely to be included as sources than women in the stories (Matud, Rodriguez & Espinosa, 2011). Mateos de Cabo and his team also found differences in gender reporting since "female journalists tend to include more women in the news they report than their male peers" (Mateos de Cabo, Gimeno, Martinez & Lopez, 2014).

The U.S. political campaign coverage analysis placed much importance in the examination of the author. Aday and Devitt indicated the gender-biased reporting was partially explained by the tendency of male reporters to emphasize on Dole's personal traits during the 2000 presidential campaign, and the fact that the number of male reporters was far more than females can make this disproportion even more obvious (Aday & Devitt, 2011). Devitt further pointed out that the differences in personal frame and issue frame were due to stories written by male reporters (Devitt, 2002). Smith believed that the fact that male reporters dominated the coverage of political races might offer a "modest" advantage to a male candidate (Smith 1997), and Maria Braden earlier concluded that the increase in the number of women reporters didn't necessarily "guarantee that news will be free of sexist reporting editing, or headline writing", because some female journalists misrepresent women as male reporters did (Braden, 1996, p182).

Previous scholars and researchers have analyzed female portrayal in newspapers, magazines and on television, and found that gender-biased reporting is prevalent over the decades. In general, female figures were less frequently mentioned in news stories than their male counterparts. And, in portraying female figures, newspapers usually talked about their physical appearance and stressed their female characteristics. The studies showed women presented as less professional than their male counterparts and their occupations were not as high level as men. Overall, gender inequality in newspaper reporting has been constant over time and across nations.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are both widely used in research about media portrayal of women. Likewise, content analysis has been a consistently reliable method for research examining gender-bias and stereotyping in the media's portrayal of women.

Vincent and his colleagues used textual analysis to examine how the newspaper's gendered narratives intersected with nationalistic gender power relations (Vincent, Kian & Pederson, 2005). Len-Rios and her colleagues asked questions through telephone surveys in order to get one set of data. They analyzed news staff and readers' perceptions of female representation in news content (Len-Rios et al., 2005). Terry and his colleagues first looked at the 1820-1860 period through "a textual qualitative approach", and then analyzed stories, origins and writers quantitatively (Terry, Shaw & Hamm, 2012). Wu also combined qualitative and quantitative methods in his study (Wu, 2011), and this is a typical approach for many researchers.

In this study, the researcher used content analysis to reach her conclusions. Due to limited time, the researcher will not conduct interviews trying to find explanations to supplement the results.

There are multiple definitions on content analysis, and a classic one is "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Krippendorff defined content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (2004)." Most scholars agree that in a quantitative content analysis, researchers should set up formulated rules, which are usually stated in a codebook, then systematically following each step. Holsti identified three primary purposes for content analysis: to describe the characteristics of communication, to make inferences as to the antecedents of communication, and to make inferences as to the effects of communication (1969).

A typical content analysis has the following procedures: raise research questions or hypotheses, select the sample for analyzing, define categories and formulate rules for coding, train the coders and test preliminary inter-coder reliability, code the content and assess the reliability, and then analyze and interpret data (McMillan, 2000).

In order to make a quantitative comparison through years, the term “primary figure” needs to be operationalized. The researcher will look for the main characters of the article and select the first main character as a “primary figure” if there are multiple ones. If the article doesn’t have a main character but has at least one person that is quoted (directly or indirectly), then the first quoted person is the primary figure. Each primary figure needs to be a real-life adult (fictional characters don’t count), and the gender should be able to be identified either by the pronoun or by the person’s name. The gender of each primary figure will be recorded. In photos where female and male figures both show up and take up equal space, or in articles where a couple is mentioned as the main character, the primary figure would be both female and male.

Every article was categorized as one of the following: feature, news story, opinion or stand-alone photo. *Southern Weekly* is a weekly newspaper that doesn’t report on immediate daily news, so most of the articles it publishes are in-depth stories that could be considered feature stories by American media standards. For this study, the researcher defined “feature stories” as stories that focus on one main character and don’t go beyond that person for a larger theme. (In some studies, these might be coded as personality stories.) In this research, “feature stories” were also stories that focused on one object such as a movie, a book or a place. The researcher defined “news stories” as reports that talk about a news event, a social phenomenon and reveal a social problem or a trend. While these stories might include a person or personality, the person would not be central to the story, but used as an example to illustrate the news topic.

“Opinion stories” were identified as such based on their labeling by *Southern Weekly*. In addition to being put in a specific section of the paper, the articles contained a specific point of view or argument. Stand-alone photos are photos that aren’t the supporting materials of feature or news stories, but stand as content units themselves. They might have short explanatory texts, but the photos are the essential content. The photographic content could be a single photo, or a series of photos with the same topic, and each will be counted as one text.

The researcher will quantitatively compare the male and female primary figures in articles, and take into account the article categories. This would supplement the result from the textual analysis mentioned earlier.

## Sample Selection

In order to see how *Southern Weekly* portrayed women in the past 25 years, and look for changes there might have been, the researcher selected six years during the 25 years with an interval of five years to make analysis. Thus, the researcher selected a sample of years beginning in 1988 and continuing every five years (1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013) to the most recent year of complete news coverage, 2013. It's believed that any trend of change would be evident through the sample years and intervals selected. The material source was the National Library in Beijing and Shanghai Library, which both had the majority of *Southern Weekly's* print collections since 1986. Unfortunately the 1998 collection was ruined in the National Library, and the Shanghai Library only had the first half-year, so the researcher analyzed the second half-year of 1997 instead of the second half year of 1998.

The researcher analyzed only the articles on the front pages because that's the most prominent spot for readers and would potentially have a larger impact on how they perceive women's image. On the front pages of 1998 and later years, there were multiple headlines to introduce stories on inner pages. The researcher only analyzed one such story from each front page, and selected the most prominent headline according to the text location and size. In some cases, a big photo introduces an inner-page story, and that doesn't compete with those headline stories.

Stories with no gendered primary figures were not included in the analysis. Advertisements, cartoons, brief reports (which were usually two or three paragraphs and only appeared in early years) were also excluded. The author also didn't analyze editors' letters, which often talked about the circulation and operation of the paper.

The researcher chose half of the front pages for each year, starting with the first week of 1988, 1998 and 2008 and analyzed every other week's front pages. For the year 1993, 2003 and 2013, the researcher started with the second week and did the similar thing. Considering the length of the articles, only about the first 10 paragraphs of each article was analyzed.

## **Discussion**

The researcher analyzed the selected articles, and tried to summarize themes and patterns for each year, and compare with other years, looking for similarities and differences, and changing trends if there were. Important paragraphs about female primary figures were carefully analyzed in order to find out the tones of the author and possible underlying mentalities.

### **1988**

Women were primary figures in about half of the text pieces analyzed (45.7%), but the percentage varied greatly among different article categories. In feature stories, women were as likely as men to be primary figures (25 vs 27), but in news stories and opinions, the number of female primary figures was less than half of the male ones. They showed up much more than men in stand-alone photos. Women on the weekly in 1988 were portrayed very differently from men, with their professions significantly focused on only in a few fields, their appearance and age emphasized much more than men, and their ability to balance career and family frequently discussed.

In feature stories, men were engaged in a variety of professions including professors, painters, antique collectors, political leaders, veterans, writers and individual businessmen. They tended to be in positions that require them to be more educated, sophisticated and to have leadership skills. These positions also seem to have higher social status. Women were mentioned as primary role almost as much as men (25 vs 27), but the stories in which women were featured in primary roles were mostly actresses, art performers, models and people whose work was somewhat associated with being beautiful and having a youthful appearance. In a feature story about a polite hotel waitress, the author wrote: she is 22 years old, tall figure, thin face with fair and rosy skin, and the high nose rarely seen in Guangzhou makes the line of her face rather charming. This story mainly talked about a polite and professional hotel waitress and praised her good work, but her appearance was heavily discussed. In a story about a then-popular actress Xu Shouli, the author used the subheading of “Among the 29 youthful years, 17 has been devoted to stages and screens”.

There were also a lot of stories about male actors, and this might result from a strong interest in entertainment business in Guangdong province, which is close to the entertainment hub Hong Kong. But the authors would usually describe only female actors’ faces, figures and how they dressed in detail, and more often

than not, a close-up shot of photo would be included to go with the text. Sometimes there were more than one photos of one actress in a feature piece, with a smiling, feminine close up and a medium-shot photo showing her figure and dress. For male actors, it's usually one medium-shot photo, and they don't smile as much, sometimes looking determined.

There were feature stories about women who had successful careers other than in the performing field, but these features stories were more rare. No matter what the profession was, family role was mentioned in their features but not features about their male counterparts. I have to mention that Guangdong was one of the earliest opened-up economic zones in the 80s when China's Open Up and Reform policy went into implementation. So one of the hot words was the "individual business owner", who usually quit his or her job in a public entity to start a private business. This group of people represents the earliest private economy explorers, and a lot of them made a fortune. In the story about an individual business owner Wang Huilin, the author used the headline "The distress and pursuit of a clothing business owner," with a sentence around the headline "Wang Huilin is powerful in her career, but as a woman, she is the weak and loser". Along the line, the author talked later in the article about how she married an irresponsible man who didn't take good care of her and her daughter, so she was forced to divorce him and start a business for her family. So she was not actively exploring new opportunities, but was forced to go on a different path because of family responsibility. The language use and discursive construction indicate that family is always the first priority for women, and a successful career can't make up for a miserable marriage. Another story about a fashionable female director was in line with this mentality. The author talked about how she has a "double harvest" in successful career and happy marriage.

In the article about bridge master Yang Xiaoyan, she was portrayed as a very successful bridge player and a rare woman in the profession. Also, the article shaped Yang as a determined and confidant player, who started playing bridge just to disprove her husband's saying that "women don't have the rigorous thinking that's required in playing bridge." This article shows a modern woman breaking the gender barrier, but she was American Chinese, so apparently not representative for all Chinese women at that time.

There was a feature story about a famous female director Yang Jie, who made the world-known TV series *Journey to the West*. The article was very positive and portrayed Yang as a creative, determined and problem-solving director and modern woman. The included photo, unlike other photos of female figures, didn't

focus on her appearance but showed a confident director at work. However, the headline read “People say directing is not a woman’s career, let’s look at Yang Jie’s long walk on *Journey to the West*”, emphasizing in plain language that Yang is an exception of a successful woman in a male-dominated field. It’s certainly encouraging for professional women, but it’s still a rare example.

In news stories and opinion pieces, there were fewer female figures in primary roles, less than half the number of male figures. Men were mentioned as experts in several articles, but women were not mentioned once as experts. There were male professors, government department heads, business managers and other professionals, but women were nurses, waitresses and mothers. Only in one news story about the ad war in beer industry did the author mention a beer businesswoman. One interesting thing is that female migrant workers were the primary role in three news articles. They were examples of hardworking and migrant workers who went to look for better lives in the city. They learned new skills, embraced new ideas and contributed to the city’s development. One of the articles focused on migrant workers’ poor living conditions. The phrase “outside female job seekers” was used as a hot word in these articles. I don’t know why these stories focus on female migrant workers, but emphasizing them might indicate that it’s a bigger advancement for women to go out and work.

Two male figures were portrayed as liars in the stories, and one female graduate student was portrayed as the victim in a sensational trafficking case, though there weren’t a lot of articles like this to enhance the impression.

For non-primary role women, they were mostly wives and mothers, who were mentioned as family members of the primary male characters.

On the front pages of the 1988 weekly, there are a lot of stand-alone photos because they were winners of a photography contest with the theme of “modern style”. Female figures were featured much more frequently than male figures as the primary role in these photos (16 vs 8), and they were mostly young, beautiful and unsophisticated. These stand-alone photos and photos in features both show that editors wanted more female figures on the pages and were eager to show their attractiveness of their age, facial features and body figure.

Table 1:

1988		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo (stand-alone)
Primary Figure	Male 63	27	19	9	8
	Female 53	25	8	4	16
Total	113 texts				

## 1993

Similar to 1988, the primary roles for women in *Southern Weekly* in 1993 were focused on only a few professions, and their work was mostly less culture-related compared with men. One new addition in 1993 was that women were openly portrayed as sex objects, a potential reflection of changing perceptions in society. There were also much fewer women in primary roles in front page stories, but there were a few more positive examples of professional women in both feature and news stories compared with 1988. Another interesting thing is that women were portrayed as emotional and subject to rumors.

If you look at the table below, you see the overall percentage of female characters as primary figures decreased, from 45.7%(1988) to 33.0%(1993). But if you look at each category of texts carefully, you will realize the change somewhat resulted from the story type shift on *Weekly*'s front page. Female primary figures take up a higher percentage in feature stories compared with news stories, and as the number of feature stories decreased and news stories increased, the overall percentage of female primary figures decreased.

One new trend of the 1993 front pages included talking about women's bodies more openly and aggressively. In the 1988 articles, women's appearances were frequently discussed, but only about how beautiful and well-shaped they appear. But in the 1993 front pages, hot dancers and models wearing sexy outfits were featured in the stories. One story talked about sexy models going into a restaurant to dance for customers as an inexpensive way to present designers' new dresses. "There are tall models and short ones. They first dressed in Qi Pao, with a high slit, and then western suits, with a very low collar. Those models did sexy poses and flirty moves, but the customers seemed unimpressed, and even a little disgusted." Another story talked about hot Egyptian dancers in a then called "ball room", which is more like a night club. Customers, mostly

men, were eager to see them wear less and were willing to pay a lot of money for them. A story about a popular movie talked about the controversial human art in it, which required actresses to be naked and posed for painting. A very seductive photo with a woman's body was presented with the article, and covered nearly the whole length of the page. These stories plainly talked about women's bodies and revealed a new social trend: As one of the earliest opened up areas, Guangdong appears to be embracing western culture and with more open representation of women as sexual objects. Traditional mentality still exists —— “some customers didn't seem to like what they saw” —— but the paper may very well reflect societal acceptance to changing values.

In feature stories, actresses continued to be the dominant profession of primary role women: eight out of the 13 were full time actresses, plus two others were in other professional businesses, and the rest were singers and a TV host. The articles stressed their appearances and specifically depicted the feminine side of the main characters: “with shoulder-length hair, slim Jin Sumei is very feminine. As a movie and TV star, her each smile reveals deep tenderness in women and is so attractive.” Men, on the other hand, continued to be professors, government officials, entrepreneurs, writers, editors, singers, antique collectors, painters, and wild explorers and a garment maker for Party leaders.

There was also silver lining in the portrayal of women in feature stories, in which they were portrayed as ambitious and successful, professional women (not only in acting), and their marriage and family didn't seem to be taking as much space. One feature talked about actress and designer Ma Ling, who used a TV series to publicize fashion clothes branded under her name. The feature story about Liu Xiaoqing showed the famous actress moved into industries to do business in real estate, foreign trade, clothing, cosmetics, wireless communication and automobile industry. The article portrayed her as an energetic and powerful professional woman, who was good at what she was doing and had an insight for exploring her new field. She was quoted as saying “I am successful in acting, and I don't need to prove something I already did successfully, rather, I need to prove another kind of success, and that's entity industry. “ However, there was still language indicating the gender-based labor division in some cases: “ And there was also a female staff Li Na. Her main responsibility was trivial matters such as sending letters, sweeping the floor and refilling hot drinking water. She also sends remuneration for authors.” This came from a feature story about a humor magazine. Specifically mentioning a “female staff” after introducing several key staff members who are presumably male, the author seemed to agree

to the social mentality that women at that time were less important in professional area, at least in journalism industry.

Some female primary figures were portrayed to be emotional and the subject of rumors or gossip. One article talked about two famous female singers making peace at a banquet, after they allegedly failed to keep on good terms. There were also multiple actresses who came out to defend themselves, arguing that rumors about them were not true. Actresses Fang Shu was in the mire of negative rumors, including arguing with a director about her character and not listening to the arrangement of the production team.

In news stories, the silver lining was that women were mentioned as “boss”, “writer” and “sales manager”, though they still account for only less than one third of the primary roles in news stories (almost the same percentage as that of 1988). Male figures as primary roles are leaders in politics and business (such as local Party branch secretary and development zone director), educated cultural professionals (such as writers and poets) and ordinary people in different fields, including farmers, business drinking companion and vendors. Male figures dominated not only the higher social class positions in *Southern Weekly*, they were also the main sources for stories that just tell the stories of common workers. Men also dominated negative reports: either the government staff who wasted public money, or the government official who strived for development regardless of the environment was male. These portrayals are similar to those in *Southern Weekly*'s news articles in 1988.

A lot of the opinion pieces didn't mention any gendered primary role, but among the seven opinion pieces that did, the primary figures were male. The pattern is similar to news stories: male figures with successful careers such as government leader, magazine chief editor, comic master and male figures as an ordinary source, including city management staff, patient and father.

There were only three stand-alone front-page photos in 1993. One primary figure featured winners from a flight attendant beauty contest, another featured the winners from a general beauty contest, and a third was Mao Zedong, the country's former political leader. Even though the number of stand-alone photos was small, you can still see the distinct gender-based stereotype: women are in photos because they are pretty to look at. The photo for Mao has a caption that says “the TV series showed Mao Zedong's great strategic courage, poetic temperament, revolutionist personality and the blood and flesh relationship with the people....”, emphasizing how great a political leader he was.

In other photos that go with articles (especially feature articles), just like 1988, women were more likely to be the visual focus than men, with more close-up shots and generally more photos. Women's photos were more likely to show up in articles that didn't even have a female primary figure. In a news story about professional drinkers, who worked to help employees deal with drinking in business meals, the first several main characters were all male, but the photo was a female figure in a sexy dress.

Table 2:

1993		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo(stand-along)
Primary Figure	Male 63	17	38	7	1
	Female 31	13	16	0	2
Total	92 texts				

## 1998<sup>1</sup>

The overall percentage of female characters as primary figure was 22.8%, less than that of 1993 (33.0%) and 1988 (45.7%). Women lost their prominent presence in front-page feature stories in 1998, with no female primary figures in the eight features, compared with 13 out of 40 in 1993. As *Southern Weekly* increased its negative coverage on social issues especially corruption and crime, negative female figures appeared in these contexts, though only a very small number compared with male counterparts. The language was more gender-neutral most of the time, with only occasional cases still emphasizing feminine features and family roles. Women's bodies were no longer frequently seen on front pages, and most of the photos didn't have gendered difference but only focused on newsworthiness.

The 1998 *Southern Weekly* had much fewer articles on front pages compared with 1993, and unlike 1988 and 1993, the 1998 paper had 16 pages in total, while the 1988 and 1993 paper only had eight pages. Many feature stories didn't have the opportunity to stay on front pages but could only be found in inner pages. The

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in the methodology section of this report, the 1998 newspaper included the first half year of 1998 and the second half year of 1997.

redesign of the pages almost eliminated the front-page feature stories, so as the paper's shifted positioning, which focused more on public interest and serious social issues.

The paper had multiple front-page headlines that introduced to inner page stories. I only analyzed one story of this kind on each page, the story with the most prominent headline (considering the location, text size and the companion photo). I also analyzed stories with big front-page pictures that covered the space of an article and led to inner pages.

Generally, there were more negative reports that reveal social problems compared with earlier years, and women's presence as the ones who conducted wrongdoings seemed to indicate some changes in reporting. Corrupted government officials or those who misused power were talked about in feature stories, news stories and opinion pieces. Most of them were men, but there was one criticized woman Shuqin Li, who was the leader of a state-owned factory and infuriated workers because of her massive corruption wrongdoings. A lot of crime stories that concerned public security were reported, with most primary figures portrayed as male suspects, including rapists, murderers and robbers. There was only one woman named Xiaoli Chen, who was accused of multiple kidnapping and libeling. Even though the number of "evil women" presented was small, it's apparent that men no longer completely dominate this field. The presence of "evil women" was a step towards a weakening gender stereotype: women could do bad things like men do. However, it seemed that women with high administrative level were seldom mentioned or quoted until she made horrible mistakes, which highlighted the issue of a lack of women in political sphere.

In Shuqin Li's story, she was introduced as the last of the six factory directors, and the "widow of the secretary Li and senior member of the tent factory". Even though I'm not sure why she became the factory director, I couldn't see being a widow any more important than being a senior member of the factory. The author introduced her with her family role before her professional role, and that meant something didn't change.

As for the victim image, there was one male professor killed by colleague and one female villager disfigured by her husband. In the latter story, the villager was severely hurt by her husband as a result of her walking out on the arranged marriage. Even though her husband was sentenced severe penalty, the fact that she was punished by her husband demonstrated a traditional mentality that women should conform to family rules.

Other than negative figures, men were neutrally portrayed government officials, directors, businessmen and ordinary staff or citizens. Just like that of 1988 and 1993, men seemed to have more decent jobs than women with higher social status. Among the nine women mentioned in news stories, most of them seemed to come from ordinary professions. Aside from the greedy state-owned company leader and the kidnapping and libeling suspect, there was only one woman who seemed significant to the story, a plaintiff of the Japanese germ warfare. She was mentioned among a group of offspring of the germ war victims, and she was also shown in one of the two photos. This is worth mentioning because men were usually the primary figures in stories about ordinary people struggling for their rights.

There was one woman out of the eight primary figures in opinion pieces I analyzed, and she was a prostitute. The article discussed the related parties' failure to contain the problem from spreading after she was found infected with AIDS. Other than this, women were almost absent in opinion pieces.

A big advancement in 1998 compared with earlier years was that women's body figures were seldom described and the overall language was no longer focused on how they look. Even in one of the picture stories about models, the author looked into the living and working conditions and went beyond their pretty outlook. The front-page picture of the story included two sexy and enchanting models with masks — a typical model photo — but in inner pages, there were multiple photos showing their daily rehearsal, performance and life. The short text explaining the photo said: "In other people's eyes, they must have earned much money with their pretty face and slender figure. But this is a misunderstanding... The average monthly income for the seven models was only about 1000, which isn't really a big deal in big city like Guangzhou. What attracted them was the willingness to perform they were born with and their interest in the profession." With a series of photos and very concise words, the author told a story about models in a more neutral way.

Aside from this story, I analyzed two other pieces that told stories with mostly photos. I categorized them as "photo" because the photos were not companion content for a text story, but were the subjects of an article. One of the front-page photos showed a female drug addict with her child. In the inner page, there were a series of photos showing drug addicts and their children taken by a Los Angeles Times reporter. There were men and women. I don't know why the editor chose the front-page photo. It might be that the image itself had powerful impact, or it might be more shocking to see a female drug addict, or it might be more natural for a

woman to take the family role. I can't say for the editor at that time, but there is a possibility that it was a "gendered decision".

Table 3:

1998		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo(stand-along)
Primary Figure	Male 44	8	29	7	0
	Female 13	0	9	1	3
Total	57 texts				

## 2003

As the percent of news stories on front pages reached 69.4%, women as a primary figure on front pages became a very small part of all the characters —— only 7 out of 49 (14.3%). The percentage kept decreasing from 1988 to 1993, then to 1998 and 2003. The main reporting pattern of female and male primary figures in news stories stayed, with female figures limited in some professions and male figures showing variety and higher status. Women's importance in news stories seemed to be even lower than before (only 4 out 34). The portrayal of the limited female figures in features and photos seemed to be not gender-biased and authors tended to treat them more equally as male figures.

The 2003 *Southern Weekly*'s front pages usually had only two articles on each issue, and they were usually important hard news. The content was usually one news story as a cover story and one article as an opinion piece, which doesn't usually mention a gendered character. Even so, the paper's overall content was growing and spread over on a thicker issue of 24 pages minimum. The paper divided the pages by article categories such as finance, culture, people and so on. Many feature stories could only be found in inner pages, but sometimes the front page would have a headline that led to inner pages.

In news stories, men continued to dominate well-educated and leadership-role positions, and they also appear as the primary role more than women when it comes to ordinary characters. They were government leaders, professors, media leader, lawyers and also ordinary citizens, policemen and waterman. The four female primary figures out the 34 in news stories were a nurse, a poet, a mother of a farmer and a citizen. In some Q&A

articles where the authors interviewed several experts on a certain topic, the listed experts on that issue were all men. This created an impression that when media had a question, they could only find male experts. In an article “The legal elite who were forgotten 30 years”, there were photos of 19 influential professionals in the field and none of them were women.

There was only one female primary figure in the seven opinion pieces analyzed, and she was a Hong Kong legislator. She was fiercely criticized by the opinion writer. The negative image of her might just be a coincidence, but it was a constant situation that women were rarely mentioned in opinion pieces.

In feature stories, there were only two female characters as primary figures out of the seven, but they were important women who had significant achievement in their respective field and their contribution was certainly comparable with their male counterparts. One woman was Song Meiling, the first lady of the Republic of China (founded in 1912 was overthrown by Mao Zedong in 1949), and the other was Ding Bilan, an American Chinese film producer. In the article about Song, the author said “With a fluent English of a Georgia-Boston accent, She talked to curious Americans about China’s internal and external hardship and described it as an isolated country awaiting rescue.” Her earnest speech asking for America’s moral support to China’s anti-Japanese war met with tremendous success. In that era, her diplomatic activities made substantial contribution to our nation’s survival. “ Song was portrayed as an important figure in political and diplomatic fields, though she was introduced as the then first lady. But the photo in the inner page showed her knitting a sweater, rather than making a speech or meeting important political figures. The author/editor might want to show her Chinese root as a traditional woman to enrich her image as a political activist with a western background. The story about film producer Ding Bilan talked about her experience in revealing the difficult lives of early Chinese laborers in America and their unrecognized contribution to the country.

There was an interesting opinion piece that’s worth noticing. It discussed a marriage-seeking advertisement, in which a rich businessman was looking for a girl with some requirements, including that she needed to be a virgin. This complied with a traditional thought that pre-marriage sex shouldn’t exist, but the author thought this was very disrespectful to women. “Just imagine: women with ‘education level above junior college’ and ‘pure as water’ have received education in a new era and agree with the spiritual civilization of the new era. They yearn for and pursue female subject consciousness. All of a sudden, a man who had married

before and had a child, with millions of assets, asked them for their virginity as a premise and a ‘pure and true love’ as qualification, what a rough encounter that would be? This could only happen in this utilitarian age!”

The article showed a social mentality that feminist consciousness was rising — women became more conscious of their rights — and viewing a woman as a sex object instead of a human being should be criticized.

The way women were presented in photos was neutral, as front-page articles in 2003 usually included newsworthy photos and supplemented what the news stories had to tell. There were almost no photos showing women’s feminine features and pretty appearance like those in earlier years’ feature stories, and a few women were in photos as important figures (if not primary figures) in the news stories. For example, in a story about the conflict between the real estate developers and the residents, the companion photo showed a woman joining the protest, holding a board saying “the right to know protects our home.” There was the photo of a female staff in a SARS story, a female leader at a local writer’s association and female immigrants in the story talking about Ding and her movie. Even though the photos seemed to be neutral, there were more men than women, and that’s probably because men were more often primary roles.

Table 4:

2003		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo(stand-along)
Primary Figure	Male 42	4	30	8	-
	Female 7	2	4	1	-
Total	49 texts				

## 2008

There was a dramatic decrease in the number of women as primary figures in 2008. Out of the 50 articles analyzed from the 2008 *Southern Weekly*, women were featured as primary figures only three times. That’s only about 6 percent, the lowest in previous five years of analysis. Women were not primary figures in any of the 10 front-page features or the three opinion pieces, and only were primary figures three times in 38 news stories. For

a few cases, women were present in photos when they were not primary figures in the news stories, which seemed to be a “gender-balancing” effort.

The top category of male primary figures were government officials of various levels, and this trend seemed to have had been obvious in 1998, when news stories largely outnumbered feature stories already (38 vs 8). There were high-level political leaders, government department heads, foreign politicians and local government officials. In one story about tracking down the ministry and commission staffs who were laid off 10 years ago because of government agency streamlining, the big accompanying photo on the front page showing the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference only had two or three women among dozens of attendants. In another article that talked about nine high-level party officials who implemented policies based on the books they believed in, none of the nine was a woman. It's not hard to tell how dominant men were in the political sphere even just five years ago. Other male primary figures were pilots, lawyers, academician, manager, teachers and so on. There was a farmer who lied about taking the photo of a long time vanished wild tiger in an attempt to have economic gains. The three women were sales staff at a blood bank, social activist and a woman of a couple. The female social activist was a key figure in the effort to solve the Chinese labor compensation issue politically after the door for lawsuit against related Japanese parties was closed.

There was an interesting phenomenon in the presentation of photos, with some female figures shown in photos even though they were not primary figures in the news stories. In the story about substitute teachers (temporary teachers in rural areas who didn't have a recognized status in the education system), the primary figure was a male volunteer teacher. The accompanying photo showed seven teachers, three male and four female. In this case, the presence of some female teachers in the large photo compensated somewhat for a lack of female characters in the text. Another example was an article about the implementation of the government's open information act. The primary figure was a male lawyer, but the photo was a female citizen involved in the first case in which she sued the government for unopened information. She was not a primary figure in the article, but she was in the photo. There was also an article with a female primary figure in text and a male figure in photo, and they had similar professional positions. I don't know whether this was the editors' intentional arrangement, but it may have balanced the gender in the article.

Table 5:

2008		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo(stand-along)
Primary Figure	Male 48	10	35	3	-
	Female 3	0	3	0	-
Total	50 texts				

## 2013

After reaching its lowest point in 2008, the percentage of women as primary figures bounced back to 19.6 in 2013. There were more women on front pages in 2013 compared with 2008 and 2003, and women had a larger presence in news stories. Among the 11 female primary figures, some had positions in traditionally male-dominated fields, some showed their leadership skills and some made extraordinary contributions to society. There was a lot of negative coverage of various crimes, and all the suspects were men.

In news stories, male primary figures included those with well-recognized jobs such as government officials, economists, engineers, business managers, academicians and ordinary workers such as truck driver, miner, teacher, policeman and so on. There were also several suspects who were involved in serious crime cases. On the other hand, the nine women included an astronaut, a foreign politician, a spokeswoman, a former deputy chief for an art troupe, a volunteer caregiver for abandoned babies, flu patient, villager, passenger and online shopper. The first three were a rare breed to show up in their professions according to this research. It's the first time a female astronaut was seen on *Southern Weekly*'s front pages, and she taught a class to young students in the spacecraft. It's also the first time a female politician was seen on front pages, and she was Angela Merkel, the counterpart for China's new premier Li Keqiang. The appearance of these women as primary figures in news stories would mean much more if they had been Chinese female politician, but it's still a sign that changes are happening: politics is no longer completely dominated by men. The spokeswoman was a government official, and it's very rare to see female government officials quoted in news stories.

The presence of a former deputy chief for a military art troupe and Angela Merkel as a foreign politician on front page was an indication that women could also be leaders. In feature stories, there was a civil anti-AIDS

fighter who also certainly showed leadership skills. This may look promising, but it's shocking that there were so few female leaders even in the 2013 paper. Men had always dominated fields that require good education, sophisticated professional skills and leadership abilities, and this trend was persistent when I looked at the paper of 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2013.

The story in which a volunteer caregiver for abandoned babies was the primary figure is worth discussing. She was poor herself, but she saved her income to provide living environment for dozens of orphans. The news story talked about an unfortunate indoor fire that killed several kids, and reflected on the lack of a mature system to take care of abandoned babies. The "orphan mother" Yuan Lihai was portrayed as a kind-hearted caregiver, and what she did seemed to accord with what the society traditionally expected from women. The two photos included also showed her taking good care of those orphans. However, she was more than a mother. The author wrote: "The little building on fire was the best living place Yuan could provide for these orphans in the past 30 years. Yuan has so much love, yet so little money." She "illegally" adopted more than 100 abandoned kids, of whom a lot were handicapped and mentally disabled, according to the article. It's not hard to tell she was voluntarily taking on more responsibilities than necessary and struggling hard to contribute to the society. The story showed her kindness and also her social responsibility as a citizen.

In feature stories, men were mostly government officials or prestigious people in economic and academic fields. There were two people who conducted fraud, and one of them was fooling local governments that he was a director from a central department. The two female primary figures, just like the two in 2003 features, were extraordinary women who accomplished great achievements in what they were working on. One of them was Gao Yaojie, an aging civil activist who had made tremendous efforts on the prevention and treatment of AIDS. She spent her own money to print promotion materials and help financially support AIDS patients and orphans. She received numerous domestic and global awards for her work, and was definitely a role model for thousands of women. Another was a Nobel-winning Canadian author, who didn't have much fame in China but had apparently produced a lot of widely recognized short fiction stories.

The *Southern Weekly*'s 2013 front pages were not short of negative figures, including misbehaving government officials, fraud and criminal suspects. None of them was a woman, which is a longtime phenomenon in the years I analyzed. Only in 1998 did two negative female primary figures show up.

Table 6:

2013		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo(stand-along)
Primary Figure	Male 46	10	35	0	1
	Female 11	2	9	0	0
Total	56 texts				

## Conclusion

This research argues that women's presence on *Southern Weekly*'s front pages was not comparable to men, and the percentage of women as primary figures generally decreased during the past 25 years. The figure reached its lowest point in 2008, and bounced back a little in 2013. Male figures were more likely to be in professions that required higher education, more sophisticated skills and leadership abilities, and the dominance had been mostly consistent throughout the 25 years, and had just been slightly weakened in 2013, with a few more professional women taking up front page space. Women figures were portrayed with a more neutral tone in recent years compared with 20 or 25 years ago, with the descriptions no longer focused on their beautiful appearance, less mentioning of their family roles or description of their feminine features. This point was also shown in the change of photos.

Table 7:

Year		Feature	News	Opinion	Photo (stand-alone)	Total
<b>1988</b>	Male PF*	27	19	9	8	63
113 texts	Female PF	25	8	4	16	53 (45.7%)
<b>1993</b>	Male PF	17	38	7	1	63
92 texts	Female PF	13	16	0	2	31(33.0%)
<b>1998</b>	Male PF	8	29	7	0	44

57 texts	Female PF	0	9	1	3	13(22.8%)
<b>2003</b>	Male PF	4	30	8	0	42
49 texts	Female PF	2	4	1	0	7 (14.3%)
<b>2008</b>	Male PF	10	35	3	0	48
50 texts	Female PF	0	3	0	0	3 (5.9%)
<b>2013</b>	Male PF	10	35	0	1	46
56 texts	Female PF	2	9	0	0	11(19.3%)

\*PF stands for primary figure.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, women were featured as primary figures in a large percentage of feature stories (more than 40 percent), but then the percentage dropped in later years, as the paper had fewer feature stories on its front pages. Even though there were fewer women in features, those who were on front pages of recent years' papers were usually very successful professional women, who had tremendous achievements that were comparable to their male counterparts in those fields, while dozens of women in the earlier papers were actresses, models, performers and other professionals for whom a pretty appearance would be a necessity. One or two successful professional women in earlier years seemed like a rare breed among the many actresses.

In news stories, women's percentage was also decreasing, but the "quality" of female primary figures seemed to be higher in recent years. Women always had a smaller presence than men, and had always played a secondary role: they were usually ordinary people with common jobs rather than experts or important news sources, who were mostly male figures. Men were also ordinary people or workers in some cases, so they basically had a variety of professional images. In the late 80s and early 90s, women took up about 30 percent of all the primary figures, who were usually the main human characters or important quote sources. Surprisingly, the percentage dropped in the later years, and in 2008, there were only three female primary figures out of the 38. In 2013, the number went up a little bit, but still, it was only about 20 percent. There were only one or two women with relatively high-class jobs such as manager in the five years that spanned across 25 years, and the

number didn't really grow until a small rise in 2013, when women had a slightly larger presence in male-dominated areas. It's not hard to tell how difficult it is for women to be important sources in news stories.

Photos changed greatly starting from the 90s. In 1988 and 1993, women dominated the photo images, and they were shown in a lot of close-ups and their body figures were usually prominent. But in the past 15 years, as female primary figures decrease, women were featured in front-page photos much less than men. Also, women were shown in a more neutral way because the paper was more news-oriented so the photos were probably selected based on newsworthiness. No matter what the reason, the photos of women had fewer gendered features in recent years.

The general tone has become more neutral probably starting from the mid-90s. In the paper of 20 or 25 years ago, words describing women's appearances and their family responsibilities were frequent, but language like this started to fade away in later years. Words emphasizing women's gender in a professional setting were also only seen in the papers from 20 or 25 years ago.

As I discussed earlier, the *Weekly* seemed to have had an obvious change in its positioning and page design during the 25 years, and this might have influenced women's images on front pages. The paper tended to pay more attention to important news events beginning sometime in the 90s. News reports took a larger percentage in 1993 compared with 1988 and continued to grow after that, reaching a stable point in 1998. More feature stories could be found in inner pages, and a lot of them were about women. The decrease in feature stories and increase in news stories on front pages might have influenced how women were presented on front pages. As that shift happened, the general language style of the paper also changed, with the subjective opinions in news stories and features in the earlier days gradually eliminated. This might also influenced authors' language and tones in portraying women on the front pages.

In summary, the percentage of female primary figures on *Southern Weekly*'s front pages generally decreased during the past 25 years, but the language and tone seemed less biased after the mid-90s. In recent years, women's appearances were discussed much less frequently than in earlier texts. In photographs, women's images were no longer glamourized in later years and authors write less about work and family balance like they did in earlier years. Male figures were more likely to be in higher-level positions than female figures, and the dominance was mostly consistent throughout the 25 years.

## **Research Limitation**

This research has some limitations. The researcher only analyzed half the front pages of the five years out of the 25 years and tried to see a trend of change during those years. But the five years couldn't really represent the whole 25 years, and some delicate changes couldn't be seen along the way. However, the researcher hoped that the results were helpful in providing a primary understanding of the main changes that have taken place about *Southern Weekly's* portrayal of gender.

Since the research is a textual analysis with supplementary quantitative method, it has similar shortcomings to that of any content analysis. The research could only present the facts but couldn't go further into the reasons behind those facts or what the numbers and text might mean. Further studies could be done to inform the numbers, such as interviewing the journalists and editors at *Southern Weekly*. Also, the analysis was done by one person, so it might have minor errors or subjective judgments.

The way the researcher selected inner-page stories with front-page headlines might not represent the way an ordinary audience would choose what to read. The researcher only selected the most prominent headline on front pages and went to inner pages to read the story, and also selected the stories that had a big photo on the front page. Other consumers might go through all the headlines, select the ones that they found most attractive, then jump to inner page stories. If so, the audience might have a different perception of women's images than the researcher because they might be reading different stories.

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