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# women hold up half the sky!

★ The following article was written by members of the Southern California APSU Women's Group. ★

Women throughout history have faced oppression in all aspects of their lives. Traditionally, only the lowest paying, most tedious jobs have been open to us. In the home, women are expected to take care of household duties as well as carry the main responsibility of child-rearing. The stereotypes of women - housewives and as sexual objects with no interest in anything beyond the vacuum cleaner or the latest fashions - keeps us bound in the subordinate roles we are expected to play. Asian and other Third World women are triply oppressed--as women, as workers, and as oppressed nationalities. Third World women have been systematically channelled into the worst jobs, working as domestics and garment workers where they spend long hours working under the most exploitative conditions. Asian women have not stood by passively accepting this as a way of life. There has been a history of continuous struggle against this oppression. For example, Asian women took part in the Third World Strikes during the 1960's, the fight for Ethnic Studies, and at the Jung Sei Garment Factory waged a militant fight to unionize.

## ASIAN WOMEN UNITE!

The women in the Southern California APSU recognize the need to continue the struggle against women's oppression -- this led to the formation of a women's group. Through several discussions we saw the need to unite around four main purposes. One is to become more assertive and take up leadership in APSU. Secondly, to learn more about and to be able to understand Asian women's true history in America -- bringing out the truth of resistance. Third, not only do we want to understand women's oppression, but to actively take up specific needs of Asian women, in particular the fight for childcare in Chinatown, Little Friends.

Through all of our work we hope to promote unity among the women in APSU and to create an atmosphere where the women and men of APSU may work together on an equal basis, being mutually supportive.

In the few months that the women's group has been meeting, there have been many accomplishments. Women are more assertive in taking up responsibility in APSU and in initiating and carrying out ideas and plans. Chauvenistic attitudes have been discouraged and support of different women's struggles in the community, campus and workplace have been taken up.

The Southern California APSU Women's Group has planned future work in line with our goal to integrate education about our history with actively taking up the needs of Asian women. Along with the Southern Cal. APSU we will be participating in the October 1st celebration in Chinatown by putting together and exhibiting a photo display on women in the People's Republic of China. Many lessons can be drawn from the struggle for equality of women in China and we as Asian women in APSU can use these lessons in working towards the full equality of women in America. Developing this photo display is a concrete

way for us to learn more about Asian women as well as showing support for the Chinese community. Towards the end of this year the Southern Cal. APSU and the Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization (LTPRO) will be sponsoring a program on Asian women. It will include our photo display, slide show, skit as well as cultural performances and presentation. The Women's Group will also be holding regular discussions on suggested topics such as the need for childcare in our communities, the women's movement in China and in other parts of Asia, forced sterilization, and wife beatings in the Asian community.

The Women's Group would like to encourage anyone interested to come and participate in any of our meetings, discussions or projects.

**BUILD THE UNITY AND SOLIDARITY OF ASIAN WOMEN!**

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# Interview with a Garment Factory Worker

Question: What is the general situation of sweatshops in San Francisco Chinatown?

Answer: I worked in a garment factory sweatshop in San Francisco Chinatown. From my own experience and from talking with my fellow workers in the garment factory, I found out a lot about the sweatshop situation. There are a lot of them up and down the block, probably at least one in every single block. Most of them are illegal in that they pay the workers lower than the minimum wage which is \$1.65 an hour. That is why they don't put up a sign outside the door saying that it's such and such a company.

How you can tell that inside is a sweatshop is usually it's a storefront, on the ground floor, either they have curtains all around the windows so you can't look inside or they paint the windows and the door is closed. But when you walk past if you can tell it's a sweatshop. The owners of the sweatshops, depending on how many they own, are in general part of the petit bourgeoisie of Chinatown.

Q: How do they become sweatshop owners?

A: Probably a lot of them started out being seamstresses. After like ten years, when they have saved up enough money and they have learned enough about the trade, they open up a sweatshop themselves. Not every person that works in a sweatshop can later on open up one themselves, though. Most of the people that work there work for the rest of their lives.

Q: How much do the workers get?

A: The workers are not paid by the hour, but on the piece rate, between \$6.00 and \$8.00 a dozen, which is 50 cents to 60 cents a piece. This is the standard price in San Francisco Chinatown. The workers sew on an average of a dozen a day, and that is from eight o'clock in the morning to six-thirty or seven at night.

Most of them take only half an hour to eat lunch. They eat lunch right there in the sweatshop, they either bring their lunch or cook something right there. When I said workers sew an average of a dozen a day, I meant the experienced workers. When I first worked there, I made five dresses in three days. For workers who have worked in this trade for five to seven years, some of them are super-fast, they make about two dozens a day, but that's only twelve dollars for like ten hours of work. How they get around paying the workers the minimum is by talking them into not using their social security number. The sweatshop owners have different ways of not reporting to the government.

Q: What are the conditions in the sweatshop as far as health and safety go? Are there any regulations?

A: There are no regulations whatsoever. There is no sick pay. As far as safety goes, sewing machines are relatively safe and since most of the workers are experienced, there's not that much hazard. But one thing that affects your health is the lighting of the place. The lighting is so dim it really affects your eyes. Sewing is a very delicate task and when you have to bend over a sewing machine for like ten hours a day, your back hurts, your eyes hurt.

Q: Who are the workers and why would they take such low wages?

A: The garment workers in Chinatown are all immigrant women.

The immigrants are from Hong Kong. Most of them worked in the factories in Hong Kong. They came over here because the conditions in Hong Kong are too oppressive under the British colonial government, they came over and find themselves slaving away for the American capitalists.

Most of them are middle-aged. Some of them are young mothers. Most young immigrant women work as waitresses in the Chinatown restaurants where they make a little bit more.

The reason why they would take such low wages is because the American capitalist system has created this sweatshop system with the sole purpose of exploiting them and making the sweatshop system their only way of making a living. The big white corporations know that they can exploit Third World immigrants better than the American workers because of language barriers, so instead of hiring the Third World immigrants themselves, they piece out work to these small sweatshops in Third World communities, for example in the Mission and Chinatown, owned by the Third World shop owner who in turn would hire the immigrants to do the work.

These small sweatshop owners are not the enemy, they too are exploited by these big companies. They work in the sweatshop themselves, not as long hours, but they do the buttonholes, they sort out the materials delivered by the big companies. They just barely make it to be middle class or lower middle class. They receive a lot of pressure from the big companies too. They have to meet the deadlines and the quota in order to contract work and they in turn have to pressure the workers to work extra hours to get the work done. The big companies give the sweatshop owners something like \$1.00 a piece, the sweatshop owner gives 50 cents a piece and the big companies sell the finished product in big stores downtown for \$8.00 to \$10.00 a piece.

How I found out was that one time after I quit the sweatshop job, I got a job at Macy's downtown to do inventory work for twenty hours altogether. I was wandering around the store on my break and I saw these dresses that they sell which are the same material, the same pattern, as the ones I saw selling for \$8.00 to \$10.00 a piece. It's just super-exploitation.

# ASIAN WOMEN as LEADERS

American society is broken up into different levels based on economic income, education, politics, color and sex. Each level has a prescribed set of rules for action and interplay -- roles that are enforced by the levels above. At the bottom of these varying gradations are women of color. Third World women face domination by both racism and sexism (discrimination based on sex). Both are means by which American society controls and oppresses everyone. Everyone is forced to conform to the values and roles established by the dominant group in order to "succeed."

For the Asian movement to progress, it must have a clear understanding of sexism, racism, and imperialism; and deal with them simultaneously.

For Asian women in general, the stereotypes or roles have been of two major kinds: either docile, submissive Oriental doll who will cater to the whims of any man, or the Suzie Wong, sex-pot, exotic bitch-body. Between these two are the efficient secretary, sexy stewardess, the good housekeeper and domestic, the girl any guy would like to marry.

Women in the Asian movement find that these stereotypes are still hovering over their heads. Not only these but new stereotypes, too: i.e., Asian men have tried to define for "their women" what it means to be "heavy." Men in the Asian movement also find themselves tied down to stereotypes. Perhaps they may feel that to be a MAN one must have authority and responsibility. In the same light, they will frown on women who take on a lot of responsibility (and the authority that goes along with it), labeling them as "unfeminine." Women then tend to fear this loss of "femininity" and so they do the clerical work and the cleaning up, activities for which intellect is not essential or expected. Women may also fulfill these jobs because they do them the best: And why do they do them the best? Because women are never encouraged to do anything else; women's potential abilities as a leader are left untapped and undeveloped. She loses her confidence in being able to handle such responsibility.

THE SISTERS WHO HAVE ACHIEVED a position of authority in the movement are a minority and are still trapped by the stereotypes that society has created. It is a struggle for women to attain the top leadership positions. Women who "make it" into such positions have had to reject the stereotypes already

imposed upon them. But because the new definition of "the Asian woman" has not yet evolved, women find themselves in a "limbo." Some find themselves being labeled as Bitches--women who speak out loudly and strongly; who are authoritarian, who boss people around, and command some form of respect. Some must resort to being overtly diligent and efficient to prove themselves as worthy of the same leadership positions as the men. Others gain respect by appearing to accomplish work in a multitude of projects but actually only completing a few tasks. And still others attain their leadership positions as token gestures. Some women can gain respect only by putting up with put-downs on other women, i.e., "You're not one of those bird-brained little girls" or "You're as strong as a man!"

Once women do get into leadership positions, they find that their ideas are usurped by the men, who then take credit for the idea as being their own. Women are often heard but not listened to. Many times the woman must play her old role in order to get things done: "Oh, please, can you help me carry this. It's much too heavy for little old me..."

HOW CAN THESE PROBLEMS BE SOLVED: People must recognize that women are half of the working force in the movement against oppression, exploitation, and imperialism. They are half of the working force in creating the new revolutionary lifestyle. Men and women in the movement must therefore begin to live the ideals and goals they are working for. To do this, they must not let chauvinist acts slide by. People cannot work together effectively if there are hidden tensions or if people let little annoyances build up inside themselves. They must deal with sexism on the same basis as they would deal with racism and imperialism. They must be able to develop as human beings, not subject to categorizations and stereotypes. Developing as people confident in themselves, in their ideas, they will not be afraid of criticism; they will see the need for criticism, self-criticism in order to move forward. The struggle is not men against women or women against men, but it is a united front striving for a new society, a new way of life.

If I go forward,  
Follow me.  
Push me if I fall behind.  
If I betray you,  
Kill me.  
If they take me,  
Avenge me then in kind.

from Rodan



### DIMENSIONS OF THE MALE SEX ROLE

Now let's return to the specifics of the male sex role in our own culture. We already know some of the broad outlines, but there are seeming inconsistencies in the common-sense view of masculinity. One senses that there is not one ideal image of the "real man" in our society but several. Consider for example the following male stereotypes, each of which in one way or another strikes us as distinctively masculine:

- The football player; big, tough, and rugged, though not precisely a towering intellect;
- The jet-set playboy; usually sighted in expensive restaurants or fast convertibles, accompanied by a beautiful woman (whom he's ignoring);
- The blue-collar brawler; a quick temper with fists to match; nobody better try to push *him* around;
- The big-shot businessman; the Babbitt traveling salesman Rotary Club booster type of expansive back-slapper;
- The Don Juan; he's smooth, smoldering, and totally irresistible to women; a super-stud on the prowl;
- The strong, simple working man; he's honest, solid, direct, and hard-working;
- The Truly Great Man; a statesman, prophet, scientist, deep-thinker, awesome genius.

They don't look, act, or sound very much alike, but somehow these images all seem distinctively masculine to at least some of us. Does this mean that the male role is so infinitely flexible that anything a man does can seem "manly"? No; most male images and examples are by no means as masculine as these selected examples. The image of the "average guy," the man-in-the-street, is not especially masculine; many successful, familiar, and popular male personalities seem anything but manly.

The answer is that the male role is demanding but, except on a few points, not very specific. There seem to be several basic routes, and many specific variations, to fulfilling the minimum demands of the role. A man can in some sense choose what to "specialize" in — how to project a viable masculine image, choosing from among the options the role provides. In choosing, he is likely to be influenced

by his age, class, ethnic subgroup, and physique, as well as individual talents and capacities. There are many acceptable combinations and certain styles become "fads" after they're popularized by movie stars or public personalities. As with other cultural fashions, there are changes over time. Beneath all the permutations, however, are a small number of basic themes which pervade and ultimately define the male sex role. I believe that there are four such general themes, or dimensions, which underlie the male sex role we see in our culture. Each has subparts and complexities and at some points they overlap, but the following four themes seem to comprise the core requirements of the role:

1. No Sissy Stuff: The stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability.
2. The Big Wheel: Success, status, and the need to be looked up to.
3. The Sturdy Oak: A manly air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance.
4. Give 'Em Hell!: The aura of aggression, violence, and daring.

There may seem to be a mechanistic quality to such an inflexible listing, and a model which proposes to examine sex roles in terms of four (or any other number of) components. Obviously such a model overstates what is definitely known about sex roles. Remember also that there are many human traits and characteristics (e.g. generosity, loyalty), which are not strongly associated with either male or female sex roles. Some widely admired male images — *Zorba The Greek*, or Sam-the-Lion in *The Last Picture Show* are good examples — combine masculine qualities with unmasculine ones in a very appealing way. But our focus here is on the pure case, the purely masculine part of a man's image. This discussion is focused primarily on the male role in the present day United States. Much of it is relevant to other areas of Western culture, but there are also national variations which we won't be able to consider here.

Finally, a note about the kinds of evidence we shall consider. As a behavioral scientist I look for and prefer experimental data where it's available. Only a controlled experiment can definitively prove causal relationships between variables (Cronbach, 1957; Campbell & Stanley, 1963). However, such evidence is necessarily limited to factors which can be manipulated by the experimenter. Observational and correlational studies are less conclusive, but have

greater scope, for nature has been experimenting since the dawn of time on a far grander scale than man can contemplate. By carefully studying covariations among events social scientists can extend the scope of science far beyond the controlled certainty of the laboratory.

Writers and novelists have no "controls" at all, but sometimes they show enormous powers of analysis. It has often been observed that novelists are among the greatest psychologists. Freud acknowledged the genius of those writers who can draw "from the whirlpool of their emotions the deepest truths, to which we others have to force our way"; "they draw on sources not yet accessible to science" (quoted in Stone and Stone, 1966). Men and masculinity have provided the subject matter for countless great writers in all ages. So to explore this familiar but strangely uncharted domain of masculinity, we'll consider material and insights from all these sources

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one obsessed. sexier than the rest of the world. The obsession is not just a matter of being different, but of being different in a way that is socially unacceptable. The obsession is not just a matter of being different, but of being different in a way that is socially unacceptable. The obsession is not just a matter of being different, but of being different in a way that is socially unacceptable.

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THE OBLIVION OF WOMEN'S DAY (1948)

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(Following is a speech presented at a previous IWD celebration/program at Laney Junior College, Oakland)

International Women's Day, Laney ASU (1976)

On behalf of Laney ASU, I'd like to welcome you all to today's International Women's Day celebration. In the spirit of solidarity, we'd like to join together with you to celebrate IWD and commemorate the struggles of women throughout the world.

Today, we'd like to begin to answer the questions, "What is women's oppression? Why is there women's oppression? What is its source? How can we put an end to it?"

Is women's oppression male chauvinist or sexist ideas like, women are inferior to men; women belong in the home and are supposed to cater to men; women are sex objects? Is women's oppression being denied equal opportunity or being paid the lowest wages? Is it not being taken seriously in a serious discussion or being afraid to speak up at all?

Yes, these are all manifestations and factors of women's oppression. But women's oppression encompasses more than these particular forms. It is more than scattered, incidental attacks on women. Women's oppression is the systematic oppression of women that is inherent in the system of imperialism. To understand why it takes these forms, we have to grasp the reasons why women's oppression is necessary to the system of imperialism. Otherwise, we could be led to believe the incorrect idea that off-the-wall sexist ideas, stereotypes, and antagonisms between men and women lie at the heart of our oppression.

The roots of women's oppression lie in class society. As long as class society exists, one class will dominate and oppress the other. Antagonisms and struggle between these classes are inevitable. Today, the class society we live under is imperialism. Under imperialism, the working and oppressed people of this country and the masses in Third World nations are exploited by the capitalists who have to grab new territories in order to reap greater profits so that they can maintain and expand their power. Under imperialism, the oppression of Third World people throughout the world is objective reality. As such, we see class society as being the source of all oppression.

Concretely, what does this mean for women, particularly Third World women and more specifically, Asian women?

If we look at how our people came to this country, we'll see that TW people have been enslaved, deceived into coming here to serve as a source of plentiful and poorly paid labor. Because Asians were initially brought here primarily as contract labor to work the mines, railroads, plantations, Asian women were denied entry into this country. As one form of national oppression, Asians, especially Chinese and Filipinos, were prevented from establishing stable families and communities within the U.S. During the 1900s, the few Chinese women that were allowed to come to America were those that had been deceived and sold into prostitution. Less stringent immigration laws only came about in the mid-20th century. Later, Asian women's labor was highly exploited in the garment factories, fields, in the canneries, and in the houses of middle and upper class families. Capitalists extracted huge profits from our labor as they paid us some of the worst wages and put us through inhumane working conditions.

In addition to these forms of class and national oppression, women have carried

the additional burden of society's concept of women as mothers, housekeepers, and wives; men and even many of us still hold onto images of women as being weak, inferior, docile, and helpless. As long as class society prevails, stereotypes of women will exist though they may change forms. Examples of feudal stereotypes are of will-less, subservient women. These stem from very real oppressive conditions: women were forced to become virtual slaves to husbands they had not selected; women were forbidden to travel outside of the immediate confines of their villages; women were denied even basic education. In today's society, the stereotypes have been modified somewhat. Particular to imperialism are images of Asian women as dutiful mama-sans; super-erotic Suzy Wongs, and fragile, fashionable China Dolls. The material conditions that oppress women, reinforced by these stereotypes, stifle the full and creative development of our potential to make valuable contributions to society.

In today's economic world, TW women are still relegated into the most exploited low-paying, unstable, and tedious jobs. Many of us can identify with, "Last Hired, First Fired." It's not just by chance that we are made to fill these positions. TW women are still laboring in sweatshops, canneries, the fields, doing long hours for near-to-nothing wages. To some of us students, these forms of oppression may seem remote. In reality, they are actually closer than we might realize. Here at Laney we are being trained to serve the needs of the capitalists in the expanding service industry. The general character of the job market opens up to us as typing, clerical, restaurant, domestic, and nursing jobs. The forms of oppression may have changed but the essence remains the same: although we are the creators of wealth in this society, the benefits of our labor go to the capitalist class. We can never fully enjoy the fruits of our labor.

Class oppression is severe but it is not the only type of oppression we have to contend with. Our rights are constantly being trampled upon as we are classified second class citizens and denied fundamental equality.

Let's look at the situation at Laney and see how women's oppression affects us here. In the past month the administration has eliminated the evening women's studies class. This has deprived many working women who cannot attend day session of the class. The educational system has consistently ignored the history, contributions, and needs of women. For TW women this situation has been aggravated by the systematic denial of courses pertaining to TW students. As TW women students, we experience triple oppression: women's, national and class oppression by the educational system that is a component of the overall system of imperialism.

It's difficult for many of us to attend school if childcare facilities aren't provided. And yet at Laney, we are still plagued by inadequate childcare.

Have you checked out the classes that most women take? How many have been admitted into carpentry, welding apprenticeship programs? That relatively few women enter these programs and instead are concentrated into typing, nursing, social science courses really speaks to the jr. colleges' purpose of steering and training women into service-oriented jobs. We aren't belittling these types of jobs; it is the system that classifies women-oriented, service jobs as secondary. We recognize that without them the system would come to a standstill. But we are pointing out that because the majority of women have been channeled into these jobs, equal opportunity in fact does not exist. Under imperialism, women's energy cannot be fully unleashed in all areas of productive work.

In ASU we believe that only by eliminating the material foundation of our oppression can we be truly emancipated and productive. Reforms like Affirmative Action and the ERA can help to open up job opportunities to us and to improve the conditions

of our lives. But reforms, in themselves, cannot give us full and equal rights. Nor can they fundamentally alter the system that is our oppressor. With this perspective, ASU supports the struggles for reforms, bearing in mind that they must be seen in the context of a larger movement for progressive change.

Women's struggles are not isolated events. They are an integral part of the movement for fundamental social change. Ultimately they affect the overall progressive movement. By looking at the women's movement with this broad perspective, we can advance the struggles of women in changing society!

Laney ASU has established a women's caucus so that we can implement this perspective. The purposes of the caucus are to encourage women to join ASU and other progressive organizations, to analyze the women's question, especially the Asian women's question, and to apply in practice the lessons we learn in our study.

Steaming from society's image of women as insipid and inferior, we often find it very difficult to assert ourselves. We often find we risk looking aggressive or unfeminine when we try to conduct serious conversations with men. In this society we are taught and expected to shun heavy discussion and activities, especially politics. Through the caucus, we are vigorously trying to overcome women's hesitancy to engage in political work. By deepening our understanding and providing mutual support, we are building the confidence of women in the caucus.

By clearly linking the women's movement to the broader progressive movement, we hope to raise our political consciousness. As a woman in China remarked about her experiences during the Revolution:

"Plunging into political struggles to brave storms and face the world, women have acquired better understanding of revolutionary principles, raised their political consciousness, and gained experience in class struggle."

In the women's caucus, we hope to learn from the women of China and other TW countries to help develop leadership, solidarity, and support among the women of ASU.

The women's caucus is in the process of formulating plans for an Asian women's course that can address the needs and interests of Asian women on campus. In the class we want to bring out the history and contributions of women that have been neglected by traditional education. In the course, we would also directly speak to the question of triple oppression and concretely try to advance the struggle of women in changing this society.

It has been the women's caucus that has played the leading role in organizing today's IWD program. We have consciously tried to sharpen our understanding of the women's question and become more familiar with the struggles against triple oppression. Through study, practice, and discussion between men and women of the organization in preparation for this day, we have deepened our understanding of women's oppression and particular manifestations of sexism. We saw IWD as being significant for both women and men. Both women and men can gain valuable lessons from IWD and can contribute insights and ideas. Working on IWD and paying attention to the women's question and triple oppression have strengthened and advanced ASU as a whole. We of ASU, recognize the importance of extending ourselves beyond the organization to share the lessons we've learned with all of you, to promote struggle over ideas, and to learn from all of your experiences. In this way, we feel we can advance the movement.

In summary, ever since class society, women have faced oppression. Under today's system of imperialism, TW women suffer from triple oppression--women's, national and



class oppression. Triple oppression affects our lives in the most blatant and subtle ways. It affects our jobs, education, and personal lives.

But women have always struggled against oppression. Today, we commemorate and support those heroic struggles.

Chairman Mao said, "Women hold up half the sky." We recognize that men and women must join together to advance the struggles of women. And that the women's movement is an integral part of the struggle against imperialism and for fundamental change.

ASU encourages all of you, men and women, to become involved in the overall movement. In unity, we all can strive to eradicate all forms of sexism, male chauvanism, and inequity by working to eliminate the material basis for these forms of triple oppression. Let's join together in this spirit to celebrate International Women's Day.

Advance the struggles of women in changing society.  
TOGETHER WE CAN HOLD UP THE SKY!!!