

# THF Lecture Series

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# FEMALE LEADERSHIP EDUCATION

Empowerment For Change

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## **Introduction**

On 4 November, 2015, a highly significant political event occurred. Mr. Justin Trudeau introduced the members of his government cabinet to the Canadian people. The whole world sat up and noticed a remarkable achievement. Half of Prime Minister Trudeau's cabinet is female, thus proving it is possible to have representatives of half your population take on leadership positions in government. When asked why he thought it was so important to include so many women, Mr. Trudeau answered, "Because it's 2015."

Yet, just 3 years earlier, on the afternoon of 9 October, 2012, a young Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, was shot and nearly killed for having the audacity to believe that all girls should get an education. The contrast between continents could not be starker. It is a great tribute to Malala that, after her life-threatening ordeal, she continues to be one of the world's strongest advocate for female education.

Despite the threat to her life, one could say that Malala is lucky to have been born into a family that valued her. She could well have been missing! It has been estimated that there are more than 100 million missing women in Asia. The Nobel Laureate in Economics, Dr. Amartya Sen wrote that the selective abortion of female fetuses and female infanticide due to a traditional preference for boys in two of the world's most-populated countries, namely India and China, has led to that estimate.

He also listed other inequities for the surviving women. Of the girls who are born, their long-term survival rates are lower because of unequal access to quality care and nutritious food. They get less access to education, ownership of land and other means of production. Within the family, they take the much larger burden of the chores but far fewer of the benefits. Most alarming of all, women are often the victims of violence and physical abuse perpetrated by their own family members. They continue to suffer the cycle of disadvantage for women in much of Asia.

At the same time, an IMF report shows that Asia is also a region that is experiencing tremendous economic growth. As the region prospers, it is imperative that its citizens develop the required skills to fully engage in a rapidly transforming economic landscape. Thus we should ensure that Asian women are not "left behind" from, nor excluded from shaping, the positive growth and developments in the region.

## **What Is To Be Done?**

So what is to be done? We know that the solution lies in education and cultural and political movements that will transform society so that the inequalities that have been and are still faced by women in Asia can be overcome. To do this we need to have more young women in Asia equipped with the skills that will empower them to change their societies.

## **Education and its goals**

Higher education should not just be an escalator for personal success for the individual woman. It should increase her capacity to transform her wider society. As Mr. Nelson Mandela famously said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." We should educate Asian women to change their world.

But first, what should be the goal of education? Professor Gregory Prince wrote in *Teach Them to Challenge Authority: Educating for Healthy Societies*, that education should build well-rounded, free-thinking individuals and communities that are economically productive, culturally creative, socially equitable and supportive of human rights. To build healthy communities, it is essential for its citizens to have the capacity and willingness to challenge authority and convention in constructive and appropriate ways. These citizens will generate innovations and changes in their communities that help to LIMIT exploitation, authoritarianism, environmental degradation, racism, selfishness and oppression of minorities, including women.

What kind of education should we explore to achieve these goals? There are existing universities in Asia where there are female students. Unfortunately, most of them educate students to become professionals but not necessarily to become leaders with the social conscience to make positive change. Moreover, in these co-educational universities, the opportunities for female students to take up leadership positions are limited. A study that was conducted at a public university in an Asian country showed that the 24 of the presidents of 25 student organisations were male while the percentage of female students in the university was over 60%!

In all women's universities, all student organisation leaders are women! In their own women-only space, women can more easily and consciously engage in discourse to overcome gender conditioning and develop self-confidence to make their own decisions. More importantly, data from the US show that women graduates from women's universities enter graduate, medical schools and get PhD's at twice the rate of their counterparts who graduate from co-ed institutions. They are 1.5 times more likely to be entrepreneurs and actually earn at least 25% more.

### **Liberal arts and sciences**

One way to reach these lofty goals of education is via a liberal arts and sciences education. This mode of education is a critical component to empowering women in building a strong society because it emphasises the development of students' capacity for critical thinking, rather than simply introducing students to different forms of knowledge. This is the most effective way to educate students to act responsibly and effectively when challenging authority and convention in order to bring about change.

What is a liberal education? How does a liberal arts and sciences curriculum provide the basis for the kind of graduates we hope will go on to make changes?

The liberal arts and sciences curriculum exposes students to a broad education in the types of knowledge, thinking and tools of major disciplines in social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. With this broad education, graduates will become informed, flexible thinkers and life-long learners with a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and experiences that will enable them to reason and to make ethical choices, to recognize the importance of the past and work towards a better future.

Thus we should seek to educate, train and cultivate the next generation of Asian women in a university that blends the best of a liberal arts education with regionally relevant and substantive leadership courses. It should aim to improve the

lives of students as well as create a cadre of women leaders who can advance social, political and economic development in the region.

### **Women's liberal arts university to empower women as catalysts for change**

Women's higher education is a confirmation of the belief that women have something valuable to contribute as full members of society. Their energies, talents, and experiences are resources that all societies can draw upon and benefit from. An all-women's institution will strive to create opportunities for women so that its students can reach their fullest potential. This is a powerful orientation; such a university can produce empowered graduates who use their knowledge, self-esteem, and leadership skills to advance women's empowerment and contribute to social progress.

National prosperity itself hinges on a society's ability to benefit from the full participation of its women in every aspect of life. Full participation includes having full freedom to walk when and where you choose, to pursue realistic career options in even traditionally male-dominated fields, to speak one's mind without fear of retribution, or to make decisions about one's personal goals and ambitions.

Women, as leaders, also often bring greater attention, and unique perspectives, to fundamental social problems, such as lack of prenatal care, educational inequality, domestic violence, corruption and nepotism, poverty cycles, and hypocritical legal structures. Although certainly women have different viewpoints and a range of experiences even among themselves, a women's university helps solidify these shared experiences so students can freely and thoroughly explore these issues, and together they can work to address them.

The advantages of a women-only education include greater academic, mentorship, and internship opportunities; a close-knit, supportive atmosphere for learning and self-discovery; exposure to strong female role-models in faculty, staff, and classmates; absence of male distractions, interruptions, and gender entitlements; greater confidence in discussing issues that affect women or speaking out in general; greater attention on women's and social issues; an increased level of safety on campus and very strong alumni connections.

### **Examples of successful alumnae**

Thus an all-women's university is still relevant and there are many examples of successful Asian graduates from women's universities. Han Myeong-sook, the former Prime Minister of Korea, is a graduate of Ehwa Womans Univeristy in Seoul, the largest women's university in the world. Asian graduates from Smith College, the largest women's college in the US include Sherry Rehman, a Pakistan National Assembly member, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, a Pakistani journalist and filmmaker who won an academy Award for her documentary, *Saving Face*, in 2012 and Xie Xide, a Chinese physicist who was president of Fudan University. Kavita Ramdas, former President and CEO of the India Ford Foundation is also a graduate from Mount Holyoke College, another women's institution. In the US, Hillary Clinton, Madeline Albright, Laura Tyson are all graduates from women's colleges.

### **Possible Curriculum**

The advantages of a liberal arts university exclusively for women in Asia are quite clear. A possible liberal arts and sciences curriculum for such an institution could look like the following.

#### *Mission*

The university prepares women of high ability and potential to meet society's challenges and effect positive change through an innovative, rigorous curriculum that encompasses the liberal arts, sciences, and professional training to develop thoughtful, ethical leaders.

#### *Institutional Vision*

The university's unique institutional features help ensure that students receive a top quality education that dramatically expands opportunities for international exposure, encourages students to identify and strengthen their academic and personal talents, and challenges them to envision their own role in leading positive change in the world. In addition to formal courses in the classrooms, students will also learn from living in residential housing as well as off-campus experiential learning opportunities.

Our students will graduate with depth of knowledge of one field of study, breadth of knowledge across disciplines, professional skills, leadership skills and be empowered to make a difference.

Thus the students will be educated with a new, impactful model of liberal education that combines the best of both East and West and graduate as flexible, critical, strong communicators with multi-disciplinary perspectives and responsible global citizens.

#### *Principles*

In order for the university to provide a liberal arts education and a vibrant academic, residential, and social community for talented young women from diverse backgrounds where they can achieve their fullest intellectual and personal potential, the curriculum will be designed based on evidence drawing on research in student-learning behavior, cognitive psychology, and brain development to inform curriculum design and educational strategies that will most effectively facilitate student-learning.

The curriculum will focus on student learning and teaching that enables the mastery of analysis and expression. It will engage students in dynamic, interactive and interdisciplinary learning, and will foster the invaluable intellectual habits of curiosity, creativity, critical (including self-critical) independence of mind, the advanced understanding of one field, the ability to move nimbly from one field to another, and the proper regard for the achievements of others, including those living in the remote past and in distant civilizations.

The university will include multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry. Students will be aware of the current situation of the world as well as the current limits of knowledge which need to be constantly extended. They will be scientifically literate, with focus on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry such that they understand the different disciplines and the dialogue between them. Most courses

will be both theoretical and practical as learning has to be applied to understand and solve real-world problems in ethical and responsible ways.

The siting of the university in Asia means that across different fields of study, the curriculum will incorporate relevant Asian histories, societies, cultures, politics, economies, and contributions. It will be natural and given that many courses will offer comparisons both between different parts of Asia and between Asia and Western countries. Students will discuss and debate these similarities and dissimilarities as well as the complex and varied phenomenon of modern Asia.

This education will be unique for women in Asia. Its breadth, interdisciplinary approach and attention to individual students will produce graduates capable of taking the lead in the solution of complex problems of many kinds. The institutional mission to cultivate women leaders who can contribute to social progress in the region will underpin the purpose of students' study and academic ambitions.

The university will be a living and learning community of common endeavor. Although pursuing different special interests, students and faculty will be involved in the same project of learning and learning for the purpose of informing one's activism in contributing to the evolution of society, the betterment of life opportunities for others, and the advancement of knowledge and truth.

#### *Curriculum Design Principles*

The design of the curriculum will be as clear and simple as possible, so that students understand the overall structure of their education, as well as the place of smaller components within it.

Degrees offered will be responsive to the academic and career ambition of students. Degrees will reflect student demand and regional employment needs. The University will also coordinate degree requirements to ensure that students can effectively pursue graduate professional degrees globally.

An academic year will be comprised of two semesters. The average semester load will be four courses. This will allow students to read more deeply in each course, than would an average semester load of five courses or under a trimester system.

The first two years of the program will give students broad exposure to multiple disciplines as an educational foundation on which to build and contextualize the more specialized work of the third and fourth years.

Students will pursue a Major, which will allow them to explore one discipline in depth, and to engage in more sophisticated learning and research. A Major is likely to comprise ten to twelve (of the total 32) courses, or approximately one-third the curriculum.

Students will engage in independent research and writing, which will take different forms in different fields. Research work, demonstrating independent thinking, will continue throughout the four-year program, at increasingly challenging levels, culminating in a senior capstone project.

Courses will incorporate intensive writing components that demand significant written work and include detailed, personal feedback.

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Students will take leadership courses to develop a broad range of skills, including: financial literacy, negotiation, team building, public speaking, computer literacy, organizational management, and social entrepreneurship, among others.

Students will participate in experiential learning, involving internship programs in the community or with companies, regionally or globally, to build on the academic, social and leadership skills gained, to provide opportunities for student employment as well as enhance the university's reputation for educational excellence.

### *Pedagogical Principles*

The university's pedagogy will be as important as its curriculum. The university will provide an opportunity to develop new modes of instruction and learning, with the use, for example, of case studies, service-learning and innovative lab exercises.

Students must take much responsibility for learning. They will be expected, with advice and within parameters, to find areas for enquiry and research within each course, as well as to choose appropriate electives. They will also be encouraged to reflect upon, critically evaluate, make connections between and build from what they have learnt.

The role of the professor will be to stimulate interest, and to guide and facilitate the student's learning. Professors will be expected to elicit both oral and written work from students, and to comment constructively, critically and in detail on it. They will be available to students for consultation outside the class, and will join in informal discussion with them round the campus. Faculty will be involved in research, some of which will include the collaborative involvement of students.

The cultivation of the intellectual and moral qualities required of future civic leaders require that most, if not all, of the teaching be in small seminar-like classes, where students are encouraged, indeed required, to discuss and debate, and interact with professors and classmates in a collegial but critical way. Students' active participation will be encouraged in an atmosphere of mutual learning and trust.

Learning in this university will take place outside as well as inside the class. Professors will take their students for field visits, meet with them in their offices, engage in conversations around the campus and over dinner, and host meetings with and talks from visiting experts. Annual convocations will provide another avenue for ungraded learning beyond the formal curriculum.

Courses will include the experiences, contributions and relevance of women and Asian peoples to the development of history, politics, science, art, literature, and other fields.

### **Objectives**

Thus a graduate from this university will be expected to know and be able to:

#### *Demonstrate a Breadth of Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World:*

By taking courses in the humanities and fine arts, natural sciences and mathematics, and social and behavioral sciences, students develop an understanding of the nature of human experience—its complexity, its diversity of expression, and the conditions which limit and liberate it. By engaging with big questions and problems in the real

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world, both contemporary and enduring, students will connect learning in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences to the real world where business, politics, economics, social structures and the environment intercede.

### *Establish a Depth of Understanding:*

By studying a particular subject (the major) in depth, students develop the ability to make informed, independent judgments.

### *Critically Think, Inquire and Analyze, Communicate, Collaborate and Problem Solve Using leadership level Literacy and Numeracy Skills:*

By comparing and evaluating the ideas of others and by participating in various styles of research, students develop their capacities for critical judgment. By exploring mathematical and other scientific systems, students acquire the ability to think in abstract, symbolic ways and at the same time have the quantitative skills for effective communication. Through extensive writing and oral communication, students acquire the ability to express their ideas effectively and to persuade others. By working on team projects and taking a capstone integrative course, students gain skills in teamwork and problem solving.

### *Think Integratively and Divergently from Multiple Disciplines and Cultural Perspectives:*

By integrating the perspectives of several disciplines, students gain an understanding of the powers and limits of each field and the kind of contribution each can make; students learn how to understand real world phenomena from different perspectives. By learning about their own cultures and placing these in comparative perspective, students appreciate their own and other cultures, and recognize how their own thoughts and actions are influenced by their culture and history.

### *Exhibit Personal, Social and Ethical Responsibility and Action:*

By undertaking social responsibility and examining the ethical implications of knowledge, students learn to evaluate the effects of actions and social policies and thus are empowered to take responsibility for making the world a better place. Students who graduate from this university do not just have a degree but also have an obligation to use their knowledge and skills to engage with their local and global communities to improve life not just for themselves but also for others.

### **Structure**

In keeping with the general curriculum design and pedagogical principles and to achieve the objectives outlined above, the university will offer a high quality and interdisciplinary liberal arts curriculum, one of the first of its kind in Asia.

The curriculum will consist of a four-year, 32-course undergraduate program where the first two years will combine broad academic exposure to the humanities and natural and social sciences with experiential learning. The final two years will involve further in-depth study within an academic discipline that will be declared as the Major.



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The number of Majors will be small in order to ensure that each is adequately staffed and excellently taught. Staffing Majors with a relatively small faculty will pose challenges in terms of organization. Structures will need to encourage cooperation between different areas and to hire wisely and efficiently. It is envisioned that faculty will not be affiliated with departments but with divisions (e.g., Natural Sciences, Humanities, Social Science, etc.)

Within each Major, students will be able to select their courses from the following categories:

- (a) Literature, Women's Studies, Asian Studies,
- (b) Politics, Philosophy and Economics,
- (c) Biological/Physical/Chemical Sciences
- (d) Psychology, Sociology, Geography, History
- (e) Engineering, Mathematics, Physics

All students will complete the Core Curriculum of 8 courses, comprising two each from the Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences and Quantitative Literacy. Students will learn the types of knowledge, thinking processes, values, and analytical tools of the major disciplines. This structure provides the opportunity for such things as the use of a cohort model and allows for a more spiraled curriculum in which dominant themes (such as leadership, ethics, etc.) can be systematically woven into the curriculum as students progress through their studies.

The curriculum will also require the fulfillment of other key components, including:

- a first-year compulsory seminar to obtain an introduction to university studies (1 course)
- a leadership component to develop wide-ranging skills necessary for leadership (3 courses)
- a sport or art component to develop holistic learning of the mind, body, and soul (1 course)
- one "challenge course" on an ungraded or pass/fail basis to foster risk-taking (1 course)

The university can also explore offering joint degree programs where a liberal arts BA degree is combined with a professional degree (possibly with partner institutions). Possible combinations include:

- BA + Medicine (MD)
- BA + Business (MBA)
- BA + Engineering (MSc)
- BA + Law (JD or LLB)

### **Complementary Institutional Framework**

Students will learn in an intimate and diverse residential community. Residential life promotes multicultural understanding and tolerance, after-class exploration of course

materials and experiences that create life-long friendships and social networks. Students also have better access to a wide variety of on-campus cultural, political, and intellectual events.

Students will have multiple opportunities for extra-curricular activities: Student experiences will be enriched by experiences outside of the classroom. Emphasis is placed on Community Service, Sports and Physical Education, and Student Clubs and Organizations:

There will be a compulsory **First Year “Bridge to College”** seminar that provides an introduction to the university, its history, mission and values. Students will learn what makes the university a unique institution in Asia. Excellence, leadership and service are the themes of the course because they are at the center of this university’s education. The course will enable students to make the academic transition to university level thinking, reading, and writing as well as the transition to a new community on campus.

Examples of such courses might include the following:

- The Self in Society: Thinking, Reading, and Writing Critically - A writing-intensive course
- The Past and Present: Asia and the rest of the World Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century -
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Media Laboratory for Communicating Effectively
- The World Today: Examining Contemporary Issues
- Women and Society
- Exploring Great Literature of Asia and the World

Other courses in Philosophy, Religion, Psychology, Sociology, or Multicultural Studies may also provide experiences, which allow students to encounter new and thought-provoking aspects of the world and to see them from a variety of perspectives. In addition, courses in Fine Arts, Social Sciences and Laboratory Sciences can help students understand how the methodologies of different disciplines provide ways to process and organize information about the world.

For the leadership component, there will also be **“Bridges to Employment” Leadership Seminars**, a wide-ranging set of courses taught by faculty or visiting executives or industry leaders to link the academic work with practical knowledge and skills and training. Students will learn about contemporary events and the movers and shakers in various fields as well as receive training, coaching, and mentoring experience all in a dedicated course.

Examples of such courses might include:

- Women and Financial Independence
- Introduction to Business Fundamentals
- Public Speaking 101
- Electronic Communications and Online Presence

- Social Entrepreneurship Practicum
- Negotiations for Work and Life
- Life Cycle of a Start-up
- Financial Literacy 101 / Interpreting Financial Statements
- Principles of Investing
- Blogging, Opinions, and the Web
- Media Engagement and Management
- Business Ethics / Corporate Social Responsibility
- contemporary developments, such as: Urban Planning in Asia, Chinese Renewable Technology Development, International Capital Markets, etc:

In the final year, an integrated **Capstone or Honours “Course to Career”** will be compulsory. The capstone course should help students integrate the courses and experiences of the liberal arts program. This may be “skills oriented” or “experiential”. The skills-oriented course will have the threads of *critical thinking* and *technology* woven into its structure. An experiential course will focus on introducing the theme of *service* or aspects of *leadership*. The course should incorporate a service-learning component and allow students to demonstrate their ability to understand themselves and others, develop and practice ethical standards, work well with diverse people, and be willing and able to take action. Possible capstone courses can be a major project course, a portfolio-building course, a multiple-project course, or a field experience or internship program.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, an all-women’s tertiary institution that focuses exclusively on educating women for leadership and empowering them for change would be important in Asia. However, setting up such an institution would face many challenges. The primary one would be funding resources and obtaining a location with the infrastructure that can support the educational and residential programs outlined above. These include but are not limited to reliable electricity supply and communication facilities as well good schools for the children of staff and faculty. Finally, the success of the institution would require strong clear governance and capable leaders and financial sustainability.

### Notes

This paper is based partially on documents that have been prepared for a proposed women’s university in Asia.

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