

# A Cluster Analysis of the Reportage “Chinese Women Protest at Gynaecology Checks for Civil Service Jobs” in the Guardian

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## Abstract

Drawing upon Kenneth Burke’s cluster analysis, this article explores how *the guardian* journalist Jonathan Kaiman in his news article “*Chinese women protest at gynecology checks for civil service jobs*” constructs his rhetoric in convincing the audience of the ideology of gender discrimination in the practice of gynecological examination to women civil service applicants in China. The analysis reveals that civil service “examination” in China has been transformed into gynecological “examination”, which is clearly a discrimination against women applicants. In the end, the author argues that the ideology of gender inequality perpetuated by official levels in China is the primary reason why women civil service applicants have to undergo gynecological examinations. Only by eliminating the ideology of gender inequality that exists in official levels can it really enable women to compete with men equally in job application.

**Keywords:** Cluster analysis, Gender discrimination, Gynecological examination, Civil service examinations

## 1. Introduction

Civil service in China is a governmental job that can offer people a stable life (Note 1). A large number of people each year write the civil service examinations in order to have a better job position. According to statistics provided by the State Administration of Civil Service, there are in total 1.5 million people who passed the national civil service examination qualification assessment in 2012 (Note 1). Usually, applicants are able to pass the qualification assessment if their background is qualified for the position they applied for before writing the examinations. On Sunday 25 November 2012, 1.12 million of the 1.5 million who have passed the qualification assessment wrote the civil service examinations 2012 (Note 1). However, the process of applying for civil service examinations for women applicants in Wuhan, Hubei province, was not as smooth as that in other places. According to *the guardian* journalist Jonathan Kaiman’s reportage in his news article “*Chinese women protest at gynecology checks for civil service jobs*” (Note 2, also see Appendix), all women applicants in Wuhan have to undergo gynecological examinations when they apply for the civil service examinations, a practice which has triggered immediate protests by a group of students. According to Kaiman, in the protest, there are “10 university students in winter coats, waved placards near a government office in the central Chinese city Wuhan”, which is substantiated by a picture in Kaiman’s reportage. In the picture, there are seven students standing outside a governmental institution with their arms crossed defensively, and some of them wear oversized diaper-like underpants with the slogan “*No Examination*” on them (See Appendix).

In his reportage, Kaiman drew evidence from different sources in his criticism of the ideology of gender inequality that exists in official levels in China. According to Kaiman, civil service “examination” in China has been transformed into gynecological “examination”, which is clearly a discrimination against women applicants. Thus, drawing upon Kenneth Burke’s cluster analysis, I will explore how Kaiman constructs his rhetoric in convincing the audience of perpetuation of gender discrimination in Chinese civil service examinations.

## 2. Method

As one of the key methods of dramatism, cluster analysis was developed by Kenneth Burke to identify the repetitive nature of a rhetor’s associational logic and propensities (Blakesley, 2002, p. 103). The repetitive use of terms that convey similar semantic meanings is what Burke calls “terministic screens” of the rhetor. In other words, the terms we use not only affect the focus of our observations but in reverse, the focus of our observations implicates the particular terminologies we are inclined to use (Burke, 1989).

Cluster analysis examines what elements a communicator links together to convey a particular worldview or ideology by asking “what goes with what?”, “what implies what?”, and “what follows what?” (Blakesley, 2002, p.104). For this end, cluster analysis consists of three steps in analysis. The first step is to identify the key terms based on the principles of frequency and intensity to; the second is to identify the clusters around the key terms; and the last step is to interpret the meanings of the clusters by studying the specific relationships of the terms in each cluster, as well as the relationships between the clusters. In the following section, I will conduct a cluster analysis of how Kaiman’s reportage is being persuasive in “coaxing” the attitude of the audience to agree with him in the criticism of gender discrimination in civil service examinations in China.

### 3. Analysis

In this part, I will analyze how the key terms and their clusters interact with each other in communicating Kaiman’s criticism of gender discrimination that exists in the civil service job application. There are four key terms we have identified. Respectively, *examinations*, *protest*, *gender discrimination*, and *governmental officials*. As for the clusters around the key terms, we will exemplify them together with the analysis of the key terms below.

#### 3.1 Key Term: *Examination*

In this reportage, the term *examination* is endowed with both literal and implicit meanings. The literal meaning of *examination* simply refers to the national civil service examinations; while the implicit meaning refers to the gynecological examinations. It is the implicit meaning of *examination* that stirred up the protest.

The clusters around the key term *examination* include *civil service*, *require*, *requirement*, *regulations*, *test*, *admission standards*, *admission exam scores*, and *practice*. In order to achieve the persuasive effects, the reporter provided any examples that represent the “representative anecdotes” (Blakesley, 2002, p. 97). For instance, in describing the anecdote associated with *admission standards*, Kaiman quoted the story of some twenty women in China who once shaved their hair to protest against the discriminatory college admission standard. Similarly, he also quoted the response from the education ministry on the necessity of demanding *higher admission exam scores* from female students. Thus, the term *practice* is generalized to refer to the action of demanding *higher admission exam scores* from female students.

The god term (the literal meaning of *examination*) and the devil terms (any type of unreasonable requirements for women applicants) clustered around the key term *examination* reveal that women applicants face more external conditions and restrictions compared with male applicants when they are simultaneously competing for the same job position. The unequal requirements for women applicants reflect clearly the ideology of gender inequality in Chinese civil service examinations.

#### 3.2 Key Term: *Protest*

The term *protest* is the most frequently used term in this reportage. It describes how the women applicants for civil service jobs in China show their dissatisfaction with the official’s policy of enforcing women applicants to undergo gynecological examinations as part of their application.

The terms that cluster around the key term *protest* include those of activities, such as demonstration, waving placards, standing up, demanding change, arms crossed defensively, wear giant underpants, struck with a red line, undergo, provoke, call on, drop, and suppressed; and those of characters, such as demonstrators, activists, and activism groups. The two types of clusters around the key term *protest* reveal the resistance to physical threat. In association with this story, the journalist also provides us the story of how the Beijing-based non-profit social justice group Yirenping Center – one of the protest representatives – had openly opposed gynecological examinations earlier in 2012. According to the reportage, the Center has sent an open letter to governmental agencies including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security; however, it had received no reply.

As the academic meaning of *examination* is ultimately transformed into corrupt, invasive medical procedure, the protest against transformed examination is likewise no longer simply about civic rights (guarantee of fair application of laws and processes). Instead, it is about the fundamental attitudes toward women in Chinese society which perpetuate inequality in both practice and principle.

#### 3.3 Key Term: *Gender Inequality*

Although the term *gender inequality* does not appear as frequent as *examination* and *protest* in this reportage, it is significant in terms of the intensity of the meaning this term shows. According to the journalist, gynecological examination is a concrete representation of gender discrimination against women when they are equally competent for applying for the same job positions as men do.

As for the clusters around *gender inequality*, the journalist employs *gender discrimination* in his rhetoric. However, a variety of other terms also, in Burke’s (1984, p. 322) terms, “coax an attitude” on the

audience toward the protest. For instance, we can find terms such as *sexually transmitted diseases*, *malignant tumors*, *widespread*, which are related to diseases; terms such as *menstrual cycles*, *private parts*, *lack of female public toilets*, which are related to the biological functioning of women's bodies; and terms that indicate the administrative policies, such as *deep-rooted*, *job discrimination*, *fairer ratio*, *discriminatory college admissions standards*, and *higher admissions exam scores*. In relation to the cluster *lack of female public toilets*, Kaiman also provided us the story of the protest against the lack of female public toilets in Chinese southern city Guangzhou. It is particularly in reading this story that the problem of gender discrimination overwhelms the readers; and it is by introducing this story in relation to the protest that Kaiman has established firmly his credibility on the part of the readers.

### 3.4 Key Term: *Government*

The last key term we have identified is the term *government*. It is obvious in this reportage that the journalist is criticizing Chinese officials' gender discrimination in implementing gynecological examinations to women applicants of civil service examinations. According to Kaiman, gynecological examinations have triggered a number of protests nation-wide, and it has been the time for the officials to change the practice. Meanwhile, the journalist deploys a variety of clusters in supporting his criticism of the unfair treatment to women applicants for the civil service examinations.

In this reportage, the journalist adopts the terms clusters such as (provincial) government office, institutionalized, government departments, government agencies, officials, university departments, education ministry, and civil service examiners. The clusters around the key term *government* manifest that gender discrimination is universal in almost all levels of officials starting from university departments. In addition, the clusters impress the readers that the officials are the sources of the issue of gender discrimination in China.

## 4. Discussion

In the previous sections, we have conducted a cluster analysis of the key terms and the clusters Kaiman employs in delineating his criticism of the practice of gynecological examinations for women civil service examination applicants in China. However, ignoring the relationship between the key terms and the clusters would not present us a panorama of how the journalist establishes his rhetorical act in his news article. Therefore, in the following sections, we will analyze how the key terms interact with each other and how the clusters relate to each other in facilitating Kaiman's criticism of the gynecological examinations.

### 4.1 Relationship between Key Terms

In the analysis above, we have identified four key terms. Respectively, *examination*, *protest*, *gender inequality*, and *government*. The key terms reveal that the invasive gynecological examinations designed the officials' deep-rooted gender discrimination triggered women applicants' protest against this disrespectful conduct. Thus, the deployment of each of the key terms in the reportage helps the readers see clearly the inherent relationship between the officials' discriminatory examination policy against women applicants and the prejudice against them in reality. When the journalist quotes Crothall's comments that civil service examiners can even avoid the practice of gynecological examinations to women applicants as there is a high demand for women civil servants, it is even more obvious that gynecological examinations are an absurd obstacle designed deliberately for women applicants.

### 4.2 Relationship between Clusters of Key Terms

In addition to the analysis of the key terms, we have also examined the clusters around the key terms. As is analyzed, the clusters around the first key term *examination* offer us a view that women applicants encounter more constraints in applying for civil service examinations in an equal competition with male applicants. As for the analysis of clusters around the second key term *protest*, it provides us a view of the means by which the protest was performed. When it comes to the analysis of the clusters around the third key term *gender inequality*, we found that women are being prejudiced against, repulsed, and ignored in various aspects in China. The clusters that portray the officials' reactions to altering the practice of gender discrimination revealed ultimately that the officials are the genuine causes of the perpetuation and practice of gender discrimination against women applicants. Thus, there is a transformation of the meaning of examination, i.e. from being an educational procedure to being a medical procedure. In other words, examiners whose jobs are monitoring civil service examinations ultimately turned to be examiners of the invasive medical examinations. Along with the transformation of the meaning of examinations, the nature of the transformation unfolds by itself – an apparent discrimination against women applicants.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article, although it seems that the journalist Kaiman is concerned with the reportage on the protest against

the gynecological examinations, it is in fact criticizing the perpetuation of gender discrimination in Chinese officials. The cluster analysis of this news article reveals that despite the fact that the gynecological examination is the subject matter of Kaiman's news article, a series of other issues that are of gender discrimination nature also come to the forefront. For instance, the protest against the lack of public toilets for women in southern Chinese city Guangzhou, and the discriminatory college admissions standards and requirements in some universities in China. Thus, the cluster analysis demonstrates that Kaiman's coverage of the protest aims not only to report on the issue of gender discrimination in the Chinese civil service examination, but to create a concern for the equal opportunity women applicants should be given in competing for job positions with men.

### References

- Blakesley, D. (2002). *The Elements of Dramatism*. Longman.  
Burke, K. (1989). *On Symbols and Society*. Ed. Gusfield, Joseph R. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

### Notes

- Note 1. Associated reportage on China's civil service examinations in 2012 can be found at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-11/26/content\\_15956436.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-11/26/content_15956436.htm).  
Note 2. This reportage can be found at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/28/china-women-gynaecology-job-test> (also see Appendix).

### Appendix (also see Note 2)

#### “Chinese women protest at gynaecology checks for civil service jobs”

Invasive tests, gender inequality and job discrimination are rife in China, but female activism is increasing  
Jonathan Kaiman in Beijing  
theguardian.com, Wednesday 28 November 2012 16.19 GMT



Figure 1: Chinese students in Wuhan, Hubei province, protest against invasive gynaecological examinations imposed on all women applying to join the civil service. Photograph: ndnews

It was a modest protest: about 10 university students in winter coats, waving placards near a government office in the central Chinese city Wuhan.

Yet the reason for the demonstration was shocking. The students were protesting against a requirement that women applying for civil service jobs must undergo invasive gynaecological examinations.

The demonstrators in Wuhan have joined a growing chorus of Chinese activists who, despite the government's hard line on public protests, have shone a harsh light on China's deep-rooted gender inequality and job discrimination.

"Gender discrimination is very widespread and in many senses institutionalised in China," said Geoff Crothall, communications director for the Hong Kong-based China Labour Bulletin. "What's been increasing in the past few years is the number of women in social and civil society activism groups who are standing up and demanding change."

A picture of the protest on Monday, which appeared in the state-run Legal Daily newspaper, shows seven women standing outside a provincial government office, arms crossed defensively. They wear what look like giant underpants, each emblazoned with the Chinese character meaning "examine" – struck through with a red line.

The regulations that provoked the protest have been in force since 2005, and require women applying for civil service jobs to undergo invasive testing for sexually transmitted diseases and malignant tumours. Applicants have also been asked to provide information on their menstrual cycles.

"Through this demonstration, we call on government departments to drop the examinations," one of the protest organisers told the Legal Daily.

In March, the Beijing-based non-profit social justice group Yirenping Center sent an open letter to government agencies including the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security protesting against the gynaecological examinations, but it received no reply.

"Sexually transmitted diseases can't be transmitted at work, so we think it's unnecessary to test for them – and the tumour examinations, these are unnecessary as well," said Huang Yizhi, a lawyer with the centre. "If I'm going to the hospital in order to find work, is it really necessary to examine so many things, even those relating to my extremely private parts?"

Over the summer, activists in the southern city of Guangzhou protested against a lack of female public toilets by "occupying" mens' stalls. Officials in Guangzhou announced that they would adopt a fairer ratio for new public toilets, but similar protests in Beijing were suppressed.

Elsewhere, about 20 women across the country shaved their heads in a quiet protest against discriminatory college admissions standards. Some university departments have demanded higher admissions exam scores for women than men, ostensibly to balance enrolment ratios. The education ministry approved the practice "in view of considerations of national interest", it said.

On Sunday, an all-time record 1.12 million people took the notoriously difficult civil service examination, according to the China Daily; 150,000 more than last year. As China's college-educated workforce grows, secure, high-status jobs such as government posts are becoming increasingly competitive.

"Civil service examiners can often get away with these absurd requirements, because there's such a high demand for civil service jobs," said Crothall.



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