

# The Evolution of the Gender Question in the Study of Madame Lavoisier

Keiko KAWASHIMA\*

## Abstract

This paper analyses the changes in the image of Madame Lavoisier from the perspective of gender in two centuries worth of academic literature. From her lifetime to the end of the twentieth century, which marked the 200 years anniversary of Antoine Lavoisier's death, this woman was mainly praised as the quintessential sensible woman who had been dedicated to her husband, the father of the Chemical Revolution. Whereas this was intended as a praise to Madame Lavoisier, an investigation conducted from this perspective does not mean it depicted her as one of the intellectuals of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, a study that attempted to portray who she really was, due to the gender question, could be accused of bias and manipulating the historical documents; furthermore, if such a study adopted an unsuitable methodology, it would only end up emphasizing her as a "wicked woman". From the perspective of second-wave feminism, personified by the slogan "The personal is political", this paper shows the importance of the perception of Madame Lavoisier as a person who supported the Chemical Revolution in her own right.

Such a perspective demands an analysis of how Marie-Anne Lavoisier has been described more recently, especially before the emergence of second-wave feminism, as well as how the research on her changed after this shift in feminist thought occurred. Such works can answer the question of when scientists attracted attention in history. In particular, this paper will compare the ways that female and male scientific researchers have attracted attention and shed light on the reasons for the difference between how the two sexes have been treated, to stop adopting the view of the strong and the tendency to group humans according to different conditions and think of them as being the same. This research approach will be a useful method for not only gender minority studies in the history of science but also for other minority studies.

**Key words:** Madame Lavoisier, Antoine Lavoisier, Gender studies, the Chemical Revolution, 18<sup>th</sup> Century studies

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## 1. Madame Lavoisier and the Gender Question

Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze-Lavoisier (1758–1836) remains a mysterious historical figure. Her name is famous, but nobody really knows what she actually did. In fact, most of what is known about this woman's life and appearance has been gleaned by those who had an interest in her husband Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) and/or the Chemical Revolution. With respect to her appearance, of course, we cannot ignore the powerful portrait, "Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier and His Wife" (Fig. 1) painted by Jacques-Louis David

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\* Nagoya Institute of Technology, Omohi College, Gokiso-cho, Showa-ku, Nagoya City, 466–8555, Japan. kawashima.keiko@nitech.ac.jp