

Woman, House, Identity: The Study of the Role of House in Constructing the Contemporary Dong Minority Woman's Identity

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Abstract : Similar to most ethnic groups in China, men of the Dong minority hold the primary position in policymaking, moral authority, social values, and the control of the property. As the spatial embodiment of the patriarchal ideals, the house plays a significant role in producing and reproducing the distinctive gender status within the Dong society. Nevertheless, Dong women do not see their home as a cage of confinement, nor do they see themselves as a victim of oppression. For these women with reference to their productive identity, a house is a dwelling place with manifold meanings, including a proof of identity, an economic instrument, and a public resource operating on the community level. This paper examines the role of the house as a central site for identity construction and maintenance for the southern dialect Dong minority women in Hunan, China. Drawing on recent interviews with the Dong women, this study argues that women as productive individuals have a strong influence on the form of their house and the immediate environment, regardless of the male-dominated social construct of the Dong society. The aim of this study is not to produce a definitive relationship between women, house, and identity. Rather, it seeks to offer an alternative lens into the complexity and diversity of gender dynamics operating in and beyond the boundary of the house in the context of contemporary rural China.

Keywords : conception of home, Dong minority, house, rural China, woman's identity

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