

Reviewing Conduct Books as Feminist Rhetorical Devices for Agency Reforms

Florence Elizabeth Bacabac

Abstract: *This essay extends the possibility that historical conduct books encourage women to work from within to enact agency reforms, particularly to survive the hostilities they faced in first-century China as well as exterminate misogynistic attacks in medieval Europe. With two translated works spanning across socio-historical milieus, Ban Zhao's Lessons for Women (first-century China) and Christine de Pizan's The Book of the Three Virtues (fifteenth-century France) reveal systematic approaches for ethical praxis that may have only been used to gain agentive powers for women through rhetorical education, contributing to the ontogenesis of pro-feminist movements.*

Keywords: *conduct books for women, feminist rhetorical devices, agency reforms, symbolic identifications*

The attempt to provide standardized behaviors through etiquette books or advice literatures oftentimes endorse masculine hegemony and patriarchal values, and any effort to dismantle a deeply entrenched paradigmatic framework through these conduct texts in favor of feminist scholarship remains ambiguous (Delaney, 188; Peary 220; Winch 359). Prescribed forms of social behavior found in conduct book rhetoric across cultural landscapes seem to promote dominant forms of gendered roles to the forefront, making anti-establishment reforms to attain sexual revolution suspect. After all, how might sponsoring fixed surveillance and/or policing normative choices to other women be considered feminist? How do these forms of rhetorical practice challenge conventional expectations and gender norms? Traditional conduct manuals for women might be problematic for twenty-first century feminism unless new rhetorical interpretations emerge to bridge incongruous gaps with time- and place-specific evaluations of rhetorical motives. As teachers and researchers of rhetoric, we need to keep revisiting rhetorical texts, including conduct books for women, to discover new angles, enable new meanings, and redirect new maps toward an enriched feminist rhetoric scholarship.

In this vein, I posit that scholars need to review traditional conduct books as cultural reflections with distinctive motives and re-examine how they

promote women's rhetoric through extraordinary, albeit illusive, measures. Hui Wu recounts the challenges of studying rhetorical history based on dominant "established interpretive frameworks" (171), and in keeping with disciplinary progress, I assert that revising prevalent impressions of conduct manuals relative to their socio-historical contexts will help counterbalance singular views of sexism. Embedded in this supposition are questions about women's rhetoric from a social frame of reference by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch:

What were the spaces in which women chose/were permitted to speak? What were their fora, their platforms, the contexts of their rhetorical performances? Who were their audiences? What were their concerns? What tools for interaction did they use? How did they construct their arguments? What were the impacts and consequences of their rhetorical performances? How were they trained? How did they convey legacies of action? (100)

Since conduct books by women demonstrate the development of a gendered theory of rhetoric (Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric* 42), I have chosen this genre for my analysis to support the questions above and recognize the unique histories, similarities, differences, and/or intentions of cultural codes from a globalized feminist perspective. In order to treat "globality as a core analytic" (Royster and Kirsch 110) and shift away from exclusive Western/imperialist views of rhetorical performance, it is necessary to compare two rhetorical texts that span across socio-historical milieus of both Eastern and Western traditions. Particularly, because no known influential linkages bind the rhetorical traditions of ancient China to classical or medieval West (Kennedy 167), any comparative rhetorical interpretations from those texts would yield compelling results. For this reason, I chose to compare two translated works from first-century China's *Lessons for Women* by Ban Zhao and fifteenth-century France's *The Book of the Three Virtues* by Christine de Pizan. Evident similarities and/or differences drawn from their works would prompt analytical readings that focus on either universal traits or divergent histories, respectively.

Using them as focused analytical samplings, I reposition the transformative power of historical code manuals from documents that endorse gender-complicit rhetorical devices in favor of the status quo to those that help women work from within to enact agency reforms. Three sources of identification illustrate how Ban and Christine argued for women's education to accomplish distinct rhetorical motives, particularly to equip women with instructions to survive domestic hostility in first-century China and exterminate misogynistic attacks against them in medieval France. Contextually, a married Chinese woman must learn how to fulfill her obligations under harsh conditions to

serve her family and her husband: “The woman should devote herself wholeheartedly to her child and husband without complaints and make the home clean and cheerful” (Lu 90). Or a medieval woman in Europe, stripped of any intellectual and moral equality with the opposite sex, must learn to accept a generalized negative image of a depraved miscreant, one “who reads on the surface only or who distorts the author’s intention” (qtd. in McCormick 151). In all this, conduct books may be re-inscribed as feminist rhetorical practices that attempt to strategically redress women’s honorable stature in the face of oppression.

When it comes to feminist rhetorical history, the implications of new analytical research offer more opportunities for scholars to participate in remapping, reconstructing, and revising the terrains of existing work to empower feminist practices. Patricia Bizzell notes the importance of Linda Ferreira-Buckley’s advocacy for revisionist history dependent on traditional archives (7), and Carol Mattingly’s *Appropriate[ing] Dress* willingly examines alternative ways in nineteenth-century America to rectify inequity (3). Reviewing how texts contribute to the influx of new knowledge will carve out more openings for new rhetorical insights, though this does not mean established readings of canonical works need to be distorted nor devalued in favor of newer interpretations, opposing views, or neglected authors. However, the ambit to which rhetorical exercises, such as revisiting traditional texts, is performed will simply provide other possibilities for extending feminist histories that are already inscribed in rhetorical anthologies. Citing Joan Kelly-Gadol, Wu explains the trajectory of feminist history writing as one that “restore[s] women to history and... history to women” (173), and exploring uncharted territories or alternative interpretations will challenge/alleviate women’s rhetoric at large. New critical works will only prove that for each traditional archival work, historians of feminist rhetoric may not be totally done with history yet until relevant methodological approaches to research has been exhausted and repositioned its place within rhetorical history altogether.

I will begin this essay by cultivating possible angular shifts on feminist rhetorical practices to frame my argument; explain the historical background of both texts and sources of identification to connect the dots; present thematic readings of two translated conduct books to recast alternative rhetorical motives consistent across socio-cultural and historical conditions; and conclude with the larger implications of recognizing conduct books as feminist rhetorical devices enacting agency reforms. Finally, this essay hopes to strengthen its purpose of inviting global/feminist rhetorical scholars to challenge dominant rhetorical interpretations of conduct literatures that might not only encourage myopic/anachronistic frameworks of analysis, but also subvert the

development of their rhetorical foundations as opposed to advancing them as legitimately transformative and rhetorically feminist.

Angular Shifts on Feminist Rhetorical Practices

The history of women's rhetoric, according to Andrea Lunsford, is one filled with gaps, silences, and erasures that need to be retold and reclaimed (3-8). Women rhetoricians and historiographers who pave new rhetorical spaces for women's rhetoric continually grow, develop, and encourage others to review and recreate new meanings of feminist rhetorical texts. As practitioners of rhetoric, our chief purpose is to pursue recorded texts for enrichment, find new openings for multiple avenues of disruptions, and expand feminist rhetoric that offset oppressive rhetorical constructs. As research agents, we need to transform "dominant research practices and interpretive frameworks, ... adding to what has been left out to present more complete and fair truths of the past than traditional historical accounts" (Wu 174-75). Reconceptualizing newer angles on women's voices in rhetorical history, for this reason, is key in promoting gendered territories for aspiring rhetoricians. Of this, Cheryl Glenn refers to the notion of "remapping" basic assumptions about rhetoric necessary to include new practices or analyses in the history of rhetoric (3-4).

To counterclaim hegemonic practices also means investigating expansive manifestations of women's rhetorical agencies across social, cultural, and historical milieus. Historically, women were marginalized and denied affordances to deliver political forums, hold public offices, preach sermons, pursue legislative functions, etc., so other forms of communicative acts expressed in teachings, conversations, letters, social codes, crafts, cookbooks, and so forth, have been revisited. Jane Donawerth insists on presenting a broader, more social definition of rhetoric (*Rhetorical Theory* xiii-xlii), disclosing numerous evidence of women's rhetorical efforts as teachers of rulers akin to Ban Zhao, Christine de Pizan, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, et al. who occupied different territories/histories/socio-cultural spaces and assumed context-driven slants to expose oppressive marks of patriarchy. For instance, medieval women were not as concerned with individual spirituality as with collective religious/social transformation (Rorem 82-93), and since they did not have "overt political power, they could *wield covert power* [through]... texts that give advice to women on how to behave generally... called *conduct books*" (Bizzell and Herzberg 446, emphasis added). These textual productions describe acceptable behaviors across time and brought women front and center as integral originators of cultural mores.

Ideally, conduct book rhetoric instills communal positivity for both sexes, gauging whether an act is profitable or not. "The value of any piece of discourse, or mode of communication," according to Fred Newton Scott on

Platonic rhetoric, “is to be measured by its effect upon the welfare of the community” (Berlin 49). Armed with an ethical commitment to the public good, the feminist rhetor extends public servitude through her conduct manuals, which motivate readers to regain a sense of agency from within and, perhaps perversely (though contestedly), gain sexual parity. Sarah E. Newton primarily argues that through its prescribed moral behavior, conduct books for women led to a stable social order and middle-class success (Passet 342). But the relevance of conduct book rhetoric legitimizing women as professional writers, however, is equally suspect as conduct rhetors face hostility and disapproval (Peary 220). Critiques of these texts are replete with objections from radical feminists for elevating conservative principles that often restrict, silence, and oppress women within a masculinistic framework. Since women lack freedom from gender oppression, wouldn’t female conduct rhetors possess more leverage had they radically opposed hegemonic masculinity and worked to expose implicit bias instead? Why did they opt for female conduct literatures that seem to encourage traditional roles within contested private spheres?

These radical objections, while warranted, are also challenged by context-based translators of rhetorical motives. First, Western feminists then and now have had no position to fully understand, much less prescribe, what should have been proper embodiments of Eastern socio-historical practices, such as Chinese women’s agency in Ban Zhao’s work (Lee 47). Western radical feminists who speak about the plight of women in first-century China simply lack the cultural, historical, and social ethos to critique what women at that time should have done to survive a hostile environment and regain their status. And the reverse is also true for critics of Western principles: non-Western analysts do not possess the systematic experiences nor values necessary to refute or acknowledge proper measures to counteract oppression outside their domain. Second, the use of conservative mechanisms in restoring the dignity of women might have been disappointing to some contemporary feminists, as seen in Sheila Delaney’s reactionary charge against Christine de Pizan (188), but critics need to understand that these conduct rhetors wrote their treatises from a socio-historical standpoint: particularly, Ban who wrote to forge “ways to gain strength through compliance and... education” (Lee 62), and Christine who assumed the role of a “humanist [and] feminist operating in the fifteenth century” (Nowacka 92). Finally, the concept of radical feminism was not something that Ban nor Christine in their context-based orientations would have been familiar with, so their works best describe how women could only obtain agencies in their respective locations — individualistic for Christine (McCormick 166-67), familial for Ban (Lee 49-50). After all, what did feminist approaches look like in first-century Asia and fifteenth-century Europe? And

how could one quash educational inequity so deeply entrenched in each systematic historical operation?

To re-examine our assumptions about women's history in rhetoric, Royster and Kirsch acknowledge the value of "contexts and conditions in performance" when it comes to knowing how rhetorical actions work (14). Without which, it would be difficult to grasp how, for instance, an archetype of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Sor María de Agreda's *Mística Ciudad de Dios* was altered from an image of perfection to a humanized female of an egalitarian household who contends with family, religious, and civil affairs (Risse 232), nor would it be possible to decipher the core intention of postfeminist conduct books *What Not to Wear* and *Skinny Bitch* that girlhood culture actually promotes the make-over industry more than defying patriarchal systems (Winch 360). Even Carol Mattingly's *Well-Tempered Women* unravels how nineteenth-century temperance women used non-aggressive rhetorical strategies within the cultural context of their time to reach their audiences more effectively (1-2). And there are countless other scholars with analytical acumen who treat rhetorical pieces not as literary texts but as rhetorical actions addressing concerns of cultural, sociopolitical, ethical, or historical nature.

Though limited to some extent, I am not prescribing a singular path for rhetorical analysis here but do support other possible conceptions that embrace contextual cues through contingent methods.

Historical Background and Sources of Identification

First of all, Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women* and Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Three Virtues* are repositioned here as feminist rhetorical practices that promote social and moral reformations, particularly as embodied in first-century China and fifteenth-century France. Reviewing thematic patterns from their translated texts elicits contextual readings and identification strategies from an author/subject nomenclature with transformative instructions distinct to a location, time, and space. Ban and Christine have markedly different epochal/cultural groundings, but they also possess ethical commensurability to uphold (rather than challenge) gender hierarchy. Next, it is important to note that despite their autonomous global power dynamics at play, Eastern and Western women's experiences with oppression historically are somehow fungible and involve conservative agency reforms. This notion is exemplified by both rhetors' textual samplings, proving them rife for analysis: "There was no influence of Western ideas of rhetoric on ancient China, and Chinese rhetorical theory thus represents the best example of a conceptualized non-Western tradition for comparative study. Similarities, suggesting universal features, and differences, arising from a different language and different historical experiences, are evident" (Kennedy 167). Toward this, Table 1 contextualizes the

similarities and differences of each author’s generational and cultural framework in terms of historical time period, economic/educational status, and contribution to rhetoric.

Table 1. Comparative generational and cultural context

<i>Constructs</i>	Ban Zhao	Christine de Pizan
Historical Time Period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - born between 45 and 51 AD in Anling, near modernXiayang, Shaanxi province (died spring 117 AD) - 1st and 2nd centuries, the great Han empire - married at 14 to Cao Shishu, a local resident - widowed a few years later and never remarried to pursue a literary career (Swann 42-50) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - born around 1364 in Venice (died 1430) -15th century, Charles V et al. of France - married at 15 to Etienne du Castel, a royal secretary to the court - widowed at 25 and never remarried to pursue a public literary career (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 155-73)

<i>Constructs</i>	Ban Zhao	Christine de Pizan
Economic/Educational Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - came from a wealthy and influential family with many court connections (esp. her father, a popular magistrate and scholar) - brought up in a learning environment by her parents, a scholarly father and cultured mother - summoned by the emperor to the palace several times to teach the Empress and honorable ladies, which prepared her to write after her husband's death (Donawerth, <i>Rhetorical Theory</i> xiii-xlii) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - came from a wealthy and well-educated family with court connections (esp. her father, a well-known physician and astrologer) - brought up in a learning environment by her father and court tutors where she drew influences as a writer from the two worlds that formed her, Venice and French royal courts - turned to writing after her husband's death by copying legal documents, writing longer poems on moral and romantic themes, and doing other types of literary trade (Bizzell and Herzberg 540)

<i>Constructs</i>	Ban Zhao	Christine de Pizan
Contribution to Rhetoric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - first known female Chinese historian; foremost woman scholar of China (Swann 145) - first Chinese court historiographer, teacher of eloquence to the Empress, and wrote a treatise on women's education that included a section on "women's words" (Donawerth, <i>Transforming the History</i>" 37) - wrote <i>Lessons for Women</i> (a.k.a. <i>Admonitions for Women</i>) that reflects the impact of Confucianism and Daoism (Goldin 112; Lee 50) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - first "woman of letters" of the West (Bizzell and Herzberg 540-43); first professional woman writer in Europe (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee xi) - regarded as a protofeminist; defended women against the classical and Christian misogynists when she attacked a popular/medieval poem, <i>Romance of the Rose</i>, for its immoral and unfair depiction of women (Brown-Grant 7-51) - wrote some devotional texts that reflects her deeply held Christian faith (Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee xi)

As presented above, there are significant gaps between Ban Zhao and Christine de Pizan's time periods and cultural orientations, though their economic statuses are quite telling: both came from wealthy and influential families with scholarly fathers serving as role models for their educational paths. Having distinct connections to Eastern and Western courts respectively, they developed writing skills that helped them support their own families after their husbands' early deaths. Both also opted not to remarry but devoted their time to write for women (esp. for their education) to accomplish definitive goals, either to gain approval from one's husband and in-laws in first-century China (Donawerth, *"Transforming the History"* 36; Lee 56) or to gain intellectual and moral equality of the sexes in fifteenth-century France (Nowacka 82). Being sensitive to these context-specific conditions also requires an understanding of their cultural traditions/histories: that Chinese Han dynasty sponsored a return to Confucian values (Kennedy 156), that Confucius put great value on the written word vs. Platonic Socrates' emphasis on orality (Kennedy 153), and that Chinese rhetoric was more conservative and consensus-driven in which

accommodation, not overt confrontation, was viewed as politically expedient (Goldin 114; Kennedy 143). In contrast, the Crusades in Europe facilitated contact with classical learning, shifted emphasis on individual human powers through Renaissance humanism, and employed lecture and debate in scholastic teaching in medieval universities (Bizzell and Herzberg 439-43).

Since the use of feminist practices as tools to interrogate specific propositions involve rhetorical contexts, performances, effects, metaphors, histories, etc., it is necessary at this point to explore various symbolic implications contextually found in conduct books and liberate our interpretive sensibilities. This means recognizing symbolic identifications that disclose transformative connections between text, author, and reader. In effect, the concept of "space and location as a way to understand the sites where a historical subject lived" (Royster and Kirch 36) is applied and, if taken seriously, will reveal Ban and Christine's identification strategies from related points of references. Assessing metaphorical representations, cultural significance, and historical background mentioned above requires thematic patterns to unlock contextual cues built around code manuals.

For this purpose, I deduced three sources of identification from Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss to highlight each conduct book's symbolic implications: (a) material identification, (b) idealistic identification, and (c) formal identification (142, emphasis added). These overlapping sources of identification add more leverage to my analysis on the transformative power of conduct book rhetoric as opposed to having systematic factors of persuasion. Here, writers use communicative symbols, beliefs, attitudes, etc. by using non-deliberate identification or consubstantiation to draw connections with readers. Modifying these concepts from Littlejohn and Foss' approximation of Kenneth Burke's theory, I considered the notion of material identification to consubstantiate the marginalized position or status of women based on distinct socio-cultural frameworks that also depict their (lack of) access to economic independence/tangible properties; idealistic identification in reference to similar interests, ideas, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, values, experience, perception, etc.; and formal identification to emphasize the social characteristics of the organization they all participated in at that time (142). Using these sources provided me with the tools necessary to evaluate certain communication processes in deference to the rhetorical function of conduct manuals. Without them, any attempt at modal interpretations would be incomplete, inconsistent, and insecure.

Reviewing *Lessons for Women* and *The Book of the Three Virtues* as Feminist Rhetorical Devices

Attempting to expose distinct forms of oppression in the first and fifteenth centuries requires context-based tactics to pervade hierarchical structures. Some arguments against code writers, albeit essentialist, only impress the contingency of contextual designs. By writing conduct books reflective of their times, female rhetors like Ban and Christine taught women how to be more effective within their spheres of influence to circumvent hostility. Women's agency in this case is directly proportional to the pragmatism of conduct manuals, and a careful examination of identified acts and/or purposes in relation to their agents will only prove how women might have actually worked from within to enact agency reforms and reclaim their status from definite positional sites.

Reviewing conduct books from this perspective also validates the potency of conduct rhetoric in laying the foundations toward pro-feminist proclivity. Some excerpts from both Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women* and Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Three Virtues* seem to suggest that propriety enables covert penetrations to hegemonic structures. The adoption of "a symbolic system to induce cooperation among human beings" (Antunes) helps determine legitimate identifiers precedent to feminist rhetorical actions and/or inquiries of today. In the following section, I will concentrate on the texts' symbolic implications and rhetorical motives to highlight these sources of identification.

I. Symbolic Implication through Material Identification: Promoting Rhetorical Education

The struggle to promote parity with regard to rhetorical training is recognized in both authors' conduct rhetoric. Considering the notion of material identification, Ban and Christine imply women's subordinate positions as a result of disparate social and material conditions that necessitate educational access for self-improvement. Though Ban primarily endorses eloquence not for public acclaim but for domestic conformity (Donawerth, "Transforming the History" 35-39), she remains an important figure to our understanding of the history of women in Eastern rhetoric because of her radical call to educate girls along with boys (Covino and Joliffe 70). Her emphasis on serving husbands and families bespeaks the importance of education for women to wield influence in the domestic spheres and raise a strong family (Lee 56). The traditional concepts of *Yin* and *Yang* further expose the absence of sexual parity in rhetorical training, restricting women's access to recognition, acceptance, and material efficiency. Historically, a Chinese woman's agentive means to exert

authority in the home was either deficient or non-existent: a wife/daughter-in-law had the stature of a servant, expected to perform household chores under the scrutiny of her husband's families: "...being a daughter-in-law in a Chinese family placed a newly married woman in the lowest position in her new home, where she appeared worthless, powerless, pitiable, and dependent" (Lee 52). Ban alludes to the exclusivity of education at the time but also argued that in order to maintain domestic harmony and uphold *Yin* and *Yang*, young girls must also be taught in school to fulfill their familial expectations with proper conduct. Although morality is still the basis for training women and evaluating her success (Yin-Lee 348), its rhetorical intent remains purposeful socio-culturally to help women exercise agency within their marital families and gain respect and influence.

From a hierarchical perspective, Christine counsels those in superior positions to act as positive role models to their subordinates, affect their ways of (seeing and) doing things, and disrupt misogynistic claims through rhetorical education. Conversely, her readers are expected to emulate those of privileged status by virtue of their charismatic appeal, and while this consubstantiates other women's marginalized position in society, it seems that their compliance is taken to produce co-participants of civility and decency regardless of their material/social worth. Though existent hierarchical divisions and disparate material conditions are laid bare in the process, this excerpt promotes equitable access to rhetorical training for everyone of multivariate gender/class positions, exacting education to be the great equalizer. With the agency for self-governance, her audience is wont to pursue moral choices even if one of them departs from a sanctioned/limited option between marriage or convent life to survive the onslaught of economic hardships. Christine's prequel, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, already offers an alternate reality for women at that time to shelter them from misogynistic attacks, but the agency to build this city and learn how to live morally seems to have been left out intentionally for another tome on conducting one's self to salvage the damaged reputation of its female citizens. Her sequel, *The Book of the Three Virtues*, advocates for women's natural inclinations toward morality and virtue and recognizes that proper rhetorical education would not only reform anti-feminist views, but also elevate their marginalized status collectively for moral, social, and material gains. Table 2 illustrates similar denotations between Ban's and Christine's excerpts regarding rhetorical education.

Table 2. Close textual correspondences that promote rhetorical education

<i>Lessons for Women</i> (trans.)	<i>The Book of the Three Virtues</i> (trans.)
<p>Yet only to teach men and not to teach women – is that not ignoring the essential relation between them? According to the “Rites,” it is the rule to begin to teach children to read at the age of eight years, and by the age of fifteen years they ought then to be ready for cultural training. Only why should it not be (that girls’ education as well as boys’ be) according to this principle? (qtd. in Swann 84-85)</p>	<p>Our lesson and sermon of Wisdom are meant for the entire community of devoutly religious women. First of all, for those whose royal or noble state raises them above other worldly estates. By necessity, these women and men whom God has established in high positions of power and domination must be better educated than others, so that their reputation may be enhanced and they can be exemplars and mirrors of virtue to their subjects and those they frequent. (qtd. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 158)</p>

Consequently, both rhetors identified the material, social, and moral benefits of rhetorical education to meet a desired end. Such identification further stimulates the possibility of capturing textual functionality from an ideological standpoint, as the following section attempts to unpack.

II. Symbolic Implication through Idealistic Identification: Asserting Ideological Connections

Contained in both works are messages denoting rhetorical motives subsumed under ideological frameworks of distinct idealistic identification. These messages appeal to the interests, ideas, beliefs, perceptions, etc. of the audience that both acknowledge the rights of women to be respected. On separate occasions, Ban and Christine encourage altruism consistent with recognizable socio-cultural values of their time using persuasive communication tactics that assert ideological connections, including symmetrical ties based on common ideological thoughts. Ban advances a more socially-based ontology rooted in Confucian philosophy in which women are expected to co-exist harmoniously with others through obedience, modesty, and acquiescence to maintain balance and benefit themselves, their families, their communities. While this social point of reference is rife for female stereotypes or essentialized views on gender, it is important to note that the history of Chinese women’s rhetoric is “even more marginalized” (Wu 178), and dismissing their discursive viewpoints

from archival works suppresses their rhetorical intent built on cultural bias. Ban contends that with the agency to navigate domestic spaces properly (and wisely), women can operate from a favorable status and, albeit subtly, conduct reforms from within to survive hostility, promote harmony, and gain respect. Invoking the authority of the Confucian Classics, she supports her subject matter with “the techniques of a successful, elite woman as wife, daughter and mother” (Wing 43). Here, the woman is expected to act properly for domestic/ social acceptance or risk bringing disgrace to the family and losing extensive clout.

Ban’s excerpt warns against the social consequences of humiliation, familial/domestic disorder, and marred reputation due to one’s naiveté. In contrast, Christine affirms religious ideals in which women, also capable of following scriptural passages, deserves equal/moral treatment from the opposite sex. Ordinarily maligned as sinful ‘Eves’ who bring ‘Adams’ to their fall, women who follow Christian precepts will no doubt nullify medieval attacks and disprove allegations of vice and inconstancy. From this standpoint, Christine’s use of religious patterns to address medieval women who were victims of misogynistic claims reflects symbolic implications that bridge solidarity among readers. Her simulation of heaven and hell serves to provide persuasive symbols for choosing the right path, either through contemplative or active life, and living morally to avoid temporal consequences. But for those whose lives do not emulate moral servitude, she warns of eternal damnation consistent with Scriptures. The symbolic consciousness engendered by instructing women to adopt biblical truths and lived experiences aims to shift not only their operational paradigms but also the patriarchal/anti-feminist charges of immorality against them. Christine’s rhetorical appeal rests on promoting righteous living for eternal reward, which constructs a pro-feminist polemic to replace gender-based attacks. Table 3 shows a juxtaposition of each author’s distinct ideological positions.

Table 3. Close textual correspondences that assert their respective ideological connections

<i>Lessons for Women</i> (trans.)	<i>The Book of the Three Virtues</i> (trans.)
<p>I do grieve that you, my daughters, just now at the age of marriage, have not at this time had gradual training and advice; that you still have not learned the proper customs for married women. I fear that by failure in good manners in other families you will humiliate both your ancestors and your clan. (qtd. in Swann 82)</p> <p>Nothing is better than an obedience which sacrifices personal opinion ... Let a woman not act contrary to the wishes and the opinions of parents-in-law about right and wrong ... If a woman live in harmony with her immediate family, unfavorable criticism will be silenced (within the home. But) if a man and woman disagree, then this evil will be noised abroad ... Modesty is virtue's handle; acquiescence is the wife's (most refined) characteristic. All who possess these two have sufficient for harmony with others. (qtd. in Swann 88-90)</p>	<p>The Scriptures speak of two paths that lead to heaven which you cannot enter without following them: one is called the contemplative life, the other the active life . . . The contemplative life is a manner and a state of serving God in which a person loves God so much and so ardently that she completely forgets father, mother, children, everyone, even herself, for the great and glowing devotion she has endlessly for her Creator . . . The active life is another way of serving God. The person who wants to follow it will be so charitable that, if she could, she would serve everyone for the love of God. She seeks out hospitals, visits the sick and the poor, helps them with her own money and physical effort for the love of God, as best she can. (qtd. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 159-61)</p> <p>Open your eyes to the knowledge that you give yourself to sin and live miserably and dishonestly. Get out as long as there is daylight and before night overtakes you, that is, before death attacks you and surprises you in sin which will lead you to Hell, for no one knows the hour of his death . . . You women who bear the name of Christians and who use it for such base purposes, raise yourselves up and get out of this abominable mud. (qtd. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 170-71)</p>

Both rhetors contextually used ideological influences (i.e. Confucian, Christian) to persuade their audience, but the charge to adopt a taxonomy of rhetorical analysis that draws on historical descriptions and facilitate subtle inter/disruptions of conventional accounts, canonical representations, or gendered tokenisms continues below to offer a new rhetorical terrain.

III. Symbolic Implication through Formal Identification: Reclaiming Women's Status

In this regard, both conduct books signify acceptable modes of behaviors for women and exhibit formal identification. If faithfully followed, these tenets are supposed to reclaim women's fledgling status as authorities of virtue in their own spheres of influence. For first-century Chinese women, Ban's practical admonition on four character traits tends to favor conservative predilections to elevate their status as modest, virtuous, and diligent sectors of society. The idea of prescribing formative rules on how to behave properly transcends beyond domesticity into positions of moral/social ascendancy, strengthening social/domestic harmony, especially for one's immediate family, husband, in-laws, and the Dynasty. Despite Ban's complicity to traditional norms, the complexities of a rhetorical purpose are contained in an immediate context, which is the imprint of Mencian teachings on treating others properly (Swann 42). In turn, her text is loaded with appeals toward literacy, practice, and shared responsibility, including deliberate intentions for gaining filial agencies over ethical/social conduct. An individual's disciplinary training here may have reflected socio-cultural implications, but the strongest motivation seems to be her collective attainment of personal ethos/influence through the lessons upon which she could draw practical counsel for self-regulation to survive any hostility thrown at her at the domestic front.

Embodied in three allegorical, feminine avatars (Reason, Rectitude, and Justice), the ideal woman for Christine possesses prudence and sobriety who, like the opposite sex, is also capable of pursuing morality and virtue (Brown-Grant 215-19). Her strategy for attacking misogyny is articulated in the conduct guidelines for ethical praxis as she formally identifies with Christian orthodoxy by judicious speech, good manners, right conduct, etc. to collectively repeal the attacks leveled against women at that time. This approach clearly admonishes morality versus corruption and, though too reserved to agitate dissent or radical transformation, actually enhances women's collective agencies to lead virtuous lives, enacting a hermeneutical reversal of women as immasculated readers. Because of its religious context, this conduct manual not only denounces failure in favor of freedom from inconsistency, vice, and indiscretion, but also encourages women to assert themselves through proper speech

and rhetorical tact. Its medieval religiosity only grounds the textual and contextual maneuvers of this excerpt to make sense of its traditional boundaries and formal engagement. Christine here bolsters women's individual agency to undo the construct of a demonized 'Eve' and encourages others to spread the word in order to reclaim their dignity and moral status. Table 4 highlights the importance of women's speech and actions as well as the mandate to influence others.

Table 4. Close textual correspondences that reclaim women's status

<i>Lessons for Women</i> (trans.)	<i>The Book of the Three Virtues</i> (trans.)
<p>A woman (ought to) have four qualifications: (1) womanly virtue; (2) womanly words; (3) womanly bearing; and (4) womanly work ... To guard carefully her chastity; to control circumspectly her behavior; in every motion to exhibit modesty; and to model each act on the best usage, this is womanly virtue. To choose her words with care; to avoid vulgar language; to speak at appropriate times and not to weary others (with much conversation), may be called the characteristics of womanly words ... With whole-hearted devotion to sew and to weave; to love not gossip and silly laughter; in cleanliness and order (to prepare) the wine and food for serving guests, may be called the characteristics of womanly work. (qtd. in Swann 86)</p> <p>I am now seriously ill, life is uncertain. As I have thought of you all in so untrained a state, I have been uneasy many a time for you ... I wish everyone of you, my daughters, each to write out a copy for yourself. From this time on every one of you strive to practise these (lessons). (qtd. in Swann 82-83)</p>	<p>Prudence and Sobriety will teach the lady well-ordered speech and eloquence, not cute but serious, quiet and restrained, with a composed face, without gesturing with her hands, body, or grimaces. They will keep her from laughing too much and without cause. Above all, they will forbid her to speak ill of anyone, not to blame but rather highlighting the good. She will not say anything vague or dishonest, and even in her amusement she will be modest and discreet. (qtd. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 166-67)</p> <p>As I looked at them [teachings] written down and reviewed them, they seemed to me more and more profitable for the improvement of virtuous habits, increasing ladies' honor, and good for the whole community of women, now living and those in the future, wherever this work may reach an audience ... I ... began thinking that I would make many copies of this work and would distribute it throughout the world, no matter what the cost. It would be presented in many different places to the queens, princesses, and noble ladies so that ... it could be disseminated to other women. (qtd. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Brownlee 172-73)</p>

Both conduct rhetors consciously advanced commonality with their readers amidst rhetorical positions to motivate response. From this angle, each lesson (e.g., Ban on four womanly qualities, Christine on prudence and sobriety), with all its symbolical thrust, seems to have reclaimed women's rhetorical agencies and re-inscribed new spaces for historical feminist practices.

IV. Summative Evaluation

Through this analysis, common symbolic implications reflecting three sources of identification in Ban’ and Christine’s translated corpus warrant another way of looking at conduct books as feminist rhetorical devices. Table 5 presents an analytical summary in relation to three types of identification and rhetorical motives as discussed earlier.

Table 5. Analytical Summary of Selected Textual References

	<i>Lessons for Women</i> (trans.) Rhetorical Analysis	<i>The Book of the Three Virtues</i> (trans.) Rhetorical Analysis
Material Identification: Promoting Rhetorical Education	Ban alludes to the exclusivity of education at the time but that in order to maintain domestic harmony and uphold Yin and Yang, young girls must also be taught in school to fulfill their familial expectations and maintain right principles.	Christine advocates for women’s natural inclinations toward morality and virtue and recognizes that proper rhetorical education would not only reform anti-feminist views, but also elevate their marginalized status collectively for moral, social, and material gains.
Idealistic Identification: Asserting Ideological Connections	Rooted in Confucian thought and filial piety, Ban contends that the agency to navigate domestic spaces properly (and wisely) allows women to operate from a favorable status and, albeit subtly, conduct reforms from within to survive hostility, promote harmony, and gain respect.	Following a medieval concept of religiosity, Christine’s instruction for women to adopt biblical truths and lived experiences aims to shift not only their operational paradigms but also the patriarchal/anti-feminist charges of immorality against them.

	<i>Lessons for Women</i> (trans.) Rhetorical Analysis	<i>The Book of the Three Virtues</i> (trans.) Rhetorical Analysis
Formal Identification: Reclaiming Women's Status	The idea of prescribing formative rules on how to behave properly transcends beyond domesticity into positions of moral/social ascendancy, strengthening social/domestic harmony, especially for one's immediate family, husband, in-laws, and the Dynasty.	Christine bolsters women's individual agency to undo the construct of a demonized 'Eve' and encourages others to spread the word in order to reclaim their dignity and moral status.

This study extends the possibility that historical conduct books encourage women to work from within to enact agency reforms, particularly to survive the hostilities they faced in first-century China as well as exterminate misogynistic attacks in medieval Europe. Distinct from each historical background, the textual features analyzed here are markedly different but reveal several identifiers that promote rhetorical education (material) through ideological assertions on Confucianism and Christianity (idealistic) and reclaim women's status viz. familial/social agency and moral/individual agency (formal). Historically, women were "uneducated in the rules of the game... without rhetorical training" (McCormick 149), and these lessons were written for them to attain respectability, stability, and influence. The conduct guidelines mostly reflect social etiquettes comparable to historiographic models, and although major textual references fall within the purview of conservatism, Ban Zhao and Christine de Pizan each worked for the expansion of women's agencies to reach transformative ends. That is, instead of outright resistance to oppressive gender roles, each one seems to have endorsed civility and compliance to the dominant order despite the fact that their systematic approaches for ethical praxis, in relation to the symbolic identifications, may have only been used to gain agentive powers for women.

As early feminist rhetorical practices, their code manuals push for rhetorical training and agency development from definite historico-cultural frameworks based on conformist/gender roles leading toward women's recognition. Paradoxically, such a crucial opening foreshadows the ontogenesis of women's rights movements and continually evolves to include a much broader,

more diverse range of participants, locations, situations, performances. Some symbolic implications from both canonical works already contain latent ideological resistance to oppressive standards, foremost of which is the rhetors' admonition for women's training, and this observation would only keep analysts even more interested in exploring global views on conduct book rhetoric. Since enabling socio-cultural shifts requires "the ability to gradually infiltrate hegemonic ways of thinking" (Kaag 46), the rhetorical appeal of conduct books to self-governance celebrates women's morality, responsibility, and power to navigate hostility from complex domains, which might have led toward open rebellion against anti-feminist allegations in succeeding generations. Granted, totally disrupting gender structures was far from the minds of Ban and Christine given their socio-cultural orientations, but reviewing their works rhetorically connects sources of identification and rhetorical motives to pro-women's agentive reforms. These subtle/primitive feminist-informed practices could have possibly chaperoned modern rhetorical dissent, though a dearth of dialectical interconnections among their histories from a globalized perspective still stands.

Implications on Feminist Rhetorical Studies

As suggested above, the rhetorical intent of historical conduct books for enacting agency reforms involve specific ways of tracking feminist-informed analyses of texts and contexts to negotiate change mechanisms on a wider scale. Contextualizing these texts does not only open spaces for new rhetorical interpretations of women's agencies over traditional/normalized means, but also offer another possibility for understanding feminist rhetorical studies from a wider transnational spectrum. The symbolic themes identified here inform how conduct rhetors enable transformative ends from within and interrogate feminist practices that move away from a one-dimensional perception to a multidimensional process of rhetorical performance. The textual/contextual grounded analyses from both samplings also mark compelling sociocultural impacts on gender, status, and geographical sites and contribute to a more enhanced model of feminist rhetorical inquiry.

What is evident in this account is that we need to be willing to review our exclusive knowledge of feminist rhetorical studies and try to understand comparative relations between rhetorical practices across time and space. By broadening our scope of evaluating women's rhetoric to another standpoint, we expand interrogations of practices that either have fixed anti-feminist assessment or hidden possibilities for rhetorical inquiry. Traditional frameworks subjected to further analysis may now be restored or dismantled, treating rhetorical works as historico-cultural practices that reflect probable affinities beyond spatial barriers comparatively and/or contrastively. While this project

reviews limited data, including more historical texts from distinct cultural epochs will increase our understanding of conduct books as we shift the ground and “stretch the boundaries of our thinking and our capacity to see more, to see differently, and to be better positioned to interpret more adequately the whos, whats, hows, and whys, of the rhetorical landscape before us” (Royster and Kirsch 137). Such a focused opportunity to review, reposition, and recast complex views of rhetorical conditions will generate new insights on feminist rhetorical scholarship.

By the same token, a more comprehensive knowledge of feminist rhetoric from a globalized perspective requires analytical tools that interrelate past histories across multiple generations, places, and cultures within local and global contexts. The crux of this investigation is not just to recognize the contributions of women’s rhetoric overall but to re-inscribe their rhetorical agencies as seen in the symbolic implications and gendered assertions here. With expanded rhetorical subjects and locations come the necessity for readjusting our myopic/anachronistic lenses to accommodate a multifaceted, globalized form of rhetorical performance with complex, multilayered tendencies for contextual interpretations (Royster and Kirsch 103). I argue that a combination of feminist rhetorical texts under scrutiny from different time periods (i.e., ancient to modern) will reveal new angles that may provide rhetoricians and/or historiographers with diverse ways on how our predecessors around the globe etched legitimate, context-specific initiatives or rhetorical actions in relation to what we now know as feminist. Basically, it is also important to remember the descriptive functions of each archival text to a certain culture or history and, in the case of conduct books, prescriptive to a time and place though not necessarily binding (as much as opening new terrains).

Finally, I admit that the use of translated texts contribute to the limitations of this study and, as they helped reclaim women’s rhetorical agencies, Ban and Christine did not completely disrupt the dominant structures of their period. But what these conduct rhetors did to advance equal access to rhetorical training opened up more possibilities for the next generations to construct pro-feminist regulations across differing historical/cultural epochs toward the twenty-first century. For all its worth, translations provide access to foreign cultures for mutual understanding and knowledge transfer (Wilson 78), so poring over holistic figures (vs. verbatim patterns) is methodically acceptable. This prospect should behoove most feminist historians to continually discover new rhetorical spaces for older texts and understand how our ancestors influenced transnational and transgenerational women to obtain gender-based reforms. To this end, I also recommend that more rhetorical inquiries use close readings of original/authentic manuscripts (e.g, trace linguistic patterns of

lexicons, syntax, stylistics) to support the symbolic implications and rhetorical motives of feminist rhetors as well as substantiate previous claims.

Works Cited

- Antunes, Débora. "Branding Cyber-Activism: Burke's Identification and the Visual Identity of Anonymous." *K.B. Journal: The Journal of the Kenneth Burke Society*, vol. 11, no. 2, Spring 2016, kbjournal.org/antunes.
- Berlin, James A. *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*. Southern Illinois UP, 1987.
- Bizzell, Patricia. "Feminist Methods of Research in the History of Rhetoric: What Difference Do They Make?" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 4, Autumn 2000, pp. 5-17. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org.libproxy.dixie.edu/stable/3886115.
- Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, editors. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Reading from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.
- Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate, and Kevin Brownlee. *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*. W.W. Norton and Co., 1997.
- Brown-Grant, Rosalind. *Christine de Pizan and The Moral Defence of Women*. Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Covino, William, and David Jolliffe. *Rhetoric: Concepts, Definitions, Boundaries*. Allyn and Bacon, 1995.
- Delaney, Sheila. "Mothers to Think Back Through': Who Are They? The Ambiguous Example of Christine de Pizan." *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, edited by Laurie A. Finke and Martin Schichtman, Cornell UP, 1987, pp. 177-97.
- Donawerth, Jane. *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600-1900*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- . *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900: An Anthology*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.
- . "Transforming the History of Rhetorical Theory." *Feminist Teacher*, vol. 7, no. 1, Fall 1992, pp. 35-39. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40545636.
- Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*. Southern Illinois UP, 1997.
- Goldin, Paul R. "Ban Zhao in Her Time and in Ours." *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, pp. 112-118. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wn0qtj.11.

- Kaag, John. "Transgressing the Silence: Lydia Maria Child and the Philosophy of Subversion." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 49, no. 1, Winter 2013, pp. 46-53.
- Kennedy, George A. *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction*. Oxford UP, 1998.
- Lee, Lin-Lee. "Inventing Familial Agency from Powerlessness: Ban Zhao's *Lessons for Women*." *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 73, no. 1, Jan.-March 2009, pp. 47-66.
- Littlejohn, Stephen W., and Karen A. Foss. *Theories of Human Communication*. 10th ed., Waveland Press, Inc., 2011.
- Lu, Xing'er. "Women and the Crisis." *Once Iron Girls: Essays on Gender by Post-Mao Chinese Literary Women*, edited by Hui Wu, Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 89-92.
- Lunsford, Andrea. *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*. U of Pittsburgh Press, 1995.
- Mattingly, Carol. *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*. Southern Illinois UP, 2002.
- . *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric*. Southern Illinois UP, 1998.
- McCormick, Betsy. "Building the Ideal City: Female Memorial Praxis in Christine de Pizan's *Cité de Dames*." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. 36, no. 1, Spring 2003, pp. 149-71.
- Nowacka, Keiko. "Reflections on Christine de Pizan's 'Feminism'." *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 37, June 2002, pp. 81-97.
- Passet, Joanne E. "Review of *Learning to Behave: A Guide to American Conduct Books Before 1900* by Sarah E. Newton." *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3, Autumn 1996, pp. 342-43. *JSTOR*, doi: 10.2307/369409
- Peary, Alexandria. "Eliza Leslie's 1854 *The Behaviour Book* and the Conduct of Women's Writing." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 31, no. 3, June 2012, pp. 219, 35. *Academic Search Premier*, doi: 10.1080/07350198.2012.683992.
- Risse, Katherine. "Revising a Matrimonial Life: An Alternative to the Conduct Book in María de Agreda's *Mística Ciudad de Dios*." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 123, no. 2, March 2008, pp. 230-251. Project Muse, doi: 10.1353/mln.0.0016.
- Rorem, Paul. "The Company of Medieval Women Theologians." *Theology Today*, vol. 60, no. 1, Apr. 2003, pp. 82-93.

- Royster, Jacqueline Jones, and Gesa E. Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Swann, Nancy Lee. *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China*. Century, 1932.
- Wilson, Rita. "Exchanging Views: Knowledge Transfer through Literary Translation." *International Migration*, vol. 52, no. 4, Aug. 2014, pp. 78-91. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1111/imig. 12125.
- Winch, Alison. "'Your New Smart-Mouth Girlfriends': Postfeminist Conduct Books." *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 20, no. 4, Dec. 2011, pp. 359-370. *Academic Search Premier*, doi: 10.1080/09589236.2011.617608.
- Wing, Sherin. "Technology, Commentary and the *Admonitions for Women*." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, Nov. 2003, pp. 42-66, vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss1/3.
- Wu, Hui. "Historical Studies of Rhetorical Women Here and There: Methodological Challenges to Dominant Interpretive Frameworks." *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics: Landmark Essays and Controversies*, edited by Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen J. Ryan, Parlor Press, 2010, pp. 170-82.
- Yin-Lee, Wong. "Women's Education in Traditional and Modern China." *Women's History Review*, vol. 4, no. 3, 19 Dec. 2006, pp. 345-67, tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09612029500200092.
-

About the Author

Florence Elizabeth Bacabac is an associate professor of professional and technical writing at Dixie State University (DSU) in St. George, Utah. Her articles appeared in *Composing Feminist Interventions: Activism, Engagement, Praxis* (ed. by Kristine Blair and Lee Nickson), *Journal of Teaching Writing*, *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, and *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, among others. She currently directs the DSU Women's Resource Center and is a recipient of the 2018 Presidential Award for Community Engagement at DSU, 2018 "U-Rock" Award from Utah Women in Higher Education Network (UWHEN) - DSU Chapter, and 2014 and 2011 Civically Engaged Scholar Awards from Utah Campus Compact for her work on service learning and community involvement.