

CHINESE WOMEN
UNDER COMMUNISM
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Methods of Research

One could say that I began research for this thesis over one year ago while working on a paper discussing the relationship between the roles of Chinese women today versus those displayed in ancient Chinese myths. Also, having studied the nature and history of the Chinese political system, my curiosity led me to inquire into how the modern Chinese Communist Government creates policy regarding women. I started to read and skim books written by well-known scholars of women on China's mainland. Upon arrival to study for one year at the Chinese University in Hong Kong in September 1990, I began to observe the position of Chinese women in Hong Kong. I contacted all the organizations for women in Hong Kong, as well as various female activists among the community. Many of the women I interviewed or conversed with were actually first-generation mainland Chinese who immigrated to Hong Kong. These contacts broadened my understanding of the problems facing women in Chinese society. Recent articles and papers written on women's problems in Hong Kong added to my study. Meanwhile, I researched the problems of women in the People's Republic of China (hereafter, PRC). By comparing the circumstances surrounding women in Hong Kong versus those surrounding women in Communist China, I came to the conclusion that females on the mainland are more oppressed than in Hong Kong or Western societies. Their problem lies not only in the fact that both men and women still believe in female inferiority, but also in the repression inflicted onto them by the Chinese Communist Party.

Upon coming to this conclusion, I then reviewed Confucian codes regarding women's roles. Confucianism was the traditional practiced moral code in China, which continues to affect how society is organized today. Aside from Confucianism, the need to study the fundamental theories of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism became essential to the research in order to understand the government policies implemented since 1949. Since the paper does not intend to grapple with Marxist theory as a whole, I found it difficult to identify only the theories directly relevant to the Chinese Communist Party's treatment of women. I therefore referred to Marxism-Leninism only in a most general sense.

In addition to the several books recently written about women in the PRC, there are also a number of useful journal articles related to the subject of women, and an abundance of articles discussing the policies of the China's Communist system. Much of the material most valuable to my study exists in books, journals, newspapers, and magazines written in Chinese, however my lack of Chinese literacy precludes me from fully understanding these materials. After an attempt to read such newspapers as the Renmin Ribao (People's Daily); Hongqi (Red Flag); Zhongguo Funu (Women of China), and others, I concluded it would take far too long to translate, much less find, the articles pertaining to the Party's policy towards women or to the women's movement itself. Among the Chinese English-language publications -- Women of China, People's China, and the Peking Review, only a few issues from the early years of the PRC could be found, and these are on microfilm; in some cases, the microfilm is damaged or poorly marked. (This is reflected in the occasional absence of publication data for various of these articles listed in the

bibliography.) I examined all issues available on microfilm at the Chinese University Library in Hong Kong.

Despite the difficulties due to my lack of Chinese reading ability, as well as the lack of opportunity to study directly in China, the English-language writings of well-known Chinese scholars and others have provided a wealth of information regarding women in the PRC. Current reforms among Communist nations in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may influence the slow reform and opening up to the West ongoing in Deng Xiaoping's China. In due time, China's reforms will undoubtedly effect women's status in Chinese society.

Finally, a note about the romanization system. In most cases when referring to place names and prominent persons, I used the current method of romanization, *pinyin*. However, cases in which the Wade-Giles romanization or Western renditions are more widely used and accepted, such as the names *Chiang Kai-shek*, *Peking*, and *Kuomintang*, I kept the Wade-Giles or Western rendition. Furthermore, regarding names found in the bibliography and footnotes, I chose not to alter a source's method of romanization. The styles, consequently, are inconsistent. Since different forms of romanization are still commonly used among scholars of China, I chose to use whichever style the respective authors chose themselves.

I. Introduction: Women in (Recent) Chinese History

Although women of all nations have struggled to attain human rights, the women of China provide an exceptional case. Prior to 1911, when the Tung Meng Hui Revolution overthrew the last of China's emperors, for thousands of years Chinese women were treated as subordinate, inferior beings, possessing only the rights of slaves, which meant no rights at all.

As with most of the customs and traditions in China, practices towards women originated in the Confucian teachings dating from the second century B.C. Confucius' words in the Book of Changes(*I Jing*) state bluntly: "Women indeed are human beings but they are of a lower state than men and can never attain to full equality with them."¹ The Book of Rites(*Li Ji*) claimed that "to be a woman meant to submit."²

Confucius published the Three Obediences and Four Virtues for women. A Chinese woman must obey her father and elder brother when young, her husband when married, and her sons when widowed; she must behave according to place and to ethical codes, be reticent, attend to herself so that she is clean and pretty, and must not shirk household duties.³ The Classic for Girls(*Xiao Nu*), written during Confucius' time, poetically summarizes in a poem all women's duties:

¹Elisabeth Croll, Feminism and Socialism in China (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1978), 13.

²Ibid., 13.

³Ibid.

As a wife to husband's parents,
You should be filial and good
Nor should suffer imperfection in their clothing or their food.
Be submissive to their orders, all their wants anticipate
That, because his wife is idle they your husband may not hate.

Be submissive to your husband,
Nor his wishes e'er neglect
First of all in this submission is his parents to
respect.⁴

Other basic restrictions imposed upon women included forbidding them to leave the household, engage in political discussion, or receive any kind of education, because an illiterate, ignorant wife was considered "virtuous." Obviously, women were allowed neither voice nor representation in government, putting them at yet a greater disadvantage, since they had no way to escape from their male-dominated bondage. Furthermore, the infamous practice of footbinding, in which a three-to-four-years-old female's foot was wrapped in layers of cloth to prevent it from exceeding the aesthetic size of three inches, severely limited women's mobility, hence restricted (their) interaction with any persons or occurrences outside their (immediate) homes.

Despite these very popular practices for keeping "women in their place," early Chinese intellectuals protested against women's inequality. A female poet, Li Jingzhao, complained of women's isolation. During the White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804) and again in the Boxer of the late-nineteenth century, women formed autonomous, all-female militia groups. Another rebellion, the Taipings' Chinese-Christian uprising in the 1850s and 1860s, formally proclaimed equality of the sexes and granted women official titles. More help came when Christian missionaries flocked to

⁴Ibid., 2.

China from the West in the late 1800s, and, in order to help women attain equal standing with men, established many schools for women's equality, as well as anti-footbinding societies. In 1898, Kang Yuwei led a reform movement, which took up the issue of women's equality. The movement firmly advocated the abolition of foot-binding and promoted women's education, and, indeed, between 1898 and 1912, more measures, such as the establishment of female schools and official laws prohibiting foot-binding were adopted to achieve these goals.

By the early 1920s, several popular women's groups actively encouraged all Chinese women to support their cause; namely, gender equality in terms both of ideology and economic status, are especially guaranteed by the steadier base of legislation. When civil war broke out between the Nationalists and the Communists in 1927, the nature and role of the women's movement changed. Both parties viewed the protesting Chinese women as a potential source of powerful support. In the early years, both the Nationalists and the Communists addressed women's demands, competing to gain their support. Due to numerous variables, however, it was the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, CCP) which eventually won the support and trust of the women. This support contributed greatly to the eventual CCP victory over the Nationalists, and would continue to play a significant role in supporting Communist Party policy. When the CCP defeated the Nationalists and established the People's Republic of China (P.R.) in 1949, it also claimed responsibility for the emancipation of women, which, according to the CCP, occurred with Liberation in 1949. The Communists, controlled by Mao Zedong, claimed that, in carrying out a Socialist or Communist Revolution, women would automatically be liberated.

Since Liberation, most women have yet to occupy high positions either in the government or society at large. As the past forty years have shown, "while the Communist revolution propelled both men and women into new economic and legal frameworks, it barely touched traditional attitudes regarding sex roles."⁵

The new Communist regime did, in fact, achieve partial Liberation for the Chinese people, in that the great masses of Chinese no longer had to suffer under what was a long history of "feudalistic" oppression. For centuries hundreds of peasants worked the land owned by wealthy feudal lords. However, a full liberation of the people, especially of females, has in no way been achieved. By establishing its own regime in China, the CCP merely transferred the power of the "feudal" landlords and rich peasants (from whom they claimed to have "liberated" the people) into their own hands. In fact, since its inception in 1921, the CCP has not only failed to achieve a social reform in China which would recognize women's complete equality with their male counterparts, it has continued to manipulate and exploit females in general, so that Chinese women remain "one of the most oppressed classes" in China.

The Chinese Communist Part has perpetuated the inferior status of females in four ways:

1. Throughout the Civil War (1927-49), Communist Party leaders granted certain rights to women for the purpose of gaining their support against the Nationalists. When the CCP needed to gain support from another class -- e.g., the peasants -- or when their concentration shifted towards

⁵Barbara Wolfe Jancer, Women Under Communism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 57.

fighting the Japanese, all women's issues and demands were put on hold. Furthermore, the CCP used women's support for the purpose of caring for and maintaining their troops, thus exploiting women as a class and perpetuating women's traditional roles. These actions demonstrate the exploitive character of the Communist Party regime and expose the false claim by the Party to belief in women's inherent equality.

2. With the establishment of the People's Republic, and in order to placate women's demands, as well as solidly to establish Communist control over the masses, the CCP introduced legislation which directly affected the traditional roles of women in the community. These roles were greatly changed when the government granted equal social, economic, and political rights to women. However, many of the communist programs from 1950 to 1975 failed to relieve women's suffering or failed to reform the traditional belief that females were inferior. Furthermore, not all of the CCP legislation affecting women had women's equality in mind, but rather the establishment Communist control and the success of Communist goals. Though Communists claim that, with socialism, women will automatically achieve equality, in China women's issues are subordinate to Party policy, since the vast majority of Party members are male. Therefore, women continue to be manipulated by and placed under male priorities.

3. Whereas women began the road to equality in the early-twentieth century, led by independently successful women's groups, such as the "Women's Suffrage Association," were taken over by the CCP after 1949. The Party claimed to be a full believer in women's freedom and equality, thereby taking control of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation in

1950, only six months after it was established. All other women's organizations were absorbed by this body. Furthermore, the original goals set by women's groups in the 1920s and 1930s were changed to follow more closely those of the Party. Throughout its history, the Party has used the ACDWF (now the National Women's Federation of the People's Republic of China) as an instrument in implementing Party policy and control over China. Therefore, the Women's Federation exemplifies the complete manipulation of females.

4. That the Chinese Communist Party labels the period since 1949 "Liberation" is quite ironic, since the majority of Chinese have suffered great exploitation and manipulation at its hands. The Communist State, by nature, contradicts those qualities assumed to qualify liberation. By dictionary definition, the term "liberation" means "the act of freeing from control or domination by a foreign power or the state of being freed from such power."⁶ This writer believes that specific conditions must be met in order to maintain the state of being liberated. These include: the continuance of freedom from domination by a foreign power or state; freedom of expression and belief; the freedom to choose a spouse, employment, and leisure activities (so long as the choices are not harmful to the rest of society); the right to be treated and to treat others as equal human beings, regardless of gender; the right to equal opportunity or accessibility to opportunity; the freedom to escape from or protest any kind of domination or power which an individual believes harmful to him or her self. Without each and every one of these conditions, an individual

⁶Philip Grove, ed., Webster's Third World Dictionary (G.C. Merriam Co., 1961), 1303.

cannot consider himself or herself wholly free. The Communists claimed to be liberating China from the domination of feudal lords and Imperial rule. Though this liberation occurred, the term cannot be justly applied to most peoples in China, including women, who continued to be dominated by Communist rule. Although recognizing the freedom to choose one's spouse, as well as the equality of men and women, the Chinese Communists failed to grant any other liberties to the people. Thus using the term "Liberation" to describe their reign is invalid.

It is the policy of China's Communist regime to restrict free expression or free choice in employment, activity, and even the ability to leave the country if one wishes. In order to retain control over the people, Communists need the masses' support and cannot tolerate criticism. Moreover, at the time when most of the "Women's Movement" activities took place, Mao Zedong was the leader of China. Mao believed in liberating all the peasants from "feudalistic oppression," and had a specific formula through which Communism would work. He firmly supported Marx's theory of class struggle, and urged the proletariat to struggle against the wealthier classes of China, especially feudal landlords. Later, while Mao ruled China (1949-76), the masses, for fear of severe punishment by the Party, strictly followed his proclamations and policies; no one was (is) at liberty to oppose the Party. Moreover, the Government assigned jobs to the people -- the people were not free to choose. These factors have restricted not only the freedom of the people in general, but have greatly hindered the development of women as equals to men.

These factors, coupled with the fact that traditional beliefs and practices regarding women persist throughout much of China and the failure

of the Party to check these practices, lead to the conclusion that if indeed a women's movement took place in China, it was quickly overrun by a Communist regime whose primary concern, regarding women, was to keep women in their place.

II. The Seeding of A Women's Movement: From the 1911 Reform Through the May Fourth Movement

A genuine women's movement was in fact underway in China long before the Communist takeover. Prior to Sun Yat-sen's revolution against the Manchus in 1911, a strong reform movement swept through China. Reform leaders Kang Yuwei and Lian Qichao, in 1898 and later, used Western ideas to write several essays condemning foot-binding and supporting the right for females to be educated. In Canton, in 1892, Kang Yuwei formed the "Unbound Feet Society," which later also opened in Shanghai with over 10,000 members. Foreign women also took the initiative in fostering women's rights by establishing the "Natural Foot Society" in 1895. The reformists were somewhat successful, as witnessed by the Empress Dowager's sending an Imperial Commission to the West in order to study female education. In 1910, 42,444 girls' schools had been set up, serving 1,625,534 students; by 1919 there were 134,000 schools and 4,500,000 students.⁷ Members had tripled in less than a decade!

After Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary group succeeded in overthrowing the 250- year-old Manchu dynasty, the new government took provisional measures for general coeducation from the first through the fourth grade. Furthermore, in March 1912, Sun Yat-sen issued a decree forbidding the binding of feet. Unfortunately, at the same time, the women's section of the Revolutionary Army was disbanded by the newly established government, due to its "threatening" military wing. The President of the Republic, Yuan Shikai, passed laws in 1913 forbidding women to publish magazines or

⁷Croll, Feminism, 15.

to join any political group. These laws were not executed, as Yuan Shikai was soon replaced as President. On the other hand, during this time, a number of women's journals appeared. These included Women's Monthly World, Women's Journal, Women's Educational Daily, and Women's Bell. The Peking Woman's Journal described the feelings of women who felt oppressed by traditional ways of thinking in China:

O ye two hundred thousand's[sic] of China, our sisters, listen! In China it is said that man is noble and woman is vile, that man should command and woman obey ... But we are not under the domination of man. The nature of man and woman is the universal sense of heaven. How, then, can one make distinctions and say that the nature of man is of one sort and that of woman another?⁸

In another article, a female author wrote that Confucius "failed to see that what ought to be done to men also ought to be done to women."⁹

Confucian ideology continued to be questioned as author Chen Diuxiu attacked the Confucian theory of "Three Obediences": In 1916, in New Youth Magazine, Chen wrote that "for those claiming to be female youths of 1916, each should struggle to escape this subordination."¹⁰ By attacking traditional thinking in China, the reformers were enroute towards a broader way of thinking, in which women qualified as equal, full human beings. In order to help women gain equal and fair treatment by members of society, the journals established lists of general goals. For example, New Women stated its objectives as:

1. To sweep away all obstacles

⁸Ibid., 59.

⁹Ibid., 89.

¹⁰cited in Bobby Siu, Fifty Years of Struggle: The Development of the Women's Movement in China. (Revomen Publications, Co., 1975), 47.

which hinder the new woman from self-realization.

2. To investigate the best methods of progress and take action along those lines.

3. To select and command the latest American and European literature on the new woman.

4. To investigate properly present labor conditions among the women of China.¹¹

In 1919, the Women's Bell proclaimed their aim: "liberty and equality; means: struggle, creativeness and the solution of the women problem by women."¹²

In the 1920s women themselves took the lead in fighting for their rights as human beings. Influenced by their American and English counterparts, Chinese women demanded the right to vote. Women demanded suffrage as early as 1912, at the Provisional Parliament in Nanking. Later, suffrage societies began appearing in several cities. "The Women's Suffrage Association," formed in 1922, proclaimed three goals:

1. For the purpose of protecting women's rights all articles of the constitution partial to men should be abolished.

2. In order to secure economic independence for women, the limiting of inheritance rights to men should be abolished.

3. In demanding equality of opportunity in education, the old system of giving women a limited education adapted only to domestic affairs should be abolished.¹³

Other groups, including the Women's Rights Movement Union (1920) and the Women's Rights League echoed the suffragists' demands. The goals set by the "Women's Rights League" included:

¹¹Croll, Feminism, 85.

¹²Roxanne Witke, "Mao Tse-Tung, Women and Suicide in the May Fourth Era," China Quarterly, no. 31: 136.

¹³Croll, Feminism, 97.

1. The opening of all educational institutions in the country to women.
2. Adoption of universal suffrage and the granting to women of all constitutional rights and privileges given to men.
3. Revision in accordance with the principle of equality of those provisions in the Chinese Civil Code pertaining to relations between husband and wife, mother and son, and to property rights, disposing capacity, and the right of succession to women.
4. The drafting of regulations giving equal rights to women in matters of marriage.
5. Prohibition of licensed prostitution, girl slavery, and footbinding.
6. Addition of a new provision to the criminal code to the effect that anyone who keeps concubines shall be considered guilty of bigamy.
7. Enactment of a law governing the protection of female labor in accordance with the principles of "equal work, equal pay"; and a woman is entitled to full pay during the time that she is unable to work owing to childbirth.¹⁴

That these women's groups were still concerned with the issues of foot-binding and lack of female education, after the government had taken steps to eradicate them, displayed the persistence of age-old traditions and thought among the people. Due to their growing power as representatives of half of China's population, women's groups succeeded in gaining recognition. This was manifested in the establishment of a government-recognized Women's Day, to be held annually on March 8.

¹⁴Ibid., 98.

III. Women as a Revolutionary Force, 1921-1949.

By widely registering their complaints, women made themselves a highly visible sector of society. Thus, the government began to regard women as a potential force in remolding Chinese society. The Nationalist Government recognized that, in order for China to become a modern nation, traditional restrictions binding women to the home had to be ended. An intellectual, Chen Dong Yuen, stated: "I have never heard that the country can remain strong when half of its citizens are not educated."¹⁵ Hence, the Government sought to emancipate women in order to achieve their goal of modernization; at the same time the Government's opposition, the CCP, offered women similar goals.

By the 1920s, two powerful groups, The Nationalists or Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communists (CCP), had formed to vie for the right to govern China. While the KMT officially governed China, Mao Zedong, under the influence of the Russian Revolution and Marxist-Leninist Communist theory, was quietly organizing a Communist movement to overthrow the KMT. Both the KMT and the CCP perceived women as potential instruments with which to gain support for their movements. Furthermore, women themselves began increasing their interest and participation in political activities. As early as 1911, "the early feminists ... thought that no question was so urgent as the threatened autonomy of China and the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and the foreign yoke of tyranny."¹⁶ One of the goals of the Women's Rights League was to join the revolution "to overthrow the

¹⁵Siu, 337.

¹⁶Croll, Feminism, 60.

warlords and establish democracy."¹⁷ Neither the KMT nor the CCP let such potential patriots pass unnoticed.

Mao Zedong first recognized the political power of women during his studies in Hunan. As one scholar has explained, "The unprecedented participation of girl students in Hunan's internal political struggle awakened Mao to the revolutionary potential of women."¹⁸ In 1917, Mao and his female-activist friend, Cai Chang (who later became the first President of the All-China Democratic Women's Federation), formed the "New People's Study Society," which addressed specific issues concerning women.

1921 marked the official founding of the CCP, and the First National Congress of the CCP addressed the position of women (and most likely their potential power) at the meeting. Women's liberation was among the issues listed in the party platform in 1922. "The CCP," wrote one specialist, "formed in 1921 ... recognized that women, once awakened, could be a powerful human resource in rebuilding China."¹⁹ The Nationalist Government, or Kuomintang, created a Women's Department in 1923 to address the particular concerns of women.

By this time it had become clear that, while the KMT officially ruled the country, Mao Zedong was working hard in the countryside gathering peasant support in his campaign for Communist Revolution. While competing against each other for the people's support, the KMT and the CCP

¹⁷Katie Curtin, Women in China (New York: By the author, 1985), 19.

¹⁸C.T. Hsia, "Residual Femininity: Women in Chinese Communist Fiction," China Quarterly, no. 13: 131.

¹⁹Diana Ting Liu Wu, "Beyond the Bamboo Door: A Psychological Study of Women and Organizations in Metropolitan China, 1978-1979" (Ph.D. diss.); (Ann Arbor Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1981), 72.

sought especially to win the support of Chinese women, from whose support either party would greatly benefit. Each party introduced legislation during the 1920s which granted females rights. However, by appealing to the peasants for support, Mao and his party gained a large backing, and, as 80% of Chinese women lived in the countryside, the CCP were able to reach most of China's women. This gave them a great advantage over the KMT, regarding women's support. Mao and the CCP eventually won the support of women by promising to lift their severe oppression both as a peasant class and as females. At the same time, however, the CCP was more concerned with women's political support than their emancipation from discrimination. "After the Party was founded in 1921," wrote one observer, "women's work was taken up by Party cadres The first step was political education to awaken the masses of women."²⁰ Mao was concerned with establishing Communism, not with women's equality; yet, he needed to grant women some of their demands in order to gain support. Hence, the CCP formed a National Women's Association in 1925, which initially consisted of 300,000 members.²¹

While Mao and his troops were gathering strength, the KMT made some fatal decisions regarding women. Led by Chiang Kai-shek, it executed a large number of women in 1927 due only to the fact that they wore short hair, which in those days was a sign of emancipation. In the same year, the KMT killed "tens of thousands of the most radical workers and women

²⁰Chi Pen, ed., Chinese Women in the Fight for Socialism (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1977), 2.

²¹Curtin, 25.

activists"²² during their Northern Expedition. When the KMT eliminated the Women's Department in 1928 they lost much of the females' support. At the same time, the Peasant, Workers, and Tradesmen's Departments were also eliminated -- all representing the people from whom the CCP badly needed support. At a 1926 Plenum of the Communist Party, the leaders noticed a "certain amount of achievement in the women's movement, which has demonstrated considerable usefulness in the national liberation movement."²³

Ironically, in the same year they destroyed the Women's Department, the KMT invited female lawyer Soumey Cheng to write a Civil Code for the Government. The Civil Code, finished in 1931, included a guarantee of women's freedom to choose their spouses (thus formally eliminating the tradition of parental matchmaking in China), as well as equal civil, political, and property rights; however, it required women to adopt their husband's surname upon marriage. This last-ditch effort by the KMT represented their recognition of the growing strength of the Communists. One scholar noted: "The KMT's purpose in mobilizing women was not so much to liberate women from oppression, but to 'prevent [them] from being used by the reactionaries [CCP].'"²⁴ The 's measures came too late, as the CCP had already earned the support of many women.

In an effort to suppress the Communists, the initiated the New Life Movement in 1934. The Movement constituted the KMT's attempt to urge

²²Curtin, 28; citing Helen Snow Inside Red China, (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1967).

²³Delia Davin, "The Development of CCP Policy Towards Women 1921-1934" (Ph.D. diss., Leeds University, 1974), 9.

²⁴Siu, 96.

society to return to Confucian values and uphold women's traditional roles within the family. It stressed "the idea that men and women should be raised differently biological reproduction and maternity were praised."²⁵ At the same time, however, the Communists welcomed any recruit, regardless of sex, into their newly formed "Red Army University."

On 12 April, 1927, the KMT and the CCP formally split. The CCP increased its efforts to gain support of the masses. The KMT dampened any support by the peasants and workers in China by eliminating Government departments in 1928. The CCP, on the other hand, held the First National Representatives of Workers and Farmers' Conference in 1931, at which they concluded that women should have the right to vote and to be elected. As a scholar of Chinese women, Katie Curtin noted that the Communists, like the KMT, granted women certain rights, not because they believed in the equality of women, but because they needed women to support their cause. The CCP "saw the women's movement as subordinate to the Party."²⁶

After declaring their friendship with the Women's Movement, the Communists then proceeded to direct the Movement's attention away from women's rights and towards building a Communist China. The Central Committee of the CCP developed "A Plan of Work Among Women," in which the "women's movement was to encourage its members to participate in class associations and political institutions."²⁷ Clearly, women would not achieve liberation unless they aided the Party in spreading a Communist Revolution. That Communist Party leaders did not honestly believe in

²⁵Ibid., 157.

²⁶Curtin, 25.

²⁷Croll, Feminism, 191.

women's equality became manifest in the 1934 "One Million Red Soldiers Campaign," in which the CCP encouraged wives, sisters, and mothers to urge their male family members to join Mao's Red Army. The Communist Party required its female members to increase production of shoes, food, and tea for the soldiers, as well as to entertain them with song and dance. Thus, traditional roles of women returned, or, rather, were simply reintroduced, as the CCP used women to satisfy the material needs of the male soldiers. The Party placed women's needs below those of the soldiers.

From 1931-1934, Mao Zedong enjoyed the backing of the Soviet Union in gathering support for Communism in Jiangxi Province. The CCP programs during the Jiangxi Soviet period, such as allocating more land to the poor peasants and the campaigns to encourage women to join class struggle, enjoyed widespread support. This base would prove to be a major factor in the CCP victory over the Nationalists in 1949, after the eight-year war with Japan.

The Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists was interrupted by the Japanese invasion and the ensuing war that began in 1937. Actually, Japan had occupied Manchuria since September 1931, and did not leave until 1945, after surrendering to the Allies in World War II. During much of the time that Mao was preoccupied with promoting Communism, was fighting the Japanese. Both parties wanted the Japanese out of China. In 1937, the CCP and KMT agreed to form a United Front to resist Japan. In order to secure a united front, the Communists "downplayed the activities of the woman's organization. It stressed that the main role of the women's movement during the war with Japan was to organize women for

productive activity."²⁸ The CCP once again used its own objectives to redefine those of the original women's movement. In fact, the CCP went so far as to declare (with the help of the women's organizations themselves) that "Women Can Emancipate Themselves Only Through Participation in the Resistance."²⁹

For the next decade, 1939-49, within Communist party policy "both land reform and women's liberation were soft pedaled to the extent that Party leaders deemed it necessary to retain the support of landlords, husbands, and others in the overriding war effort."³⁰

Clearly the Communists did not believe that women's equal status was a priority, nor did they believe in women's equal status. During the Japanese war women obeyed the slogans and calls of both the KMT and CCP. They produced war materials, supplied and administered medicine to sick soldiers and propagandized the Anti-Japan Resistance Campaign. In accordance with CCP policy, "the main work of the Women's Association was to be the mobilization of women to take part in social production, the war effort and political institutions."³¹ Yet the types of jobs still ascribed to females manifests the ongoing discrimination and restrictions impeding their progress towards recognized equality. After the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the United Front crumbled, although the civil war had, in fact, continued during the eight-year-long war with Japan.

²⁸Curtin, 31.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Jane Cassels Record and Wilson Record, "Feminism in China and the United States," Social Problems, Vol. 23 (April 1975): 403.

³¹Croll, Feminism. 202.

However, by this time, Mao Zedong had successfully spread the doctrine of Communism among the peasants and women of China. One scholar noted:

As the Japanese gave way to the Nationalists, however, the struggle of patriotism was changed to class warfare: everywhere the Communists established their influence the common people were urged to see the capitalists, the landlords and the agents of the government as their enemies."³²

The people's support of Communism was not the sole factor leading to the KMT's downfall between 1947 and 1949. Extreme corruption existed within the KMT itself. Government officials were criticized for taking bribes, censoring literature after "paying lip service" to the freedom of thought, and "knowing how to use military forces but not knowing how to exploit the rich human resources of the nation."³³ The fact that the KMT did not concentrate on gaining peasant support proved to be a major mistake leading to its downfall. Chiang Kai-shek himself admitted at a Nationalist Party meeting in 1948 that the CCP army was more dedicated to the people than the KMT.³⁴ Meanwhile, the CCP created the All Women's Union, in which women were to receive a piece of land equal to that received by men. By means of its Land Reform, the Communists intended to achieve other goals as well. These included:

1. Thought reform through Party slogans and propaganda
2. The leadership of officers and progressive individuals
3. Mobilization of men to teach women how to farm
4. Cooperation of men and women in production

³²R.R.C. de Crespigny, China This Century. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 67.

³³Yuming Shaw, ed., Reform and Revolution in Twentieth Century China (Taipei, Taiwan: Institute of International Relations, 1987), 183.

³⁴Ross Terrill, Mao (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 192.

5. The systematic organization of communities³⁵

The Women's Union and Land Reform won the support of many women. The Communists claimed that women's equality was finally reached, as demonstrated in the New Farmer's Association of 1947, in which 47% of the members were female. The Women's Association itself drew in thousands of new members each year. In 1938, the Association had 173,800 members; by 1943, the number had reached 2.5 million; three years later, there were 7 million (75% of all Chinese women).³⁶ What was once an independent women's movement had become a useful instrument for Mao's Communist Party.

³⁵Siu, 222.

³⁶Croll, Feminism, 220.

IV. Women in the PRC, 1949-1976: The Emergence of New Roles

1. Introduction

The Communists began their campaign to destroy the traditional family system even before officially declaring Liberation in 1949. Using the ACDWF, the CCP urged females to speak out against their "feudalistic" oppression and maltreatment by family members. Aided by the organization of the ACDWF's branch offices, women gathered in regular meetings to share stories of abuse by their husbands and mothers-in-law. Such meetings were called "Speak Bitterness" sessions. Over 66,000 poor women participated in the campaign,³⁷ and, for most, it was the first time they were able to share experiences with females outside their family.

In order to secure the loyalty of the people to the State, rather than to the family ties, the CCP initiated the Speak Bitterness campaign. However, in order to appease some of the Women's Federation's demands, the Communists officially granted women equal rights in the Constitution of 1949. Known as the People's Republic of China's Common Programme, Article 6 stated:

The People's Republic of China shall abolish the feudal system which holds women in bondage. Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, education, and social life. Freedom of marriage for men and women shall be put into effect.³⁸

Though the Government attempted to establish equal rights, the practice of giving women an inferior status in almost all political,

³⁷Siu, 232.

³⁸Croll, Feminism, 223.

economic, cultural, and social roles persisted. One problem with carrying out its objectives lay in the fact that the Government chose not to execute the law itself, but to use the ACDWF as an instrument for implementing party policy. Moreover, all policy affecting women was taught only to women by other women (members of ACDWF); therefore, men were often excluded from the Party's attempt to create a more equal society. The committees which carried out policies pertaining to, or affecting women, often contained only female members. Men became victims of reverse discrimination, in what had always been considered the women's realm. Reform cannot completely take place when only half of an already segregated society is affected.

The CCP's goals were directed not towards women's equality, but towards destruction of the family and a change in women's roles to support the Party's aims. Though Communists claim that only by means of socialist revolution can women be liberated, the results show that, by urging women into production, the Party did not raise the status of women; it simply prescribed another role in their already full list of duties. The Party did not urge women into production to secure women's equality (although it claimed this would ultimately "emancipate women"); it simply needed a larger labor force to quicken the pace of industrialization. The Communists also believed that, by forcing women out of the home, they would hasten the destruction of family ties.

2. The Marriage Law

The Marriage Law of 1950 represented the first major and most significant legislation of the new regime in ending the patriarchal family

system. The Marriage Law granted men and women the freedom to choose their own spouse, abolished the practice of child-brides, and gave widows the right to remarry. Excerpts from the Law follow:

Article 1:

The arbitrary and compulsory feudal marriage system which is based on the superiority of man over women and which ignores children's interest shall be abolished.³⁹

Article 2:

Polygamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference with the remarriage of widows and the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage shall be prohibited.

Chapter II: Of Marriage

Article 3:

Marriage shall be based upon the willingness of the two parties. Neither party shall use compulsion and no third party shall be allowed interference ...

Chapter III: Rights and Duties of Husband and Wife

Article 7:

Husband and wife are companions living together and shall enjoy equal status in the home ...

Article 10:

Both husband and wife shall have equal rights in possession and management of family property.⁴⁰

Article 23:

In case of divorce, the wife retains such property as belonged to her prior to her marriage ... in cases where the property allocated to the wife and her child or children is sufficient for the maintenance and education of the child or children, the husband may be exempted from

³⁹Curtin, 35.

⁴⁰Kathleen B. Semergieff, "The Changing Roles of Women in the People's Republic of China: 1949-1967; with a Case Study of Ding Ling" (Ph.D. diss., St. John's University, 1981).

hearing further maintenance and education costs.⁴¹

From 1950 on, the CCP would continue to involve itself directly with family practices, in an attempt to eliminate all feudal customs and traditions. Traditionally, matches were made based upon class, birthdays, and the relationship between the two families involved; love was never a factor in choosing a spouse. In destroying this custom, the CCP claimed to be furthering the elimination of the class system, as well as the power of the patriarchal family.

According to Communist ideology, the most widespread form of bourgeois capitalism, oppression, lies in the family. Thus, Chinese Communists believe that the destruction of the family the freedom of exploited people can be attained. A fundamental Marxist theory claims:

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and naturally, can come to no other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to women ... He has not even a suspicion that the real point [of Communism] aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production."⁴²

Both Marx and Engels also believed that wives and children were "slaves" of the family.⁴³ To end the exploitation of the proletarian

⁴¹Elisabeth Croll, The Women's Movement in China: A Selection of Readings (Anglo-Chinese, Modern Series, no.6, 1974), 114.

*The Marriage Law also required children to support their parents in old age.

⁴²Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in Selected Works (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1955), 51.

⁴³John Elster, Karl Marx: A Reader (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1986), 178.

classes, as well as of women, Marx suggested Communism would fundamentally liberate women by requiring them to enter social production outside the home.

The Chinese Communists attempted to open the path for women to enter production by allowing them freedom to marry the spouse of their choice, and hold rights within the household. However, the Marriage Law succeeded only in liberating women from kin-related patriarchal oppression; from 1950, the Party served as "Father." As the future would show, the Party substituted itself for the patriarch. A prime example appeared in a party statement issued in 1957, which ultimately required Party members to assist in matchmaking, with the degree to which the couples' ideologies corresponded as the basis. The statement published in the People's Daily on 12 January 1957, in regard to the Communist Party's approval of marriage, it read:

Such approval is to be recommended, not only that [girls] may avoid marrying persons who are politically unreliable ... but also that the Party may assist them to choose the right partner.⁴⁴

The Communists had officially established themselves as the authority reigning over all families. By ending the practice of parental matchmaking and child-brides, the Party destroyed much of the parental authority within the family. Although most of the village clan elders and patriarchs opposed the new law, the Party gained widespread support from women all over China. By promulgating the Marriage Law and winning the support of women, the CCP was able to consolidate its power and eliminate

⁴⁴Christopher Lucas, Women of China (Hong Kong: Dragonfly Books, 1965), 185.

potential antagonists such as traditional patriarchal families. According to one scholar, "in their attack on the family, then, the Chinese Communists were attacking the old feudal society [They saw] in family reorganization the key means by which to engineer a social revolution and transfer loyalty from the family unit to the Party and State."⁴⁵

On the other hand, females viewed the Marriage Law as a symbol of their freedom. In the ACDWF's magazine, Zhongguo Funu (Women of China), Deng Yingchao of the ACDWF declared that the marriage law "signified the complete emancipation of China's womanhood."⁴⁶ The Communists gave the Women's Federation the job of implementing the Marriage Law. In the tradition of the Speak Bitterness Campaign, women all over China gathered in support groups supervised by the ACDWF branch organizations to complain of injustices committed by their husbands, and were urged by the ACDWF leaders to divorce their husbands. The Federation presided over most marriage disputes, often taking the side of the woman.

After its role in the "Speak Bitterness Campaign" only a few years earlier, the Women's Federation came to be regarded as an evil manipulator by men, despite the fact that they were only acting under the orders of Mao Zedong and the Party. The President of the Federation, Cai Chang, had faith in the Communists' actions. In "The Party's General Line Illuminates the Path of Emancipation for Our Women," she states: "Since its inception, the movement for women's emancipation in China has been led by the

⁴⁵Jancer, 130.

⁴⁶Deng Yingchao, "Reminiscences of the Long March," Women of China, no.5 (1965): 7.

CCP."⁴⁷ Clearly, women would no longer move in their own direction, but under the complete control of and in line with the Communist Party. Deng Yingchao, the wife of Mao's second-in-command, Zhou Enlai, stated in a report on 14 May 1950 that, "even among the cadres of the people's government and the members of the Communist Party there are some who do not show enough respect for their wives."⁴⁸ The Federation genuinely believed that the Marriage Law greatly improved women's position in society; it failed to realize that equality could only be achieved after educational reform alongside economic and political reform. Giving women freedom to choose their spouse did not grant them an equal position in society.

In fact, women did not escape domination by male power, as they continued to be subjected to and exploited by the Communist Party. The 1950 Marriage Law did no more than to replace Confucian ethics with Communist laws: rather than Confucian prescriptions for marriage, women must now adhere to Communist policy. The "old" nature of the new State has been noted by various authors. For example:

Many writers have proposed Marxism incorporated traditional Chinese concepts of authority and obedience to superiors, but substituted the state for the head of household as the object of obedience. However, the very fact that the state, not the head of household, is now presented as the fitting subject of "filial piety" means that every member of the household must turn outward to public life. If women remain enclosed within the home, their loyalty remains with the family."⁴⁹

⁴⁷"To Our Readers," Women of China, no.1 (1966): 1.

⁴⁸Jacques Guillermaz, The Chinese Communist Party in Power, 1949-1976, (London: By the author, 1976), 44.

⁴⁹Jancer, 160.

Though the Marriage Law did indeed liberate thousands of women from marriages in which they were victims of both physical and psychological abuse by husbands and mothers-in-law, it did not necessarily improve their situation. Thousands of female murders and suicides resulted from the new law; husbands would murder their wives if the wives demanded a divorce. On 26 September 1951, Premier Zhou Enlai, in a Statement to the Central People's Government, announced 10,000 cases of female suicides or murders in Central South China.⁵⁰ It is possible that some of these were cases of female infanticide. Furthermore, "when women and girls were sent to the villages to enforce the new marriage laws, some of them were murdered by irate Confucianists."⁵¹ During the years following the promulgation of the Marriage Law, divorce cases were rampant throughout the country. In Shanghai alone the number of divorce cases doubled in 1950. Aside from divorce, women continued to be subjected to the abuses of men. Communist Party members themselves displayed their belief in male superiority in the following way:

Conservatives in the people's militia were frequently reported to beat up women whom they caught in illicit sexual relations these beatings in many instances were not considered cruel, because it had been customary in old China for men to beat their wives and judges evidently took no particular exception to similar incidents on which they had to rule."⁵²

The Communist men also tricked women into marrying Communist Party members, rather than the men of their choice, by threatening

⁵⁰Guillermaz, 47, citing People's Daily, (29 September 1951.)

⁵¹Helen Snow, Women in Modern China (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1967), 75.

⁵²Jancer, 232.

them with imprisonment or with the death of their lovers, if they disobeyed the Party member's wishes. Some Party cadres divorced and remarried more than eight times a year.⁵³ The majority of Communists obviously had not reformed their own "feudalistic" thought, which denied that women represent full, equal human beings. The Party statement that recommended it should assist young men and women in choosing a spouse reveals that the CCP was not interested in granting women freedom, but in winning their loyalty to the Party. The Party had officially claimed its authority over females. The Party, whose majority belonged to the male sex, subjected women to another instance of exploitation by men.

3. Women, Land Reform and the First Five-Year Plan(1952-1957)

The fact that the CCP considered women's rights subordinate to its own goals had already been declared in a 1948 CCP memorandum, which stated that "all rural women's associations in their respective associations must accept the leadership of the peasants' associations in their respective localities."⁵⁴ Mao Zedong believed that the peasants' support took precedence over gaining the support of any other group, and thereby implemented land reforms in 1947 and 1950 which redistributed land by taking from the rich peasants and giving to the poor. The Land Reforms also granted land to women, thus giving women a new role in agricultural

⁵³Lucas, 68.

⁵⁴Ho Kuo Cheng, "The Status and Role of Women in the Chinese Communist Movement, 1946-1949" (Ph.D. dissertation); (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1973), 149.

production. By means of these reforms, Mao and the Party sought to further destroy family cohesion and to eliminate the landlord class. The Agrarian Law of June 1950 granted each family enough land to support itself. Since women were also now allowed plots of their own, sometimes the family was split in terms of land ownership.

Although the land reform granted women new responsibilities by offering them a new role, it also added to women's hardships, as their roles as wife, mother, and housekeeper continued to be of equal, if not greater, importance. Furthermore, the Land Reform of 1950 diverted the Party's attention from carrying out the Marriage Law to thoroughly redistributing the land. In fact, Mao Zedong purposely de-emphasized the Marriage Law from 1950-52 (after the Land Reform was completed). He apparently did this in order to avoid antagonizing the working class and others who opposed the Marriage Law and whose support the Party needed.

After the Land Reform was completed, the CCP issued another reform, The First Five-Year Plan (1952-1957). The Plan aimed to increase both agricultural and industrial production in order to quicken the pace of modernization; it also sought to enhance the presence of Communism by establishing cooperatives in which households would work together and share in production. Because of the Party's desire to speed up production and to solidify their regime, females were mobilized into all sorts of production, managed by the Women's Federation. Elisabeth Croll states: "within the overall strategy to effect rural development and to redefine the position of women, however, the major government policy has always

been the entry of women into social production."⁵⁵ The Party undertook to set up street committees, whose function was to monitor hygiene, women, and the people's welfare, and to propagandize, maintain security, and settle quarrels. Female members outnumbered male members five-to-one in the street committees, whereas men far outnumbered women in government and Party official positions.⁵⁶ Women continued to perform traditional roles, not only in their homes but in the society at large.

President Cai Chang proclaimed that "in all countries women and children have had to work in the early stages of the industrial revolution in order to produce more than they use for subsistence."⁵⁷ In response to the Marshall Zhu De's orders to concentrate efforts on organizing the urban population and restoring industrial production, women's organizations changed the focus of their attention from land reform to work in the towns.⁵⁸ The Federation, in line with Party policy, also encouraged women to build a healthy socialist family. In the 1950s, Mao had declared that China's masses were her greatest asset; therefore, women must attend to the masses of children to build a great socialist nation. Women were told to "link up closely the household work with the work of constructing a socialist society."⁵⁹ At the Third Congress of All China's Women Delegates in 1957, the delegates told women "to diligently

⁵⁵Elisabeth Croll, Women in Rural Development (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1979), 7.

⁵⁶Lucas, 162.

⁵⁷Snow, 32.

⁵⁸Delia Davin, Women Work (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 156.

⁵⁹Margery Wolf, Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 21.

and thriftily manage the home ... [and] diligently and thriftily build the nation."⁶⁰ By this time, the Women's Federation had completely altered its initial goals of achieving women's equality, equal representation in all aspects of society and equal pay for equal work, to building a socialist nation. That is what the Communists wanted. In keeping with the Confucian tradition, the Party assigned women the "Five Goods":

1. Unite with the neighborhood families for mutual aid.
2. Do housework well.
3. Educate children well.
4. Encourage family production, study and work.
5. Study well themselves.⁶¹

The Party chose to emphasize women's traditional family roles, as well as their roles in production. Although at first the Party sought to greatly increase the labor force, the problems resulting from too many women entering production caused the Party to retract its policy. According to one study, "the First Five Year Plan brought an end to the mass mobilization of women in 1953, perhaps because such revolutionary struggles appeared counterproductive to economic development."⁶² As one observer has noted, the Party's messages to women in the 1950s were somewhat ambiguous. While pressuring women to retire, the Party began to emphasize the values traditionally assigned to women.

In an attempt to get housewives to see themselves as contributing to society through their husbands, their status as dependents was used more often, and dependents' conferences were held at which women discussed how best they could

⁶⁰Hsia, 169.

⁶¹Wolf, 21.

⁶²Jancer, 17.

maintain their husbands' morale and preserve their strength for their jobs, protecting them from any problems at home.⁶³

In its First Five-Year Plan, the Party sought to implement a step-by-step economic reform, not an economic revolution (that would come later). Women were the main victims of this Party policy, as they were first urged to enter the labor force, and then told to devote their attention to their families. However, as Delia Davin observed,

a fundamental difficulty for the women's movement in the towns, and one which was to cause problems throughout the 1950s, was that according to theory women were to liberate themselves through participation in productive labor, yet urban women were often unable to get jobs.⁶⁴

This shifting Party policy presents another example of the CCP's manipulation and exploitation of the masses of women, not to mention that women's needs were less significant to the Party's reigning desire for power. As one author states: "Women have always been his [Mao's] left hand"⁶⁵; the Federation was his five fingers. The Party used the Federation to satisfy the Party needs in administering society, while the Party failed to sufficiently satisfy the needs of the females.

4. Women's Role in the Great Leap Forward (1958-1959)

The success of the First Five-Year Plan pleased the Communists. Although the expected increase in production during the first and second

⁶³Davin, Women Work, 170, citing "Important Documents of the National Representative Congress of Workers' and Employees' Dependents."

⁶⁴Davin, Women Work, 59.

⁶⁵Snow, 32.

years of the Plan was 8.6%, the actual increase was 11.9%.⁶⁶ Overall, the economy grew 6% from 1952 to 1957, with over 90% of the countryside organized into cooperatives. Communism was taking shape. Due to the optimism resulting from the First Five-Year Plan, Mao decided to speed up the progress towards modernization.

By introducing the Great Leap Forward in 1958, Mao hoped to squeeze the Industrial Revolution into a two-year period. The Government placed emphasis on and investments in heavy industry, rather than agriculture. Stepping up the process towards industrialization, the Party also aimed towards greater mechanization. This, in part, symbolized an effort to follow the Marxist proposal that "the less the skill and exertion of strength implied in manual labor, in other words, the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labor of men superseded by that of women."⁶⁷ Ironically, Marx's statement seemingly contradicts another made in his Capital I, which claims that "machinery, by annexing the labor of women and children, augments the number of human beings who form the material for capitalistic exploitation."⁶⁸ China needed machines in order to develop a modern industry; therefore, the CCP intended to develop machinery first and concentrate on women's role in modern industry later. Another objective of the Great Leap Forward was to firmly solidify Communism by transforming the cooperatives of the First Five-Year Plan into communes. In February 1958, the Party announced the Great Leap

⁶⁶Chu Chixin, "The Two Years of the First Five Year Plan," People's China, (October 1955): 8.

⁶⁷Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," 41.

⁶⁸Elster, 157.

Forward, "to accelerate production beyond any previous achievement."⁶⁹
At the Second Session of the Eighth Party Congress on 5 May 1958, Liu Shaoqi summarized the goals of the Great Leap Forward:

To mobilize all factors and correctly handle contradictions among the people;

To consolidate and develop socialist ownership, i.e., ownership by the whole people and collective ownership, and consolidate the proletarian dictatorship and proletarian international solidarity.

To carry out a technological revolution and cultural revolution step by step, while completing the socialist revolution on the economical, political, and ideological fronts;

To develop industry and agriculture simultaneously while giving priority to heavy industry; and

With centralized leadership, overall planning, proper division of labor and coordination, to develop national and local industries, and large, small and medium-sized enterprises simultaneously.⁷⁰

In order to achieve its objectives, the Party needed to get as many people into the labor force as possible. Many men were transferred from agricultural cooperatives and light-industry factories into heavy industry. Thus, the Party called on women to take up the jobs left by men. As one specialist observes, "The peak demand for women's labor in 1958-9 was the result of the strategy to create a shortage of labor by withdrawing men from agriculture."⁷¹ In order to get women to comply with the Party's goals, the Communists, as usual, stated that only by participating in social production could women achieve their liberation.

⁶⁹deCrespigny, 209.

⁷⁰Harold C. Hinton, ed., Government and Politics in Revolutionary China: Selected Documents; 1949-1979. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1982), 80.

⁷¹Croll, Women, 26.

The Patti had previously stated that women were liberated when the regime came to power in 1949, then again signalled their emancipation with the Marriage Law of 1950, and in the future would continue to claim that by following each policy, women would be guaranteed liberation; yet this did not occur. The author of a 1959 article in the Peking Review, stated: "Once women have stepped out of the family ... [and] raise their cultural level and take part in social activities alongside with men ... [this will signify] the realization of women's complete emancipation."⁷² ACDWF President Cai Chang supported the commune system. "The communes have provided speedier and more favorable conditions for women's complete emancipation."⁷³ "Women," she added, "fervently supported the commune system." Women attributed their new-found equality to the CCP: "Since last year, Chinese women, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, have greatly emancipated their minds."⁷⁴ The Women's Federation organized women into production units, street factories and mess halls, proclaiming:

Women's groups should make their primary task the studying of how to organize village women to take part in individual and collective production work. They should help, aid and educate village women to solve their difficulties arising from their participation in production.⁷⁵

⁷²Li Teh-chuan, "People's Communes and the Emancipation of Women," Peking Review 2 (31 March 1959): 12.

⁷³Snow, 26.

⁷⁴Li Teh-chuan, 13.

⁷⁵Croll, Women, 3.

Hence, the Women's Federation gave priority to Communist Party Policy, exploiting women's roles to assure the success of Communism. President Cai Chang elaborated on the need to follow the Party line:

"The Party's General Line Illuminates the Path of Emancipation for Our Women:

The general line -- to go all out, aim high, achieve greater, faster, better and more economical results to build socialism -- and a whole set of policies known as "walking on two legs" put forward by the Communist Party, point out the only correct way for China to build socialism at a high tempo, and also the only correct way to lead women toward complete emancipation."⁷⁶

By urging women into production, however, the Party faced the problem of household chores. One analysis revealed that "the acute need for labor precipitated by the Great Leap Forward policies at the end of 1958 forced the CCP to come to grips with the problem of women's domestic labor and the shortage of day-care facilities."⁷⁷ Almost by accident, women were freed (for a time) from their traditional role as housekeeper. Consequently, the Communists created nurseries, public dining rooms, and clothing centers to serve as replacements for women's traditional duties. It should be noted, however, that women, not men, were employed in these centers. In 1959, 4,980,000 nurseries and kindergartens had been established, as well as 3,500,000 public dining rooms.⁷⁸ According to the Government, these facilities must have been in great use, as over 160,000 housewives "threw themselves wholeheartedly into social production

⁷⁶Semergieff, 106, citing Survey of Mainland China Magazines, no.201: 27.

⁷⁷Curtin, 57.

⁷⁸Croll, Feminism, 268.

and live in the great collective."⁷⁹ The amount of work done by women did increase from 166 days in 1958 to 250 days in 1959.⁸⁰

According to the Communist Party, women appreciated the communal household services which allowed them to participate in work outside the home: "The liberation of women from their daily household chores and their participation in labor has served to change them to a very large extent. They are beginning to feel that labor is a necessity, a thing both glorious and joyful."⁸¹ This statement seems to suggest that women did not regard household chores as labor. Another statement demonstrates the Party's success at having replaced the traditional patriarch as the family authority in China: "Now we depend on the commune for food. It looks after us during childbirth, feeds us when we are old and feeble, and keeps our children in school."⁸² The commune, an instrument of the Party, became the father figure for women.

From a different perspective, however, a researcher of Chinese women has discovered another side to the story. Katie Curtin found that, "When the peasant commune members discovered that the food was better at home than in the commune kitchen, they began to stop coming to the kitchens and these ultimately had to be abandoned."⁸³ Moreover, "By 1960, it was becoming obvious that the Commune, particularly in the rural areas, could

⁷⁹Chinese Women in The Great Leap Forward: A Chinese Communist Publication (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1960), 69.

⁸⁰Croll, Women, 26; citing "The People's Commune and Women," Hongqi, 29 February 1960.

⁸¹Chinese Women in The Great Leap Forward, 27.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Curtin, 41.

not replace female household labor or overcome traditional stipulations against women working outside of the home."⁸⁴

Proof that women had yet to be regarded as equal to men can be found in the statements and actions of the women themselves. As the Women's Federation spread Party propaganda by means of its journal, Zhongguo Funu," one editorial warned women that, due to women's "special problems," they should not strain themselves in the fields, but to work in "a place nearby but not far away, [in a] dry field but not the paddy field, and [do] lighter work, but not heavy work."⁸⁵ Furthermore, although women worked in the outside labor force, they "often confined themselves to jobs that were traditionally thought of as women's work, such as sewing, embroidery, light assembly work and other repetitive jobs."⁸⁶ One Chinese woman, in an attempt to praise the commune system, revealed the pervasive belief that women were still inferior. "The commune pays its members according to their work Now women have the power to dispose of their incomes just as they please They call this new relationship 'handing down power to the lower level.'"⁸⁷ Women were given power, yet they remained at "the lower level."

Not only did the Great Leap Forward fail to liberate women from their traditional status and roles, it failed to boost China forward as an

⁸⁴Semergieff, 127.

⁸⁵Croll, Feminism, 263.

⁸⁶Ibid., 286.

⁸⁷Chinese Women in The Great Leap Forward, 29.

industrialized nation. Some scholars believe that the Great Leap Forward was nothing but a "great leap backward":

During the Great Leap Forward, women were shunted about China like machinery. Families were torn apart without warning, babies were thrust into State nurseries and older children into State schools.⁸⁸

A Chinese female interviewee stated: "Mao promised to free women from the slavery of the household. Instead he simply changed the nature of their hardships."⁸⁹

The Great Leap Forward was an economic disaster. By emphasizing heavy industry, rather than agriculture, the Government invested in a segment of production which represented only a small portion of Chinese industry. The Government also took food from the peasants into the cities in order to encourage heavy-industry workers. Because of this policy, peasants suffered. The factories sent in inaccurate production figures, wishing, but unable to meet the Party's demands. Even though many laborers worked through the night trying to meet quotas, they were unable to do so. On the other hand, with the Party's call for more industrial goods, backyard furnaces produced an overabundance of low-quality goods unfit for use. One scholar believes that by 1959, "it was clear even to Peking that both planning and the boom in the economy were seriously out of hand and the information received at the Capital was dangerously inaccurate."⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the economic slowdown during 1959-60 combined with a severe drought from 1960-61, caused two years of "Great

⁸⁸Lucas, 8.

⁸⁹Ibid., 116.

⁹⁰deCrespigny, 212.

Famine." Mao himself admitted failure: "I knew nothing about industrial planning It is I who am to blame."⁹¹

As soon as the Great Leap Forward policy was abandoned, women were told to shift roles again. "Women were particularly hard hit by the resulting economic dislocation and decrease of production," concluded one scholar, "being the first to be released from work."⁹² Women had not yet received equal pay for equal work, and already they had been called out of the labor force. Consequently:

It seemed that in the first instance they [women] commonly agreed that the experience of the 1950s had shown that changes in the economic base, or transformations in the mode of production, did not necessarily mean the creation of new norms determining social behavior.⁹³

Ten years of experience had shown women that perhaps socialism was not the only factor necessary to guarantee them an equal position in society.

5. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Women's issues were put on hold for the next decade. After the economic crises due to the Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine of 1960-62, the Party decided to rebuild the economy primarily through political revolution. Because of his economic failure, Mao received less Party support in the early 1960s; his name was not mentioned in several

⁹¹Terrill, 275.

⁹²Curtin, 62.

⁹³Croll, Feminism, 289.

Party documents, nor did Party policy stress following his ideas. Consequently, he devised a means by which to reacquire power: the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

The Cultural Revolution was mainly a political drive to thoroughly revolutionize people's thought and practices in line with Marx-Lenin-Mao Zedong thought. In order to achieve a revolution, the Party, led by Mao, encouraged the population to purge itself of any anti-Marx-Lenin-Maoist ideas, by means of denouncing those individuals who were thought to pursue bourgeois and capitalist thought, Western values, and the like. Mao wished "to change men's ways of thinking to alter the established patterns of their culture and background in order that they should achieve a true proletarian outlook and genuine commitment to ultimate Communism."⁹⁴ Yet another view argues that, "Mao Zedong's fundamental purpose in launching the Cultural Revolution, then, was to seek and destroy his opponents within the Party."⁹⁵

The Revolution, referred to by some as "the ten lost years," caused great disorder and chaos in every city and village across China. Families were torn apart by mutual denunciations; those thought to oppose the Party were persecuted and, in many cases, killed; the Red Guards, a youth troop and Mao cult organized by the Chairman, looted thousands of homes, carried revolution to the streets, and caused millions of innocent Chinese to fear for their lives.

⁹⁴deCrespigny, 247.

⁹⁵Philip Bridham, "Mao's Cultural Revolution: The Struggle to Consolidate Power," China Quarterly, no. 41 (1970): 1.

During the Revolution, schools and universities ceased to operate so that students and professors could devote their attention to the struggle. Yet, it was a disaster. Mao had little interest in encouraging women's rights at this time, although he continued tacitly to support the Marxist theory that socialism would free women from their oppression. Rather than encourage women to enter the work force or devote their energies to the home, the Party now told women, like the rest of society, to avidly and loyally study "Mao Zedong thought."

In fact, due to the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the economic policy for women during the 1960s stressed women's reproductive, rather than productive, capabilities. As a result, China experienced a surge in the birth rate during the Cultural Revolution. An article published in Gongren Ribao suggested that, due to discrimination, women may also have been discouraged from participating in the labor force: "When they [women] are young they have a high ideal and are full of vitality; once they get married and have children they are likely to become retrogressive."⁹⁶

The results of this kind of thinking is evident in the fact that, according to one study, by 1969 women were receiving six to seven daily work points while men received seven to nine.⁹⁷ Moreover, at the Third National People's Congress, 542 females attended, which constituted only 17.8% of the total number of delegates.⁹⁸

⁹⁶Croll, The Women's Movement, 89.

⁹⁷Davin, Women Work, 130.

⁹⁸"To Our Readers," Women of China, no. 2 (1965): 1.

Instead of mobilizing for production, women, like the rest of population, concentrated their efforts on studying the thought and quotes of Mao.

Before the Cultural Revolution women were too tied to their home Now we women are studying Chairman Mao. We read newspapers and discuss things. Formerly it was only men who discussed things when resting from their work in the fields. Now women, too, talk things over.⁹⁹

The state of women's issues during the Cultural Revolution was evident in the Party's 1967 recommendation that the Women's Federation be suspended. Women were to integrate with the proletariat and to participate in the uprising. Ironically, this could be seen as a victory for women, finally placing them on the same level as the rest of society. However, the Party sought to decrease women's representation and power. The Chinese women's magazine, Zhongguo Funu, formally ceased publication in 1966, the first year of the Cultural Revolution. On May 11, 1968, an article in the People's Daily implied that the women's movement had lost momentum. According to scholar Elisabeth Croll, "My own interviews in 1973 substantiate the impression that many individuals, associations and enterprises gave little attention to furthering women's interests."¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Cultural Revolution signified a downturn in the women's movement, as well as in the Party's concern over whether or not they gained an equal position in Chinese society.

6. The Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius

⁹⁹Croll, Feminism, 33.

¹⁰⁰Croll, Women, 56.

In 1973, women fell victim to yet another Party campaign initiated by Mao Zedong. In an effort to purge competitor Lin Biao (formerly Mao's right-hand-man who was accused of organizing a conspiracy), Mao launched the slogan "Pi Lin Pi Gong," meaning "criticize Lin Biao and Confucius." The campaign called for a revolt against Confucianism, seen as an enemy of Marx-Lenin-Mao Zedong thought. Ironically, the Campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius revived the women's movement. Elisabeth Croll discovered in her own interviews with Chinese females that,

"It was in criticizing Confucius that women's groups said they had begun to realize that the traditional division of labor and the evaluation of the sexes into inferior and superior categories rested on social rather than biological foundations."¹⁰¹

The Women's Federation reestablished itself and took up the new Party campaign to criticize Confucius. A Women's Congress in 1973 adopted resolutions advocating the study of Marx, Lenin, Engels, Stalin, and Mao, and the criticism of Lin Biao.¹⁰² The magazine Hongqi published an article entitled: "We Revolutionary Women Bitterly Hate the Doctrines of Confucius and Mencius."¹⁰³ With the Party's support, the Federation established branch committees and study groups, which conducted workshops to study Marxism and contribute to the "Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius Campaign."

¹⁰¹Ibid., 40.

¹⁰²"Tientsin Women's Congress," Peking Review 15, no. 28 (1973): 4.

¹⁰³Croll, Women, 40.

The Confucian doctrine blatantly discriminated against women. Confucius referred to them as "backward in thought and ideas,"¹⁰⁴ and said that the less educated a woman, the more virtue she possessed. The Campaign, according to the Dazhai Iron Women's Team, reminded women that "the masses of working women were the most oppressed and humiliated victims of the old ethical codes and their life experiences served as a warning against the restoration of the Confucian rites and rules of propriety."¹⁰⁵ However, women failed to realize that in rejecting the ethical codes of one, they supported the codes forced upon them by the other. The Women's Federation changed its goals in accordance with fluctuating Party policy; from 1949 onwards, their focus lay not in reforming the idea that women are inferior, but in participating in social revolution. By supporting Mao Zedong's policies, the women supported their own exploitation as an instrument of the Party.

¹⁰⁴Croll, The Women's Movement, 106.

¹⁰⁵Croll, Women, 40.

V. Tracing the Goals and Policies of the Women's Federation

Although the ACDWF was introduced on 3 April 1949, six months before the Communists established their regime, it eventually became a Communist Party tool. That it gained widespread support from all around China is evident in the influx of members from 1949 to 1956. The Federation consisted of 20 million members in 1949, but by 1956 the number had risen to 76 million. The large increase in membership is due to the fact that it became, in effect, a Communist-supported government department for political purposes, and many women had to join. Cai Chang, with whom Mao had founded the New People's Study Society in Hunan in 1917, was the first President of the ACDWF. Cai firmly supported both the CCP and women's advancement in society.

As early as 1949, the ACDWF declared its two major responsibilities: to implement government policy in regards to women, and to notify the government of complaints that government policies towards women were not being executed.¹⁰⁶ Although in 1955 the Federation was already in its sixth year, an announcement in the Communist Party-controlled newspaper, People's China(Renmin Zhongguo), introduced it to the public:

[The Federation aims to] protect women's rights and interests and promote child welfare, to ensure equality of women, and raise the level of their political understanding and vocational ability...We shall, by means of education, let the women understand that men and women are born equal.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Snow, 20.

¹⁰⁷"Introducing the All China Democratic Women's Federation," People's China 1 March 1955, 39.

*(Note that men were not included in this education.)

In another statement, the Federation elaborated their objectives as:

To strengthen the unity of all nationalities and classes in order to protect the newly won rights of women, give expression to their new aspirations, break down their traditional social isolation and raise their levels of political understanding and vocational ability.¹⁰⁸

Since the initial calls for female's rights in the 1920s, women's rights groups had achieved many of their objectives: equal rights in marriage; the right to vote; a law protecting female labor (the Labor Insurance Law in 1951 guaranteed a female fifty-six days of maternity leave); and an official Government policy requiring "equal pay for equal work." Despite these achievements, the Federation recognized that discrimination against women still existed. The Women's Federation had learned, throughout the years, that education and social reforms were essential in gaining an equal status. However, rather than focusing on broad education, with perhaps some new Western ideas, the Federation chose to follow the education supported by the Communist Party. It really had no choice but to follow Party policy -- had it not, it would not have survived -- Communism requires the support of all major organizations.

The first organizations for females had called for the study and use of American and European literature regarding women to further their cause.¹⁰⁹ Communists rejected any influx of Western culture, labelling it "petty, bourgeois capitalism." Therefore, the education proposed by the Federation in 1950 referred to socialist education, i.e., Marx-Lenin-Mao Zedong Thought. By limiting its education, the Federation

¹⁰⁸Croll, Feminism, 228.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

restricted opportunities for creating social reform. The following observation by a student of Chinese women, exposes another aspect of the way in which women united themselves:

The Women's Federation channels feminist concerns and activities into areas that complement the general Party line, or at least do not come into conflict with it. Thus Federation control, which ultimately means Party control, of all public activities around feminist issues inhibits the growth of a popular movement to eliminate patriarchy and limits the development of creative approaches to bringing about this change.¹¹⁰

The Party Central Committee itself referred to the Federation as a "transmission belt between the Party and the female masses."¹¹¹

As Party policy changed, so did the focus of the ACDWF. Rather than concentrating on "letting the women understand that men and women are born equal," they shifted their efforts to encouraging women to enter the labor force. In the early 1950s, as the CCP instituted its First Five-Year Plan, the Federation added to its goals:

Resolutions on the Present Task of the Women's Movement

1. Create a movement based on workers and intellectuals
2. Improve women's productivity.
3. Provide welfare, nursing and midwife services.
4. Increase scientific knowledge.
5. Increase the promotion of cultural development done by women cadres.¹¹²

A 1956 article in the People's Daily, echoed the Federation's new emphasis. In "Women on the Industrial Front," Chiang Chen argued,

¹¹⁰Margaret Rita Weeks, "Concepts of Gender and Reproduction and the Changing Roles of Urban Women in the PRC" (Ph.D. diss., The Wright Institute, 1980), 101.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Croll, Feminism, 27.

New China's women know very well that they will not be completely emancipated unless they have the same rights as men in the economic field, and they are keen to do their bit in turning China into a great socialist economy [by entering into production.]¹¹³

The Federation declared that "women's groups should make their primary task the studying of how to organize village women to take part in individual and collective production work."¹¹⁴ In pointing out discrimination against female members in the Federation, scholar Delia Davin has written that: "the tendency was to organize working women and women not working for wages or salaries separately."¹¹⁵ She further notes that, within the dependents associations, females' membership and positions were determined by their husbands' jobs.¹¹⁶ These policies taught women to identify themselves through their husbands. At the same time, men did not have similar standards of membership within their own organizations, nor, in fact, this type of organization.

Massive mobilization of women took place only in the early 1950s. After 1953, the CCP realized that the growing labor force needed to be reduced in order to guard against unemployment. Therefore, instead of encouraging women to join socialist production, the CCP told women to develop their traditional duties in the home. The Women's Federation, jointly with the Party, carried out a "Five Good Movement," urging women "to plan their domestic budgets, establish hygienic standards in the home,

¹¹³Chiang Chen, "Women Salute March 8," People's China, no. 11 (1 March 1956): 28.

¹¹⁴Croll, Women, 53.

¹¹⁵Davin, Women Work, 57.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

help their husbands and children, and study and cooperate with each other on a neighborhood basis."¹¹⁷ In September 1957, the Third Congress of the ACDWF reiterated the Government slogans, telling women to "diligently and thriftily manage the home."¹¹⁸

This policy was quickly reversed with the start of Mao's Great Leap Forward in 1958. Once again, the Party and the Federation shifted their attitude towards women's roles. Cai Chang reported in 1958 that women should "contribute more to socialist construction, women should undertake political studies, raise their communist consciousness, and ardently love socialism and the people's communes."¹¹⁹ Communes had replaced cooperatives as the main organization for production. Pleasing the CCP, Cai claimed that all women avidly supported the communes.¹²⁰ Zhongguo Funu, became sprinkled with articles about women's great feats during the Great Leap Forward period, reporting how the communes greatly emancipated women. It ignored previous Party statements announcing full female emancipation in 1949, as well as upon enactment of the Marriage Law in 1950, etc.) Writer Huang Yuan contributed to the propaganda campaign:

Active Women Builders of Socialism Meet

Socialist social services not only enable people to enjoy a fuller life...but they have brought great benefits especially

¹¹⁷Croll, Feminism, 257.

¹¹⁸Hsia, 169.

¹¹⁹Women of China, no. 6 (1958): 3.

¹²⁰Snow, 26.

to women...it has enabled more women to engage wholeheartedly in productive work.¹²¹

Communal social services were abandoned with the failure of the Great Leap Forward, as was the policy stressing women's participation in production. Again, women fell victim to Mao's erratic policies.

The period between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution witnessed a shift in the CCP's focus from industrialization to political uniformity. As it attempted to strengthen support for Communist China, the CCP developed an isolationist attitude towards the outside world. The ideological split with the Soviet Union occurred late in the 1950s, when Mao openly opposed Stalin's policies. The United States had always been an enemy, due to their capitalism and "imperialism." Moreover, the U.S. wars in Korea and Vietnam posed a threat to China's security. Thus, during the 1960s, Mao and other Chinese Communists felt the need to stress the development of China as an independent state. In the process, Western nations were severely criticized, primarily the United States. Again, the Women's Federation shifted its line to correspond to that of the Party, and began attacking U.S. imperialism.

One of the earliest signs of the Federation's opposition to foreign imperialism appeared at the World Congress of Women, held in Moscow in March 1963. Here, the Federation, as representative of the CCP, outlined the purposes of the women's movement as:

For realizing the emancipation of women, defending their rights, opposing U.S.-led imperialism and colonialism and winning peace, national independence and social progress,

¹²¹Huang Yuan, "Active Women Builders of Socialism Meet," Women of China, no. 6 (1958):56.

[these are] the basic problems of the women's movement at the present time.¹²²

Not only did the Federation shift its objectives away from the original ones, it sought the support of other socialist nations in the fight against "U.S. imperialism." Hence, it offered six proposals at the Congress:

1. To affirm that a common task for all women is struggle against imperialism.
2. To demonstrate that U.S. imperialism is the most dangerous enemy of world peace.
3. To oppose policies of war and aggression headed by the U.S. and to ban nuclear weapons.
4. The support of oppressed nations' struggle for independence.
5. Unite all women in an effort to raise women's status.
6. A call for women of the world to unite against imperialism.¹²³

The CCP not only feared U.S. interests in Asia, they felt insecure about not having a nuclear capacity, since the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, did. In Zhongguo Funu, the leader of the Chinese women's delegation to Moscow, offered a bit of propaganda, alerting women to the change of policy. "To strive for general disarmament," she wrote, "is an important task of the world peace movement and also a task of the international women's movement."¹²⁴ A few years later, the theme was the same: "This year, we women will continue ... to march forward courageously in our common cause to fight U.S. imperialist aggression."¹²⁵

¹²²"At the World Congress of Women," Peking Review, 6 (5 July 1963): 8.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴"Greetings for March 8," Women of China, no. 2 (1964), 1-2.

¹²⁵"To Our Readers," Women of China, no. 1 (1966): 1.

While women kept busy discussing their international battle against imperialism, they eventually became preoccupied with the Party's birth control campaign. CCP (Maoist) policy towards birth control experienced several reversals during Mao's reign. In 1952, the CCP issued a statement calling contraception "a means of killing Chinese people without shedding blood."¹²⁶ Only two years later, an article in China Youth News, another Communist publication, referred to contraception as a "sweet-smelling flower."¹²⁷

In the following few years, several articles appeared discussing family planning and contraception.¹²⁸ For example, an essay in People's China in 1957 advocated contraception, later marriage, clinical abortion, and sterilization as means to control population:

To make the equality between women and men, which we won at the liberation, a real living thing, women must work and study hard. This means that they must be able to plan their families so that they are not tied down by the household drudgery [i.e., smaller families].¹²⁹

Even if women were freed from household responsibilities, they were not free to choose how they spent their time. The Party would take care of that, by assigning jobs, requiring attendance at Party meetings, etc. At any rate, almost as soon as women were told to cut down on the number of births, Mao reversed his policy and called the Chinese masses the

¹²⁶Lucas, 231, citing People's Daily, 25 April 1952.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Leo A. Orleans, "Birth Control: Reversal or Postponement," China Quarterly, no. 13 (1963).

¹²⁹"Birth Control in China," People's China, no. 23 (1957): 27.

greatest source of China's wealth;¹³⁰ hence, as women adhered to Mao's statements, they began reproducing at a heightened rate, as noted by various scholars:

"[In 1958 came] a new avalanche of propaganda that stressed a shortage of labor throughout the country. Almost simultaneously with the abandonment of the birth control policy came the creation of the communes and the inauguration of the now famous 'Great Leap Forward.'"¹³¹

During the Cultural Revolution, attempts at family planning ceased altogether. In 1964, the Party suddenly announced another major birth campaign. "Every street committee, neighborhood committee, commune, brigade, and production team," notes one specialist, "formed its own family planning staff."¹³² Despite the dispatch in 1965 of 1,000 mobile medical teams promoting birth control, by 1966 the Party was in such disarray over the Cultural Revolution that any women's issues had to be put aside until the restoration of order took place in the mid-1970s. After the Cultural Revolution, the CCP took severe measures to limit population growth. These included the introduction of the one-child-per-couple policy, as well as the inclusion of a clause in Article 49 of the 1982 Constitution stating that, "both husband and wife have the duty to practice family planning."¹³³

¹³⁰Curtin, 77.

¹³¹Orleans, 65.

¹³²Jancer, 72.

¹³³Hungdah Chiu, "China's Legal Reforms," Current History, no. 84 (1985): 268.

Today, all birth control policies decreed by the Party are monitored by the Women's Federation, and implementers of the one child per couple policy on all levels are women.¹³⁴

It may be argued that the Government's birth control policies represent an unjust interference with women's rights -- they are politicizing nature. Furthermore, the fact that the Party assigns only women the duty of overseeing the proper execution of the laws reinforces the notion that reproduction is solely a women's problem. Men must be equally responsible for childbirth, even though they cannot carry the fetus. In fact, in almost all other Party statements with regard to women's rights, the woman and child are coupled together in terms of rights, thus symbolizing the Party's recognition of women's traditional role as nurturer and homemaker.

Women continued to obey the Party because they genuinely believed that someday they would achieve full human rights. As Zhongguo Funu explained: Because women are keenly aware that socialism has brought them genuine emancipation, they love socialism and are determined to follow the Communist Party and take the socialist road."¹³⁵ At the same time, the Women's Federation recognized that they had access to women only through the Party, and that any other approach in Communist China would be impossible.

¹³⁴Weeks, 72.

¹³⁵"To Our Readers," Women of China, no. 2 (1966): 1.

VI. The Setting for the Women's Struggle: A Centralized Communist State

The main goal of a Communist regime is to create an egalitarian society in which all men's needs are satisfied by efficient means of production. Marx, Engels, and Mao believed that such a society could only be achieved after a proletarian class revolution, in which the proletariat would unite and ultimately overcome the exploitive, bourgeois class. In the primary stages of a Communist state, Party representatives must guide the proletariat in their rebellion and assure the defeat of the capitalists. However, with the liberation and victory of the proletariat, there is no need for a guiding regime, and the proletariat rules by itself. The Chinese Communists, however, have failed to return the power to the proletariat. The State represents the supreme force presiding over all of society, and most of the legislation created by that force has served only to reinforce its power over the people.

The CCP has become involved with almost every aspect of a Chinese individual's life. It assigns their jobs; censors their entertainment, so that it falls into line with Party ideology; and it requires some type of Party participation and study of Communist ideology by (almost) all people. While disallowing any studies outside those approved by the CCP, it forbids any criticism of itself, Communist ideology, or Party policy. Should any Chinese violate these premises, he or she will most assuredly suffer some kind of punishment, which may be severe. Moreover, it is in the nature of the Chinese judicial system to believe a person guilty until proven innocent.

Obviously, the lives of everyday Chinese are severely restricted. A person can neither choose his topic of study nor openly express his views and opinions. The austerity of the regime naturally affects the nature of women's lives. By restricting their actions, the CCP limits opportunities for women to strive for an equal status within their society. The foremost aspect of this kind of oppression is evident in the nature of the Women's Federation itself. In the Third Guangdong Provincial Women's Congress in March 1962, the Federation claimed that "women's work must be adapted to the demands of the Party."¹³⁶ Because China possesses both a centralized political body and economy, all organizations must form policies in accordance with the Party line, the result being that the ways of coping with existent and potential problems are severely limited. Women, in particular, suffered, due to this policy, since they already experienced repression from the types of roles and attitudes traditionally assigned to them.

Though the State claimed to liberate them, women encountered the same types of discrimination under the Communist regime as previously. By 1973, only three females had served in the State Council, one as a Vice Premier, while two others had occupied top Government positions; of the 105 members of the 1973 Standing Committee, only thirty-nine representatives were women, and only 635 females served on the 2,250-person National People's Congress in that same year.¹³⁷ Moreover, Women's groups themselves suffered discrimination. Their organizations

¹³⁶Croll, The Women's Movement, 7, translating and citing Nanfang Ribao, (27 March 1962): 62.

¹³⁷Lawrence K. Hong, "Women in China," Social Problems, 23 (April 1975): 550.

(which are automatically attached to the Women's Federation), published articles only on socialist, feminine issues, in order "to remove ideological constraints."¹³⁸ The Party closely supervised these organizations, like all others in China. "The regime's presence is ubiquitous," writes one observer, "and there are no ways to escape."¹³⁹

In a drive for support, the Party becomes involved with all forms of entertainment. Almost all Chinese publications, movies, and cultural programs, in some way praise the Communist Party and/or its leaders. As Mao Zedong stated: "There is in reality no such thing as art for art's sake proletarian art and culture are part of the entire cause of the proletarian revolution."¹⁴⁰ After this statement, all Chinese artists directed their energies only to the cause of the CCP. One Chinese woman described the consequences of this type of power: "You're always scared. You've always got a guilty conscience because there are so many things you must not do or say."¹⁴¹

Most Chinese women do not have the liberty to choose whether to participate in the labor force nor do they have the freedom to choose their line of work; the Party decides whether or not women are needed in the labor force, and assigns them a job accordingly. Can the Chinese woman really consider herself free?

Furthermore, the goal of the Party was not to raise women's status, but to utilize women for the Party's own purposes, thus exploiting them.

¹³⁸Croll, Feminism, 292.

¹³⁹Lucas, 138.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 302.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 128.

This approach demonstrates a fundamental concept in Chinese tradition, that of the subordination of the individual in order to serve the greater needs of the state. One scholar has observed "[the fact that] the single Chinese do not count is a major principle of the system; if the interest of the nation is served, the citizen must consider himself likewise satisfied; community and individual interests must be accepted as one and the same."¹⁴²

Women's interests have always followed those of the Nation. Some scholars would argue that this policy of serving the nation first represents only the Party's quest for ultimate power over the masses. In view of the repression carried out by Mao Zedong, the Gang of Four, and now Deng Xiaoping, this opinion may be valid:

[Mao] used this personal prestige in a ruthless drive for power and relentless demand that his ideal program for continual revolution towards ultimate communism should be carried forward in defense of all other considerations of government, society, and individual preference.¹⁴³

The progress of the women's movement significantly slowed due to Mao's idea of Communist Revolution. Rather than proportional representation with working members of Government, in 1972 only two women served on the seventeen-member Politburo; in 1976, seven out of sixty-

¹⁴²Ibid., 92, citing R. Guillain, The Blue Ants: 600 Million Chinese, (New York: Criterion Books, 1957).

¹⁴³deCrespigny, 244.

three officials in Ministerial, State Council, and Chairperson positions of National Assembly were females.¹⁴⁴

The control exercised over the public by the Communist Party stifles public education. By not allowing people to investigate interests other than socialist propaganda, the Party limits the public's knowledge of other perspectives, subjects, and ideologies. Of course, this is the objective of a Communist regime; for the purpose of creating popular Party support, the CCP must eliminate all competitors. The result is a significant lack of liberty among the general public. If people cannot speak, work, or play freely, then how can they claim to be "emancipated"? Rather than having freed the Chinese people, the Communists have merely replaced the pre-1949 Landlords as the oppressors. Emancipation of any sex cannot take place until all members of society are freed from oppression. When people accept that men and women have evolved as equal members of a species, the public will then be ready to treat human beings according to qualities that are universal, rather than sexual.

¹⁴⁴William Edward Ellis Deibert, "The Women's Movement in China" (Ph.D. diss); (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1984), 306, citing "Communist Party Government Line-up," Radio Free Europe, 23 November 1972.

VII. CONCLUSION

Since the Communists came to power in 1949, Chinese women have indeed experienced a great change in their roles in society, as well as their legal rights. Women in China today contribute significantly to the labor force as factory workers, party cadres, managers, and politicians. They, like their sisters around the world, also experience the double burden of caring for the family, including raising the children, managing housework, and cooking meals.

The legal rights the Communists have accorded women cannot go unacknowledged. In demanding the abolition of practices such as footbinding, child-brides, and polygamy, the Communists have eliminated the most significant contributions to women's oppression. In comparison to most women in the rest of the world, however, Chinese women had quite a lot of catching up to do in terms of opportunity for equality. The Communists have claimed that women may only be emancipated through socialism; however, history has shown that women in capitalist nations enjoy more liberties and more equality of opportunity than those in China.

The treatment of women as an inferior class is still prominent in all areas of Chinese society, despite the CCP's efforts to avoid it. One example of the Party's failure to address specific needs is a 1980 survey of 707 peasant women of child-bearing age, published in Jingji Yanjiu (Economic Research): Of the 707 women, up to 42% were illiterate, while only 3.5% had reached senior middle school.¹⁴⁵ The results of a 1982 study were less optimistic, finding 49% of rural women and 24% of urban

¹⁴⁵Elisabeth Croll, Chinese Women Since Mao (London: Zed Books, 1983), 37.

women illiterate.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, despite the fact that the Marriage Law had been in effect since 1950, in 1979 the results of various surveys in rural and urban areas revealed evidence of arranged marriages. Seventy-five percent of the marriages in two rural counties in Anhui province resulted from negotiation by the parents. In Shanghai, only four out of twenty-two marriages were "free choice."¹⁴⁷

After marriage, the belief in male superiority is again evident in the bearing of children. Although Party policy calls for only one child per couple, many couples have a second child if their first one is a girl. The pressures to bear a male child are strong:

A survey of 1000 of these with certificates [for children] and a 1000 without certificates showed that parents of boys and parents with a higher education and higher than average incomes, were more likely to have signed a certificate.¹⁴⁸

Many couples would not obtain a certificate for the new-born infant if it was female, due to the instilled belief that a son would be better and the hope that, in the future, the wife would bear a son, at which time she would get the certificate. As Elisabeth Croll states: "The desire for boys is so great in the single-child family that it has led to an unforeseen reappearance of female infanticide and violence against women who bear daughters."¹⁴⁹ Traditional oppression remains in socialist China.

¹⁴⁶"Help Chinese Women in Self-Improvement," Beijing Review 30 (2 March 1986): 27.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 77.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 95.

¹⁴⁹Ibid, 93, translating and citing SWB, 16 December 1982.

Another factor contributing to women's lack of status is their lack of representation in the Government. Despite the CCP's claim to support women's equality, only 21.1% of the 1978 National Congress participants were women, while a mere 19.4% of the Standing Committee members were women.¹⁵⁰

Today, problems facing women continue to be severe, and certain departments in the PRC bureaucracy are taking account of the problems:

In a National Women's Federation and Public Security Bureau meeting held earlier this week in Beijing, Mr. Yu Lei, vice-minister of public security, said the abduction and sale of women and children as well as prostitution, were still "very serious" despite numerous campaigns against them.¹⁵¹

Regarding the exploitation of the working class, Marx put forth the following:

The fact of the collective working group being composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must necessarily, under suitable conditions, become a source of humane development, although in its spontaneously, brutal capitalistic form, where the laborer exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the laborer, the fact is a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery.¹⁵²

Due to evidence provided on the nature of Party policy, practices, and general control over the public, it can be surmised that the relationship of the CCP to Chinese women is an example of the laborer existing for the process of production. Women are rallied to support the Party, to enter production, or to build a strong family, depending on what

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 119; citing Xinhua News, 8 March 1980.

¹⁵¹Mariana Wan, South China Morning Post, (Hong Kong), 30 December 1990, sec. 1A, p.3.

¹⁵²Philip J. Kain, Marx and Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 160; citing Karl Marx, Capital I, 489-490.

the Party deems necessary at the time -- all for the purpose of maintaining Communist Party control. As two Western scholars conclude, "Without a power base, the demands of women were met only when their liberation was beneficial to the political and economic interests of the revolutionary regime."¹⁵³ Therefore, China has only achieved what Marx referred to as "crude Communism," in which "women, instead of being the possession of individual men, become the common possession of the community of men."¹⁵⁴

This thesis has attempted not to disprove the already apparent phenomena of women's changing roles and rights in the People's Republic of China, but rather to argue that, because of the nature of Chinese Communism, women have fallen victims to the oppression and exploitation of the CCP. The possibility of increase in women's liberation depends on the reform of the CCP. During the 1980s, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the CCP took some steps towards opening up to new ideas, especially those from the West. By freeing themselves from isolation, the Chinese have created opportunities for broader knowledge and understanding by the people. A higher level of education would no doubt affect the treatment of the female in China. However, despite some reform, the ongoing repression and failure to accept new values continues to add to the virtual imprisonment of the Chinese people.

¹⁵³Cassels Record and Record, 404.

¹⁵⁴Kain, 67.

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