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# The Importance of State Intervention in Improving Gender Inequality in China

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The Importance of State Intervention in Improving Gender Inequality in China

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Union College

## ABSTRACT

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The Importance of State Intervention in Improving  
Gender Inequality in China

Over the last century, China has undergone a tremendous amount of change. For women, these changes have brought unprecedented rights and opportunities. The state plays a critical role in the status of women in China and this is shown in the accomplishments that the Chinese government has achieved regarding women's rights. To understand gender disparity in China, it is important to understand traditional customs and rituals, traditional ideologies, and the traditional roles that the state used to play in the subordination women in ancient Chinese society. However, enormous changes have occurred in the last century. The fall of the last dynasty ushered in a new state, with a completely different ideology. This is a state that has implemented laws and reforms that have drastically improved the lives of Chinese women. However, despite all these positive changes, some traditional norms remain deeply rooted in Chinese society and in Chinese families. My thesis argues that this is due to the lack of enforcement of those laws and reforms by the state. Although Chinese women are legally equal to men, this is not the case in reality. If gender equality is to be realized in China, the support of the Chinese state is necessary.

# The Importance of State Intervention in Improving Gender Inequality in China

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## **Introduction**

This thesis examines the improvements that have been made regarding women's rights in China within the last century. Historically, women in China enjoyed little to no freedom or rights. Dualism and Confucianism were the core ideologies that governed Chinese society and advocated the subordination of women. It was reasoned that women were naturally inferior to men and the state supported this patriarchal society by supporting rituals and customs that cemented women's inferior status. It was not until the early twentieth century that a state which supported emancipating women emerged. The People's Republic of China, under communist rule and influenced by Marxism-Leninism, acknowledged the subordination of women as a struggle and was able to successfully improve the lives of women over the course of the twentieth century. This paper argues that state intervention is a key component in improving the lives of Chinese women because despite its unpopularity and the persistent traditional beliefs and practices that remain, the state has achieved unprecedented progress by implementing and enforcing laws and policies that improve women's rights.

*Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* by Kay Ann Johnson is the main secondary source I use in my paper. Johnson's book focuses on twentieth century China, as the Chinese Communist Party passed laws and policies that granted full gender equality. However, many peasants and as well as cadres resisted these laws and policies, which prevented greater changes. Johnson argued that the Party decided to take a more conservative stance towards the issue of women because most of China's population were conservative peasants who did not

want to liberate women.<sup>1</sup> In the end, women's lives did drastically improve under the Communist rule in unprecedented ways, leading to my argument that the state has significant influence in either better or worsening the lives of women and gender equality cannot be realized in China unless the state chooses to fully enforce laws and policies about gender equality.

"China's Modernization and Changes in Social Status," by Gao Xiaoxian in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State* is another important secondary source. Gao explained that while China is currently modernizing, this development has not reached the issue of women in China. Without the liberation of rural women, Chinese women will never achieve gender equality. While social modernization is not easy, it is important to educate and help rural women, in order to further develop theories on women's issues.<sup>2</sup> Traditional marriage practices and beliefs remain and this hinders further development of women's rights. Gao's suggested further steps that are needed in developing women's studies and women's rights. From this, I started crafting my argument. I concluded my paper with the argument that the state can and should do more.

In addition to Johnson and Gao Xiaoxian, this thesis also contains considerable material from primary sources. *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook* edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey contains primary sources translated and gathered by Ebrey. The sources I use are: "Ancestral Rites," "Genealogy Rules," "The Shrew," and "The Correct Handling of Love, Marriage and Family Problems."<sup>3</sup> These sources provide insight on women's inferior status in ancient China and the progress in women's status through the Communist rule. *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang is a

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<sup>1</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 85.

<sup>2</sup> Gao Xiaoxian, "China's Modernization and Changes in Social Status," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, trans. S. Katherine Campbell, ed. Christina K Gilmartin, (Vol. 10.;10;. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 80-97.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Ancestral Rites," in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 79-83, 84-89, 95-97, 237-239, 373.

memoir recounting the lives of Chang's grandmother, who was a concubine to a warlord, Chang's mother, who worked in the Communist Party, and Chang's life growing up under Communist rule. This memoir really exemplified the rapid changes that occurred in China. In three generations, rituals and practices related to marriage have undergone remarkable change, and like the sourcebook, confirmed the significant impact state intervention has on women's emancipation.

The first chapter gives a very brief overview of how subordination of women in China before the twentieth century was caused by three factors, ideology, rituals and practices, and state intervention. Dualism and Confucianism created an ideal harmonious world where it was natural and virtuous for women to occupy an inferior status in society and serve men. Rituals and practices including ancestral worship and patrilocal marriages, were Dualist and Confucian beliefs put into practice that limited women's kinship relationship. Lastly, and most importantly as later chapters will show, the state's support for these ideologies, rituals, and practices cemented women's subordination. Women enjoyed few to no rights, economic opportunities, or legal protection, so women were dependent on men. This establishes the background as to why the changes that occur later regarding these three factors are so significant.

My second chapter focuses on how these factors began to change in various degrees from the late nineteenth century into the first half of the twentieth century. The Qing dynasty was overthrown and both the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party were influenced by cultural movements and sought to improve the status of women in China. Traditional rituals and practices about marriage continued because the constant warfare during this period prevented states from implementing radical policies and laws. Constant warfare also led much of China's population to seek nothing more than a return to a more stable time period, and revive the traditional families

that subordinated women. It was not just the peasants, a lot of soldiers also opposed granting women liberation and the state ultimately chose to take a conservative attitude towards the issue of women. The policies and laws that really impacted women's lives nationwide would come after 1949, with the unification of China.

The third chapter focuses on the period from 1949 to 1976, also known as the Mao years. Enormous improvements were made in the lives of average Chinese women during this time. The Chinese Communist Party was founded on Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the leader of the Party, Mao, was a feminist himself. This state, unlike any states that ruled China before, was strongly anti-Confucian, and sought to improve women's right and freedom. The Marriage Law and Land Reform of 1950 were the first of its kind, they granted women property and equal protection under the law. However, cadres and peasants alike were not enthusiastic about enforcing these laws and policies because traditional ideology towards women remained popular across China. Large numbers of women also entered the workforce and although a minority, unprecedented number women joined the Party. The state tried different ways to realize gender equality, attempting to change traditional ideology, practices and rituals, such as lessening women's double burden through collectivization, erasing outward markers of femininity. While the improvements made towards the issue of women benefitted the country and the wellbeing of many women, the state's rule irrational policies during the Mao years were largely disastrous and sent the country into decades of chaos.

The fourth chapter focuses on the period immediately following Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. Collectivization was no longer the goal and people were encouraged to pursue their own prosperity. Due to the state's encouragement, the Chinese society's ideology became a hybrid of the traditional ideas and the new ideas introduced into China with the start of



its new market socialist economy. The lives of many women significantly improved because of women's new economic opportunities and the state's continuous goal to protect and promote women's rights to certain degrees. This enhanced the freedom and independence of many women's lives and changed their status in their families, earning them newfound respect. This improvement in rural areas is noteworthy because China's peasants are China's most conservative peasants. At the same time, not everything improved for Chinese women. Important components of traditional beliefs that subordinate women remained in society, practices such as patrilocal marriage and son preference also persisted because the state has not fully enforced gender equality.

Chinese history in the past century has shown that the Chinese state can achieve great milestones in the path to women's liberation in China. Never before have Chinese women enjoyed as much rights and independence as they do today. In looking towards the future, it is important to continue analyzing the three factors that had helped subordinate Chinese women in the past, ideology, rituals and practices, and state intervention. My argument is that strong state intervention can reshape the other two factors. The Chinese state has already accomplished this in many ways. Chinese women today are still discriminated because some traditional beliefs remain and still limit in the opportunities women have. Although legally, women and men are equal, the state has not fully enforced its gender equality laws and policies. Daughter discrimination, China's weak social welfare policies, educational and economic disparities, patrilocal marriages, and limited societal roles for women are all problems the state can tackle to improve this important problem. Without the state's support, gender equality might never be realized in China.

## **Chapter 1 – The Subordination of Women through Ideology, Rituals and Practices, and State Intervention in Ancient China**

In imperial China, women were confined to the domestic sphere of life and enjoyed little to no economic, political, or human rights, or freedom. Of course, there were rare exceptions, but for the most part, females in ancient China were subjected to a life very different from that of their male counterparts. In analyzing why this was the case, it is important to consider the long lasting cultural ideologies and philosophies of China and how they were used to justify the discrimination against women through rituals, customs and practices, and most importantly, through state support. Cultural ideologies, such as Confucianism and Dualism, have been embedded in the core of Chinese thinking for centuries, even millennia. It was far better being a male in imperial China where Confucian patriarchy was the norm and ritual and customs reinforced it. Females in imperial China were dependent on male family members for everything because the state offered women few economic opportunities and political freedom. Women were not protected legally because the state that created these laws was largely biased against women.

With regards to the status of women, the traditional Chinese philosophies of Dualism and Confucianism had the most significant impact. Dualism, which existed long before Confucianism, stated that two opposite but complementary entities coexist in the world to balance one another out. Often referred to as yin/yang, this also contributed to the idea of gender inequality. In a lot of these analogies, such as heaven/earth, qian/kun, and yin/yang, one entity is seen as greater and more powerful while the other is seen as lesser and inferior. Dualism extended to other social relationships as well, including that between parents and children, and

teachers and students, and so on. It was also abstract enough that it could be interpreted and used in different contexts outside of gender and social relationships.<sup>4</sup> Dualism was applied to gender in ancient China and it is important to understand how Chinese intellectuals viewed gender in the bigger cosmology of things so as to understand female roles in China in relation to those of males. Tying yin/yang to gender in China entailed assigning specific characteristics that justified the subordination of females. Females are yin, the characteristics of which were negative, wet, dark, passive, cold, immobility, even sinister. Males are yang, the characteristics of which were also hot, dry, active.<sup>5</sup> It was seen as natural for males to go outside and live but females should be the opposite, instead thought to belong to the domestic sphere of life.

Considered one of China's greatest teachers, Confucius' name is permanently etched into the list of the world's greatest thinkers because of the impact he has had on Chinese culture. Confucianism is a system of philosophical teaching that was created by Confucius, although Confucian values includes traditional values that existed long before Confucius, traceable back to the early Zhou dynasty<sup>6</sup> and was built on Dualism. The importance of this ideology on Chinese culture for the past two and a half millenniums cannot be underestimated. It was very popular in China because Chinese emperors implemented it to shape every aspect of China's social and political life, because Confucianism, an ethical and social philosophy, reinforced imperial power. Chinese emperors liked Confucianism because it encouraged people to obediently serve the government, which meant that it preserved the status quo for rulers. Confucianism was so important to the Chinese that anyone who wanted to become a bureaucrat

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<sup>4</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 152-162.

<sup>5</sup> John DeFrancis, ed., *ABC Chinese-English Comprehensive Dictionary*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 1147, 1108.

<sup>6</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 20.

in China since the Song dynasty had to be tested on how well they understood Confucianism.<sup>7</sup>

The civil examination system was also created through Confucian values, which excluded women from participating in what was the only method offered to improve people's social-economic status through their merits.

Confucianism advocated a hierarchical system, where elders are respected and honored, and the state and ruler is obediently served. Inside the family, a patriarchal system was encouraged; men held power depending on their status and subordinated women. This made women supporters of this system because women could have only gained respect and power if they achieved Confucian goals. Motherhood is considered by Confucianism as one of the most important roles of a woman and it is not surprisingly "the most powerful social role available to most early imperial women."<sup>8</sup> This structure was important because Confucius and many traditional intellectuals before him believed this was the way to maintain a harmonious society. Although Confucianism explains a lot of different relationships in society, the five most important relationships are: son to father, husband to wife, friend to friend, ruler to subject, and elder to younger. These relationships guided Chinese society, dictating how each person should be treated based on their status and standing. Ancestor worship was also very important in Confucianism, which shared the idea of subordinating women by giving them small roles in the important rites. Therefore, regulating females to a lower status in the family as well as in society was seen as putting things in order the way it was supposed to be in a harmonious China.

Women's status in China was heavily impacted by this highly influential ideology, which established a status that excluded women from any power other than limited domestic power and

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<sup>7</sup> Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 58.

any independence in the public and private spheres. Both Confucianism and Dualism were created to help better explain the world and established a moral foundation for how everyone should live and coexist with others. These philosophies taught that harmony can only be established when things are in their right places, from social relations to elements of the cosmos. When intellectuals applied these ideologies to gender, it was reasoned that females belonged in an inferior status naturally. Not only did Confucianism and Dualism justified Chinese women's powerless status in a society where they had no choice but to become dependents of their male counterparts, but this was also confirmed as the natural order of things in the world.

This is further shown through the rituals derived from these ideologies that were considered very important in ancient China. These rituals included worshipping gods or ancestors, an important duty in Confucian ideals, and were considered a very important part of Chinese life. Through the rules of these rituals, females' inferior status in was cemented into Chinese thinking. In these rituals, there were very specific and detailed rules for everything from what everyone should wear to the many painstaking steps that have to be carried out to perfection in order for the rituals to be considered a success.<sup>9</sup> These ritual rules made clear distinctions in the roles of males and females. The significant roles of men and the less significant roles of women mirrored an ideal Chinese society. These sacrifices and rites that were tied to religion, and ancestral worship mirrored individuals' role in society, explaining the Confucian society as the natural way of things. Dualism and Confucianism both advocated the idea that everything in society is the way it is because of a certain balance that needs to be achieved, hence, women's inferior status in Chinese society.

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<sup>9</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Ancestral Rites," in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 79-83.

In the Song dynasty, the influence of dualist ideology of gender separation and difference is shown very clearly in society's definition of women's domain. "In Song China, association with women in the inner both limited and empowered: it kept women out of the public sphere but legitimated their authority in the domestic sphere."<sup>10</sup> This offered no drastic improvement in Chinese women's lives because they were still excluded from public life, meaning they were reliant and dependent on male family members. The necessary existence of a superior and inferior entity in the cosmos and the application of that concept to gender meant that females were seen as inferior but necessary complements to males in traditional Chinese society. Females in Chinese society are therefore viewed indispensable, but subordinate to males.

In the very popular practice of footbinding in ancient China, women started painfully bending and binding their daughters' feet at a very young age in order to achieve what was then considered beautiful. The perfect woman needed what was called lotus feet, which were ideally only 3 to 4 inches long. Those who did manage to achieve this ideal, and every Han women by the Qing dynasty bound their feet if they wanted to get married, had to pay the price for it. It is no surprise that mutilating a person's feet to such an extent made it hard for women to enjoy any forms of physical activity that involved using their feet. This forced women to stay at home or close to home at all times, which limited women's life physically. Not only so, "footbinding... also signaled femininity and hence gender distinctions," Dorothy Ko argued.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the practice of footbinding is also related to Dualism and Confucianism, the belief that women were innately different from men and belonged indoors.

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<sup>10</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, 1st ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 44.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Ko, "The Body as Attire: The Shifting Meanings of Footbinding in Seventeenth-Century China," *Journal of Women's History* 8, no. 4 (Winter, 1997): 8-27, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/203245643?accountid=14637>.

Ancestral worship and worshipping of the gods were so important to the Chinese that the Chinese government nationalized some of these cults to stabilize and justify their rule and therefore, preserved the status quo.<sup>12</sup> This meant the subordination of women in rituals were supported and encouraged by the state. During the Han,

The selective inclusion and exclusion of women in important state sacrifices propagated gender hierarchy. Women were never completely excluded from ritual practices. Allowing carefully defined female participation gave state rituals an air of universality and completeness. But excluding women from certain key rites or confining them to marginal roles concretely and publicly enacted the overall superiority of male over female. Performances within the ritually sensitive court, symbolic center of the cosmos, were thought to encourage a similarly hierarchical order in the world at large. The system of sacrifices thereby enacted a patrilineal view of ideal female identity. Women were seen as necessary to the legitimate social and cosmic order, but only when confined to properly restricted roles. And overall, female social roles were less important than male roles.<sup>13</sup>

The importance of these rites and the state support of Confucian hierarchy in imperial China cannot be underestimated. This not only confined women to less important roles than men, but also justified it through both state power and Dualism and Confucianism, which influenced every part of a person's life. These rites and the traditional ideologies of ancient China made it clear that women played a necessary role in the world, just a much less important role than men.

One of the most important and life altering events in a woman's life in ancient China was marriage. "Of all the ceremonies a woman could experience in her life, none altered her

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Szonyi, "The Illusion of Standardizing the Gods: The Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 1 (1997): 113-35. doi:10.2307/2646345.; David G. Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, Judith A. Berling, and American Council of Learned Societies. Committee on Studies of Chinese Civilization, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou Along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, Vol. 4.;4; (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 146.

existence as decisively as marriage,” Bret Hinsch explained.<sup>14</sup> For women, this meant forever leaving her natal family and living with her husband’s family for the rest of her life. Patrilocal marriage was a common practice in imperial China. Women were married, to sometimes very faraway places, usually outside the villages their natal family lived in. This was also why Chinese families preferred sons to daughters. Daughters are married out of the family and could not help her parents into old age the way sons could. From this standpoint, it made more sense for families to invest in and care for their sons more because they could take care of the family and their aging parents. From a financial standpoint, poor families also could not afford to raise daughters with their very limited resources.

Like the emphasis on rituals in Chinese society, marriage ceremonies were very important to women because being a wife gave women title and respect that concubines did not have. Dowries, especially of large quantities, also gave Chinese women some protection. For wives, “the possession of a dowry was an important economic expression of the differences that set her apart from concubines and maids.”<sup>15</sup> By increasing her husband’s wealth through her dowry, a woman’s place in the house was secured. Concubines were not wives and were considered “closer to a higher form of servant than to a wife.”<sup>16</sup> Concubines had absolutely no legal rights, unlike wives who had a few legal rights. Concubines could be bought and sold the way servants were in imperial China. While the main wife had the most power and respect among all the wives, concubines in many cases would only be recorded in the genealogy if they had proper marriage ceremonies. “Concubines are not in reality all the same. Those who are

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<sup>14</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 143.

<sup>15</sup> Rubie S. Watson, Patricia Buckley Ebrey, and Joint Committee on Chinese Studies (U.S.), *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, Vol. 12.;12;, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 250.

<sup>16</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 38.



married with proper ceremonies are recorded as being ‘married,’ whereas those who are not are designated as being ‘taken in.’”<sup>17</sup> Concubines did not have festive marriage ceremonies like wives and some did not have any ceremony at all. Ceremonies, therefore, clearly reflected the importance and respectability of each person and where they stood on the hierarchy.

Marriage ceremonies also symbolized how brides would leave her families forever. Marriages were arranged and decided by parents in ancient China, and couples usually met for the first time on their wedding night. She is carried off from her birth family to her husband’s family, where she is expected to live for the rest of her life. This meant newlywed women were put into foreign settings with complete strangers and expected to live with them for the rest of their lives. She was removed from everyone she knew, especially her family and has very limited opportunities to visit her birth family, which was only allowed with the permission of her husband’s family. This could not be easy on new brides whose new family expected a lot from them. “New brides in these complex families were expected to devote their energies to serving their parents-in-law and pleasing everyone they could.”<sup>18</sup> She not only had to make sure to please and serve her husband, she also had to serve his whole family because “a woman married a family, not just a husband.”<sup>19</sup> This was a hard transition for most new brides and made them very vulnerable.

In a story from the Song or Yuan dynasty, “The Shrew,” a new bride was so misbehaved and acted so vulgar and unwomanly that she was returned to her family and then became a nun. Her father-in-law found her quick tongue to be unacceptable and “he said in a rage, ‘A female

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<sup>17</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “Genealogy Rules,” in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 238.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, 1st ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 115.

<sup>19</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 47.

person should be gentle and staid, and sober in speech: only then is she fit to be a daughter-in-law.”<sup>20</sup> An account from the Han dynasty laid out what was considered ideal for a wife and what was not. While Mencius’ mother was upheld as the ideal mother and wife, who sacrificed herself and raised an amazing son, a wife who dominated her family was considered bad. Mencius’ mother quoted the *Book of Changes*, believing that women should submit throughout their lives.<sup>21</sup> She should serve parents when she’s young, to her husband when she’s married, and to her son in widowhood. An account by a man named Feng Yen described what was considered a bad wife at the time. “Since antiquity it has always been considered a great disaster to have one’s household be dominated by a woman.” Not only did Feng Yen considered it to be a great embarrassment that his wife to dominated the household, but he also viewed it as morally wrong. This aligned with Dualist and Confucian philosophy, which taught that women should serve men and not vice versa. In this hierarchical system, newlywed women had the least amount of privilege and power. This meant she would be at the mercy of anyone in her new family. Not only was she a woman, which excluded her from power already, but before she was able to bear a son, she had no power and her name was not be written in the family genealogy, meaning she was not considered a member of the family yet.

Genealogy in ancient China was considered very important because it documented the family line. It was the duty of every Chinese family to carry on the family name by producing heirs. It was equally important to worship deceased ancestors; meaning offspring were necessary to maintain ancestral worship. This was why motherhood was the most powerful role a woman

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<sup>20</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Shrew,” in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 84-94.

<sup>21</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Shrew,” in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 84.

could attain in imperial China.<sup>22</sup> While wives were recorded in her husband's ancestral lineage even if she does not bear children, concubines were only mentioned if she bore children for her husband's family. This said a lot about Chinese females' worth in families. Their worth was determined by what they can do for the family. Their powers stemmed from the sons they bore, not from their daughters because daughters are married out, which highlighted the superior status of men in the family.

Yet, no matter how much power Chinese women attained from having sons, they could never be of the same status as the men in the family. Genealogy rules in Qing dynasty reveal that women who were divorced from their husband did not have their name recorded in the family genealogy even if she did bore sons for the family. She was only mentioned as the mother of this son or that son, but she was not recorded as a member of the family. This meant that a woman's place in the family was defined through her relationship to male figures in the family.<sup>23</sup> Whether it was her relationship to her son or to her husband, she had no identity in the family if her relationship to the men of the family was removed. This extended to power too, as women in ancient China could only attain power through her relationship to the men of the family, especially by bearing sons for the family.

Widowhood highlighted the fragility in the power women attained through motherhood. States not only enforced rituals, but also legally subordinated women. If a woman's husband died, she lost any power she previously had. Bret Hinsch explained, "A woman without a husband [found] herself the object of pity, outside of mainstream patrilineal society."<sup>24</sup> She could

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<sup>22</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 58.

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Genealogy Rules," in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 237-239.

<sup>24</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 58.

not manage the family finances because legally, none of it belonged to her. She simply had to hope that her relatives would be kind and would not try to cheat her as she tried to best bring her children up so they could inherit the family's wealth.<sup>25</sup> It was seen as an honorable thing and was not uncommon for women to accompany their husbands or masters to their deathbeds. "Another virtuous act that first achieved recognition in the Ming and Qing was the suicide of a wife or a fiancée on the death of her husband or betrothed."<sup>26</sup> This clearly showed that the identity of women in ancient China was tied to the men in the family. After she was betrothed, her life belonged to her husband and therefore, it was seen as a virtuous thing that she should sacrifice herself and follow him to his deathbed. A woman sacrificing for her family in such ways was expected, her only purpose, at all was to serve her husband and his family.

Chinese society was also not very fond of women who decided to remarry. It was the norm that women stayed loyal and faithful to their husband their entire lives while the same was not expected of men. Women were expected to make sacrifices by being a widow for the rest of her life and never remarrying. Widows who did not remarry were held in awe although this made them very vulnerable in society. Women in ancient Chinese society were so dependent that they had to find another male to depend on after losing their husband. Without legal rights or protection, women had no place in ancient Chinese society if they did not have a male figure to depend on. Bret Ebrey stated that society, by "exalting the courageous, stubborn, self-sacrificing widow might seem like exaltation of spunky women, but the underlying message was that women really did need men."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "The Problem of Women," in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 95-97.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," in *Past & Present*, no. 104 (1984): 111-52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650700>, 127.

<sup>27</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, 1st ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 203.

Divorce was even worse, especially when wives initiated them. With “the rising codification of patrilineal interests into moral dictates during the late Zhou and Han, it [was] not surprising that some early imperial thinkers actively discouraged both female-initiated divorce and female remarriage.”<sup>28</sup> There were even laws that were created to ban women from divorcing their husbands. States were very much active supporters of all these customs and practices that followed Dualist and Confucian ideologies, they aided in the subordination of women in ancient China. In such a vulnerable position, many Chinese women conformed to the Confucian hierarchy in order to protect themselves. By becoming a mother, women could influence the decisions of their sons, who might one day become the head of the house. While a new bride did not have any power in the family, when she became older, her power grew if she had a son. According to Confucianism, two of the five relationships gave older women respect. Young should respect old, so older women of families should be respected by younger members. The second relationship was filial piety, where sons were supposed to respect and serve their parents. Sons, therefore would submit to their parents, including their mothers. It was through their sons that mothers can therefore, exercise power that they did not have earlier in their life. This stressed the importance of sons, which contributed to favoritism towards sons.

Daughters were taught to be dependent and obedient, to be virtuous women. From an early age, it became clear that females were treated as inferior to males. In the *Book of Songs*, one of the poems instructed parents to treat their sons and daughters differently. “Boys shall have beds, hold sceptres for their toys, creep on red leather... in their embroidered coats... Small girls shall sleep on the floor and play with tiles, wear simple clothes...”<sup>29</sup> Daughters would one day

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<sup>28</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 48.

<sup>29</sup> “Book of Songs,” in *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, translated and edited by Cyril Birch and Donald Keene, (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 15.

leave the family so they are only temporary family members. Marriage was equally important to a daughter's parents because they could benefit from her marriage. For instance, her chastity was guarded because if she lost her virginity, "her womb [would be considered] contaminated through intercourse... [and would cost her parents] the loss of an economic commodity."<sup>30</sup> Son preference was the norm in many Chinese families and daughters from an early age, learned their place in the Confucian hierarchy.

The state supported the Confucian hierarchy by making it impossible for women to become independent so women tried their best to gain more power in their own domain, in the domestic sphere of life. "It was in the interests of a mother-in-law to preserve her own authority by reducing her daughter-in-law to dependence and submission. To defend herself, a woman would try to use her own children to encircle herself with sympathetic kin."<sup>31</sup> Her son was an essential source of power for her and she would nurture her relationship with her son to ensure her own protection. Women were not simply powerless victims who were subordinated by men, women also subordinated women. "Women, after all, were the ones who reared the daughters and trained the daughters-in-law."<sup>32</sup> When it came to women of the family that were lower than her on the Confucian hierarchy, especially a new daughter-in-law, it was important for mothers to make sure the new bride would not be a threat to her own power and to gain power through controlling her new daughter-in-law.

This was not just something that happened between mothers and their own daughters or their daughters-in-law, this power struggle also extended to other women in the family. For a

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<sup>30</sup> Leslie Eugene Collins, *The New Women: A Psychohistorical Study of the Chinese Feminist Movement from 1900 to the Present*, Vol. 2, (Yale., 1976), 584-585.

<sup>31</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, 1st ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 129.

wife, nothing was more threatening than her husband's other wives. These were called concubines, because husbands could only have one wife but as many concubines as he wished. Another big difference in the marriage freedoms between males and females in ancient China was that men could marry as many women as they want but women could only marry one. For women to remarry was looked down upon while men did not have the same problem. "Men in their second marriages [simply] did not suffer from the problems of... remarried widows."<sup>33</sup> This was the norm in ancient China and one of the many differences between men and women.

It was not necessary for men to marry many women, but to have many concubines was a sign of power and prestige for any man living in imperial China. This of course made a lot of wives and concubines very jealous. To have to share a husband meant that these women all had to fight over the husband's attention, love, and family resources. This also meant there was a lot of competition, to bore sons in order to secure their importance in the family and in their husband's eyes. This led to a lot of jealousy, envy, hatred, and sabotage among women. They spent their time plotting how to ruin this woman or that woman in order to benefit themselves. In one of the greatest Chinese novels of all time, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Phoenix, the very smart wife of a wealthy family destroyed the life of her husband's new concubine. She was unable to stop her husband from marrying whomever he wished nor punish him for marrying other women because men were allowed to marry whomever they wished. So she decided to destroy the new concubine, who is powerless to stop her from doing so. Phoenix easily fitted into the portrayal of an evil and cunning woman who destroyed the lives of others but she could also be viewed as a victim who was unable to break out of the Confucian patriarchal system.

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<sup>33</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*, 1st ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 216.

In the famous movie, *Rise of the Red Lantern*, concubines of a wealthy men sought to sabotage each other in order to gain power in the family. Love and affection from their husband meant protection.<sup>34</sup> Being born female in ancient China meant these women were very vulnerable and dependent on their male family members. They were not secure in any aspect of their lives because they had no independence. They derived protection from men and therefore, it was in every woman's best interest to be favored by their fathers, their husbands, their sons, or any male relatives. For the opposite to happen, for the men around them to hate or despise these women was equivalent to being ruined. In the movie, after the husband discovered that his favorite concubine was cheating on him, he had her killed, even though she bore the family's only son. Men had absolute power in ancient Chinese families. This meant they could use it however they liked over the powerless women of the family. By fighting amongst themselves, women became supporters of the system. Instead of fighting the real cause of their subordination, they fought each other. These women were victims of a system that supported the subordination of women in every way.

Ancient Chinese society was able to subordinate women so well because the patriarchal society left real power to men and women fought amongst themselves for what little power was left to them. However, some women were able to acquire a little power. Education was important means to power and influence for women. The few women who did receive good education in ancient China belonged to the very wealthy and privileged class. Ban Zhao, a very famous female scholar of the Han dynasty, believed women should proper education. Although she believed women should be educated in womanly virtues in order to be better mothers and wives,

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<sup>34</sup> *Rise of the Red Lantern*, directed by Yimou Zhang, (1991; United States, MGM, 2007), DVD.



advocating for women's education was a very novel idea.<sup>35</sup> Ban Zhou disagreed with the idea that it was virtuous for women to not have any talents.

The few women who were able to escape from this hierarchy were scorned by society. There are many documented cases of imperial women, such as the empress or the empress dowager who ruled the country behind a puppet emperor. While an emperor sat on the throne, "true authority was vested in imperial women and their kin."<sup>36</sup> This was probably true in some Chinese households as well where capable women sometimes took control of family affairs for their family. Outside the imperial family, there were women such as prostitutes, warriors, grannies, etc. who acquired jobs and escaped the traditional norms and limitations society placed on them, though, lot of these women were despised by society. "These women were regarded as risky, seen to be perversely out of control. They have been regulated, banned, overlooked, and written out of the record."<sup>37</sup> Those who deviated from the Confucian norm were considered outcasts.

Women in ancient China were handicapped by a system that undermined women's independence and rights. Confucian ideology evolved from Dualist ideology, which believed women were essential in creating a harmonious world. However, women's place in the world was far inferior to that of men. Rituals and practices include ancestral worshipping and worshipping of the gods included rites that encouraged the ideal Confucian society. Women were to serve the men in her life, her father before marriage, her husband after marriage, and her son in widowhood. Women in ancient China enjoyed very limited power and was therefore,

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<sup>35</sup> Ban Zhao, "Lessons for Women," in *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, edited by Victor Mair, translated by Nancy Lee Swann, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 534-541.

<sup>36</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 2010), ProQuest Ebook Central, 111.

<sup>37</sup> Victoria Baldwin Cass. *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies, and Geishas of the Ming*. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

vulnerable due to their dependence on others. Patrilocal marriage, rituals, footbinding, and widowhood norms furthermore confined women to these roles. As a whole, women were expected to sacrifice more and to obey and serve in order to be virtuous. The only way for Chinese women to gain power in this society was to support the system. By achieving Confucian ideals, the same ones that subordinate women, could women hope to gain power and protect themselves. The few Chinese women who were able to rebel and gain limited freedom and rights were shunned by society. In the coming chapters, the importance of state intervention in changing the status of Chinese women becomes indisputable. The creation of a Chinese state that advocated for the improvement of women's status ultimately transformed the lives of Chinese women.

## **Chapter 2 – Support of Women’s Liberation Through Emergence of Chinese State with New Ideology**

As the last dynasty of China fell in 1911, a new wave of ideas was brought into China. The Chinese were very discontented with the Qing dynasty and how it had managed the country for the past century. Following the end of imperial rule, a lot of changes happened in China. The May Fourth Movement kickstarted a women’s rights movement in China. Both the Nationalist and the Communist parties fought for control of the China after decades of warlords and chaos. Women’s status in Chinese society started to change because both Parties sought to improve conditions for women in China. However, the improvements that occurred during this time affected urban areas more than rural areas. Most of China’s population lived in rural areas, meaning a lot of these changes during the early twentieth century did not affect most of China’s population. The Nationalist and Communist tried to implement family reforms but because the country was in a state of chaos, these could not be properly executed. The few places where the state sought to emancipate women were met with resistance and this also obstructed further development in women’s rights.

This chapter covers the beginning of the Chinese women’s liberation movement and the historical events of the time that influenced it. The lives of many Chinese women did not improve during the period before the Communist liberation of China, especially in rural areas. The radical ideas calling for the improvement of women’s condition in China also had its setbacks because traditional ideologies, as well as customs and rituals, survived the fall of the Qing dynasty and in the creation of the Republic of China in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the new political parties, the Nationalist and the Communist, understood that

changing women's status in China was necessary. Both governments implemented progressive reforms for women and started to change the lives of Chinese women.

All of China's dynasties went through what was called dynastic cycles - they rose, they flourished, then they fell. The fall of China's last dynasty was due to widespread public discontent, wars fought and lost with great powers, corruption, opium, and the inability of the Qing state to keep up with the rest of the world. The defeat in the first and second Opium Wars of the mid 19th century, and in the Sino-Japanese War of the late 19th century left the Chinese feeling humiliated and angry. Within China, the growing discontent with the failure of the state and increased corruption caused many uprisings. These were all problems that accumulated over time and the Qing state was not able to solve these growing issues.

Public discontent led to mass rebellions such as the Taiping Rebellion of the mid-nineteenth century and the Boxer Rebellion in the late nineteenth century. The Taiping Rebellion was the biggest rebellion of the 1800s, and hinted at the changes that were to come to China in the coming decades. The Taiping Rebellion started with the Hakka minority of China. The Taipings sought to overthrow Qing state, convert people to its form of Christianity, and challenge traditional ideologies, foreshadowing the challenge to China's long held ideologies and customs. Ono Kazuko explained that Taiping women played crucial roles, and some women were even officials and commanders of women's armies and barely kept any old marriage customs.<sup>38</sup> Although the Hakka women were a very small minority in China and the Taiping Rebellion did not improve the conditions of Chinese women at large, the issue of improving women's status in society clearly grew in the consciousness of Chinese people.

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<sup>38</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, "Women Who Took to Battle Dress" in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989).

The inflow of new ideas from the West gained support from intellectual youths and they sought to replace the millennia old Chinese traditions. In the early nineteenth century, there was an outcry over the mistreatment of Chinese women. “By the 1830s, several scholars had explicitly criticized aspects of the traditional treatment of women, including footbinding, harsh and unequal standards of female chastity, concubinage and restrictions on the development of women's abilities.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, it was not women’s subordination that many intellectuals, or even the Qing state, were mainly focused on. It was the removal of the old Confucian system that simply did not work anymore, and the subordination of women was a part of that system. After the Boxer Rebellion failed, Empress Dowager Cixi set out to modernize China. The Qing government realized the importance of reforming in its desperate attempts to save itself. State support had always played an important part in maintaining traditional Confucian ideology that subordinated women, but now the state sought to modernize China and this included progressive policies that improved women’s lives. This included the outlawing of footbinding in 1911 and the abolishment of the millennia old civil examination system. The Qing state knew it had to change its centuries-old policies and laws. Even the imperial examination was abolished altogether in the hopes of catching up with the world’s far more powerful and advanced countries. Christian missionaries started schools for girls decades before, but “in 1907, the Qing regime promulgated the charter for China’s first public girls’ schools, and education for girls took its initial steps toward a formal legal status.”<sup>40</sup> The role of the Qing state in promoting

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<sup>39</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Lu Meiyi, “The Awakening of Chinese Women and the Women’s Movement in the Early 20th Century” in *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley L. Mow, 1st Feminist Press ed, (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004), 55.

education for females was important because this was the first of many important steps that a Chinese state would take towards the improvement in women's lives.

Most women did not receive education in ancient China; this luxury could only be afforded to the daughters of very wealthy families, but education became a possibility for women in the early twentieth century. While many Chinese men were also unable to receive education in ancient China, education was more accessible to men because China was a patriarchal society. During the early twentieth century, intellectuals became more interested in China's women issue and sought to improve women's status in society. Qiu Jin was a famous revolutionary and writer who believed that women were reduced to the status of slaves in ancient China. In order to improve women's status, she said in an address to all the country women of China, "as for you young girls among us, go to school if you can. If can't, read and study at home. Those of you who are rich, persuade your husbands to open schools... Those of you who are poor, work hard and help your husbands. Don't be lazy and eat idle rice."<sup>41</sup> Only through wisdom, education, and hard work did Qiu Jin believe that women could improve their condition.

Foot binding among Han women was the norm in ancient China but after the drastic changes that occurred in late nineteenth and early twentieth century China, its disappearance in only a few decades in most places. By 1883, Kang Youwei created an Anti-Footbinding Society and the movements that had taken place since then drastically cut down the number of mothers who chose to bound their daughter's feet.<sup>42</sup> The radical opposition to the old ideologies of China grew even louder over time. "The great successes achieved by the anti footbinding campaigns and the girls' education movement were due in part to the active participation and support they

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<sup>41</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Genealogy Rules," in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 248.

<sup>42</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, "Women Who Took to Battle Dress" in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 27.

received from the revolutionary factions, reform factions, and the Qing government,” Meiyi Liu argued.<sup>43</sup> In the end, Qing state was overall unable to reform and adapt to the new demands of the reformers to transform China. This led to the Revolution of 1911 which overthrew the Qing state, China’s last dynasty, and the creation of the Republic under the Revolutionary Alliance, later known as the Nationalist Party.

During this hectic period, where there were foreign threats as well as threats at home, many Chinese intellectuals sought to reform traditional women’s roles, in the hopes that by doing so, they could reform China by completely changing its ideologies. Megan Ferry stated that the

New Culture era intellectuals encouraged women’s (and thereby the nation’s) cultural transformation because they thought traditional views of the self and society caused China’s semicolonial crisis. An emancipation movement encouraged women’s self awareness of their predicament and reformers emphasized newly founded women’s schools, as well as new literature as ways to combat women’s ‘enslavement.’” “In general, however, intellectuals assumed that women’s social conditions would be resolved in the future, when women writers would finally awaken.”<sup>44</sup>

This was why a lot of intellectuals were also women’s liberation activists who sought to change what they thought were the backward ideologies preventing China from progressing. Therefore, the New Culture Era was, successful in promoting the women’s movement through literature.

The May Fourth Incident of 1919 sparked the May Fourth Movement, which was one of the most important and influential movement with lasting impact, during which thousands of Chinese students protested the Chinese government’s weak response to imperialist powers.

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<sup>43</sup> Lu Meiyi, “The Awakening of Chinese Women and the Women’s Movement in the Early 20th Century” in *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*, Edited by Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley L. Mow, (1st Feminist Press ed. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004), 58.

<sup>44</sup> Megan M Ferry, Laughlin, C., ed., “Women and her Affinity to Literature” in *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), Accessed November 2, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 37.

Foreign powers were setting up concessions in China and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles ultimately sparked a wave of demonstrations across China, leading to the rise of Chinese nationalist sentiments. Many Chinese were unsatisfied with the events in China and did not see the change they had hoped would occur with the new Republic. They “believ[ed] that the hold of old family values and normative ties stifled the potential of youth and women and prevented them from making the necessary commitment to build a new world... [that] it was necessary to break completely with the past.”<sup>45</sup> Some went as far as severing ties with their own families because it was part of the traditional values. It was obvious to reformers that China was a weak country compared to the foreign powers it encountered during the nineteenth and twentieth century. What had worked in ancient China simply did not work anymore and it was critical, in the eyes of these intellectuals, to create a new China.

In order to create a new China, there would have to be new ideas implemented. The Confucian society, which had influenced and regulated China for millennia, was now shunned and hated by the radical intellectuals who looked towards new western ideologies for change. The growing nationalist sentiments of the Chinese had a big impact on the women’s liberation movement. “The blunt force of nationalism seemed to offer a way for women to defeat such manifold and entangling limitations.”<sup>46</sup> For example, the May Fourth Movement led colleges to start accepting female students.<sup>47</sup> Decades after the movement, Lu Meiyi described its continuous impact on women.

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<sup>45</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 90.

<sup>47</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, “Women Who Took to Battle Dress” in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 109.



The May Fourth Movement disseminated new concepts about women, marriage, and the family, and created a new climate of public opinions and social atmosphere conducive to women's emancipation. That era also spawned a generation of women heroes who were both influential and appealing and who became the leaders of the women's movement of the 1920s and 1930s. From the perspective of women's emancipation, the significance of the May Fourth movement lies not only in its immediate impact but also in its laying a foundation for the development of later women's movements.<sup>48</sup>

The patriotic cause of the twentieth century also fueled the women's movement because Chinese intellectuals saw women's subordination as one of many old traditional values that needed to be eliminated. Confucianism, which was supposed to bring about a harmonious society, could not do so anymore. Therefore, it had to be removed along with its idea of women subordination.

Many reformers advocated for women's rights and criticized Confucianism for preventing Chinese society from progressing. One of the many women activists, He Zhen, was a writer who wrote that "Chinese scholarship had humiliated women; Chinese scholarship had wronged women; Chinese scholarship had fettered women. Failure to eradicate Confucian learning would ultimately, she argued, make their emancipation impossible."<sup>49</sup> Another writer, Shi Cuntong, wrote in an essay called "On the Problem of Abolishing Marriage," that "'family' was the root of all evil and it came into being because of the Chinese system of marriage."<sup>50</sup> Women's right to divorce was also brought up as an important issue.<sup>51</sup> These stark changes in attitude towards the once accepted Confucian ideology represented the hearts of many Chinese

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<sup>48</sup> Lu Meiyi, "The Awakening of Chinese Women and the Women's Movement in the Early 20th Century," in *Holding Up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*, Edited by Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley L. Mow, (1st Feminist Press ed. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004), 67-68.

<sup>49</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, "Women Who Took to Battle Dress" in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 67.

<sup>50</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, "Women Who Took to Battle Dress" in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 102.

<sup>51</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, "Women Who Took to Battle Dress" in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 104.

reformers. They wanted to create a new China to replace the old, broken China that simply did not work anymore.

That is not to say everyone wanted to remove Confucianism from Chinese society. The young urban intellectuals who started the May Fourth Movement were but a small group. However, many Chinese did want China to change because they were unsatisfied with China's weak and unstable state at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Xie Bingying's autobiography, she recounted her struggle to attain an education, her fight for equality, the opposition she met as a woman writer joining the communist movement.<sup>52</sup> Although most Chinese saw that change was necessary, not everyone interpreted change to mean the same thing. The ideas advocated by intellectual youths who started these cultural movements would take time to reach the rest of China, and even then, clashed with the beliefs of many rural Chinese peasants.

The cultural movements greatly influenced the founding ideology of both the two prominent political parties of the early twentieth century. Both the Nationalist (KMT) and later the Communist (CCP), both wanted to raise women's status in China. They could not do so because the country was in such a state of chaos and instability during the early twentieth century. The end of the Qing state led to Warlord Era, when warlords scrambled for land and power. Sun Yat-sen, considered the founding father of the Republic of China, was the first leader of the KMT. The CCP and the KMT formed the First United Front in 1923 to work together, but after Sun's death, the CCP and the KMT became enemies. The CCP and the KMT fought in a Civil War until they decided to suspend the war in order to fight the Japanese together. After the Japanese were defeated, the Civil War resumed and China was not united until the end of the

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<sup>52</sup> Xie Bingying, Adet Lin, and Tai-yi Linm *Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying*, (New York: The John Day company, 1940).

Civil War in 1949 when the Communist defeated the KMT. In this period, China experienced war against the Japanese and WWII, while it struggled to unify itself and stabilize the country. Therefore, even though both the KMT and the CCP both wanted to improve women's condition in China, neither could do so effectively during this period.

Most warlords were not interested in modifying old traditional ideologies. The warlords who ruled different parts of China in the early twentieth century mainly busied themselves with fighting other warlords and acquiring land and power for themselves. Many warlords were not concerned with changing Confucian traditions or improving the conditions of women. In Jung Chang's memoir *Wild Swans*, Chang recounted the story of her grandmother, who served as a concubine to a warlord general. It is evident in her account that women's status in rural China hardly changed during the Warlord Era, because her grandmother's life was controlled by the men around her. Her father had complete power over her life and married her off to the warlord general. The warlord general controlled her life until his death. Then afterwards, she returned to her father's control.<sup>53</sup> In many rural areas under warlord control, Confucian ideology and women's status in Chinese society remained unchanged.

The KMT and the CCP both realized that change needed to occur and improve women's status in society improved. Sun Yat-sen, in the First National Congress with the CCP, ““recognized the principle of equality between men and women in legal, educational, economic, and social terms... [and sought to] further the development of the rights of women.””<sup>54</sup> Both Parties wanted to establish a new country saw the importance of improving women's rights for the future of China. Improvements in women's conditions occurred mostly in cities. In the early

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<sup>53</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, “Women Who Took to Battle Dress” in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 129.

1920s, women's labor unions and other women's organizations such as the Shanghai Women's Federation, and the Women's Movement Committee of the KMT, were created to better the conditions of working women. Women like Xiang Jingyu in the CCP led labor movements that organized women workers to form unions. This was possible because many women entered the workforce in Chinese cities at the beginning of the twentieth century. "Increased poverty and dislocations lessened the ability of men to control women; force of circumstance led increasing numbers of women to fend for themselves and hence to find greater independence."<sup>55</sup> With the ability to earn their own money, some women workers started to resist the traditional arranged marriages by their parents. Jung Chang wrote in *Wild Swans* how the KMT "had made it quite acceptable for young men and women to be seen together in public."<sup>56</sup> This meant dating was possible and acceptable in the public eye. Compared to ancient China, where women had no economic freedom, had no say in their marriages and it was scandalous for unrelated men and women to be seen together, the first half of the twentieth century brought many changes to women.

Women participated in the government for a variety of reason. For these women, this was an opportunity never offered in their country before. "While helping them escape from hunger, physical abuse, low status, boredom, and marriage, the revolution drew them into an exciting new life, a safer and more interesting place in society, and granted them a sense of belonging and a patriotic purpose."<sup>57</sup> In *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse*, Wang Xianghua recalled what her mother, who joined the CCP in her village, said. "She told the women that they were equal to

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<sup>55</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 32-33.

<sup>56</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 104.

<sup>57</sup> Susan L. Mann., *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), accessed December 19, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 145.

men and should leave their gates and go out to farm and help build socialist villages.”<sup>58</sup> A lot of these women activists, who made up a big portion of the Women’s Bureau in the Nationalist Party during the United Front were CCP members. Women like Xiang Jingyu in the CCP led labor movements that organized women workers to form unions. Women like He Xiangning in the KMT actively advocated for marriage reform and the end of the old practice of footbinding. They did so by setting up committees such as the Shanghai Women’s Movement Committee and campaigned during the Women’s National Assembly Conference for women’s movement.<sup>59</sup>

It is wrong to think these changes benefitted all Chinese women during this time because that was not the case. “Before 1949 China’s course of modernization was mostly limited to urban areas. Women’s liberation barely touched the rural areas,” Gao Xiaoxian explained.<sup>60</sup> This meant these changes did not touch the lives of many Chinese people. This is because most of China’s population lived in rural areas. The big movements that brought radical ideas and the cemented China’s future leaders and ideas had little to no effect on the majority of Chinese people. “Most [Chinese people] lived in remote mountain areas of provinces far from the seat of the national government. [For them,] village life continued as it had for centuries.”<sup>61</sup> While new ideologies and new rituals and practices were welcomed in China, those who welcomed it were young intellectuals in urban areas.

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<sup>58</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>59</sup> Louise P Edwards, “Nationalists, Communists, and the National Assembly Movement, 1924-1926” in *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Gao Xiaoxian, “China’s Modernization and Changes in Social Status,” in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, trans. S. Katherine Campbell, ed. Christina K Gilmartin, (Vol. 10.;10;. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 80.

<sup>61</sup> Helen Praeger Young, *Choosing Revolution: Chinese Women Soldiers on the Long March*, (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2001), accessed December 20, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 5.

The majority of rural Chinese women did not receive the education and economic opportunities afforded to some urban women, nor the chances to participate in political and social matters of the country. Instead, the same factors that led to the improvement in women's conditions in cities created many hardships for rural women. Like in ancient China, many rural Chinese women, being at the bottom of the society, could not fend for themselves. An old Chinese woman who went by Lao T'ai-t'ai Ning recounts in her autobiography how she and her children were dependent on her opium addicted husband. The inability to depend on her husband did not liberate her, instead it brought her more hardships.<sup>62</sup> A lot of Chinese women who had to work found the most degrading and lowest paying jobs, from servants to prostitutes, due to the family crisis where men lost their ability to be the breadwinners and keep the family together. A lot of women also met cruel fates, sometimes sold to feed families.<sup>63</sup> It is important to understand that the family crisis of the twentieth century did not liberate women because Chinese women were still bound to the millennia-old traditional ideologies which gave women little to no power without the aid of men. "During the first three decades of the twentieth century, there was little institutional support for girls and women in China. In the poorest families, baby girls were unaffordable luxuries, to be disposed of as quickly as possible by death, sale, or marriage."<sup>64</sup> While many reformers were advocating for radical changes in urban areas, the majority of China was unaffected by the changes that were carried out in the early half of the twentieth century by the KMT and the CCP.

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<sup>62</sup> Lao T'ai-t'ai Ning and Ida Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1967), 55-56.

<sup>63</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 32-33.

<sup>64</sup> Susan L. Mann., *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), accessed December 19, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 133.

The CCP's commitment to gender equality was greater than that of the KMT because of the CCP's party ideology. Mao Zedong, the leader of the Communist Party, was a strong advocate for gender equality as well. When the fall of Shanghai occurred in 1927, and the United Front ended, the CCP escaped big cities like Shanghai and fled to the countryside. Although different groups of communist communities were set up, the most successful were the Jiangxi Soviet from 1928 to 1934 and the Yanan Experience from 1935 until the end of the Civil War. This was a time for Mao and the CCP to experiment with creating their ideal communist society since such a society did not exist anywhere in the world. Women were mobilized for the war effort by sewing for the army, training and taking over jobs so men could become soldiers, and even by joining the army.<sup>65</sup> Women were allotted land like men were, meaning women now had the right to legal property. In the Jiangxi Soviet, the Marriage Regulations of the Chinese Soviet Republic gave women the freedom to marriage and right to divorce.

When it came to suffrage, anyone of any sex were allowed to vote and run for election.<sup>66</sup> The Constitution of the Soviet Republic in 1931 laid the foundation of a communist society with the goal of emancipating women. Clause 11 read,

It is the purpose of the Soviet government of China to guarantee the thorough emancipation of women; it recognizes freedom of marriage and will put into operation various measures for the protection of women, to enable women gradually to attain to the material basis required for their emancipation from the bondage of domestic work, and to give them the possibility of participating in the social, economic, and political, and cultural life of the entire society.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, "Women Who Took to Battle Dress" in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 151-154.

<sup>67</sup> Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Isadore Schwartz, and John King Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, Vol. 6;6., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 223.

This meant women were equal under the law and the CCP wanted equal pay and equal work for all members of society. There is no doubt that the goals set out by the Jiangxi Soviet and in Yanan to improve gender equality were on a scale never seen before in China.

However, women activist and reformers were also limited in their struggle for women's rights in both the KMT and the CCP. The KMT became increasingly conservative and sought to increase control and promote China's traditional patriarchal family after the fall of Shanghai in 1927. Women were encouraged to take on more traditional roles in the family as well as society, while "radical women, including feminist women, were under attack not only from conservative elements in Chinese society generally but also directly from the Kuomintang."<sup>68</sup> A lot of women were executed for being "radical" even though some of them were not communist. The KMT's goal during the fall of Shanghai seemed not only to purge the communist but also leftist women who wanted to radically change the status of women in Chinese society.<sup>69</sup>

The life of the average woman under the KMT seemed to have improved, but old ideologies, customs, and practices were still very important.

Republican law drew unprecedented numbers of women to court, social stigma, expense, economic concerns, and other factors unaffected by changes in the law (such as the difficulty of remarrying) continued to make it difficult for most women to take advantage of legal options... Meanwhile, widows continued to suffer from the Confucian stigma attached to remarriage, which was never challenged in Republican legal reforms. Chaste widowhood remained the norm for respectable women.<sup>70</sup>

In 1931, the KMT passed the Family Law, which was supposed to grant freedom of marriage and the right to divorce. However, unlike the Marriage Regulations of the Chinese Soviet Republic,

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<sup>68</sup> Norma Diamond. "Women under Kuomintang Rule Variations on the Feminine Mystique," in *Modern China* 1, no. 1 (1975): 3-45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/188883>, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Leslie Eugene Collins. *The New Women: A Psychohistorical Study of the Chinese Feminist Movement from 1900 to the Present*, Vol. 2, (Yale., 1976).

<sup>70</sup> Susan L. Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), accessed December 19, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central, 75.



which “included concrete protective provisions aimed at guaranteeing women’s freedom of divorce,”<sup>71</sup> the Family Law simply had too many restrictions and did not grant women freedom of marriage or divorce at all. In the war effort, Madame Chiang Kai-shek encouraged women to aid the war effort by caring for the weak and sick, focusing on women’s traditional role as caregiver.<sup>72</sup> This meant other important roles such as fighting the war, were seen as jobs for men while women were asked to aid the war through their traditional responsibilities.

There were also limitations to the women’s movement in the CCP. While the CCP encouraged women to actively participate in the Red Army, women soldiers faced additional hardships due to inadequate medical care available to women and pregnancies. He Manqiu, recalled how she joined the Red Army to pursue a brighter future and decided to become a doctor in the Red Army despite the hardships and difficulties she knew she would face. She decided to become a doctor after witnessing many injured female soldiers not receiving correct diagnosis or proper treatment because most of the doctors were male and were not trained in gynecology. These women soldiers “were ashamed to explain their problems and were reluctant to be treated by men. As a result, a lot of women died unnecessarily.”<sup>73</sup> Jian Xianfo gave birth and raised her child while participating in the Long March and witnessing other women in the same position as hers. She faced criticisms from other soldiers for not giving her child away and devoting herself solely to the revolution, which a lot of female soldiers did.<sup>74</sup> Allowing women to participate in the Red Army was radical in that it gave Chinese women new opportunities

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<sup>71</sup> Kazuko Ono and Joshua A. Fogel, “Women Who Took to Battle Dress” in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989), 154.

<sup>72</sup> Norma Diamond, “Women under Kuomintang Rule Variations on the Feminine Mystique,” in *Modern China* 1, no. 1 (1975): 3-45. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/188883>, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Helen Praeger Young, “From Soldier to Doctor: A Chinese Woman’s Story of the Long March,” *Science & Society* 59, no. 4 (1995): 531-47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40403519>, 541.

<sup>74</sup> Helen Praeger Young, “Newborn on the March,” in *Choosing Revolution: Chinese Women Soldiers on the Long March*, Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2001, accessed December 20, 2017, ProQuest Ebook Central.

never offered before. However, the difficulties these brave female soldiers uniquely faced showed the shortcomings in the party and its policies towards female soldiers.

The communist had envisioned a society without gender discrimination and with equality for everyone, but when they tried to implement their ideology, they were met with resistance. The family crisis of the early twentieth century was caused by all the chaos China went through. Due to many factors, families were separated, and the traditional Confucian family order was not possible. As previously mentioned, for a few lucky women who were able to work in cities, this was liberating. However, for peasants, who made up ninety percent of China's population, the family crisis was not a positive thing. So it made sense that what peasant men wanted during this chaotic and unstable period more than anything else was the return to the traditional family order.<sup>75</sup>

The CCP, which was only able to unite China and defeat the KMT with the support of China's peasants, knew how important peasant support was. Johnson argued that the Jiangxi Soviet was so successful in implementing radical improvements for women because Jiangxi was more open these ideas than the less successful implementation at Yanan, where peasants were more conservative in their beliefs.<sup>76</sup> Both the KMT and the CCP created women's unions but in the countryside, many of these unions were used by women to divorce their husbands. Before these unions, women did not have the right to divorce their husband no matter how bad the marriage was. In Houhua Village, Wang Xianghua recalled that after "a women's organization was established [in the village]... the men became afraid to treat their wives badly."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 57-58, 63-83.

<sup>76</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 57-58, 63-83.

<sup>77</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 37.

For men, divorce meant losing their patriarchal control over the family and having their family broken so they opposed these unions. Older women also resisted this change because they themselves had struggled under the patriarchal system and now were in a position of relative power as an elder and a mother.<sup>78</sup> If women were allowed to divorce their husbands, this would threaten the power of both men and older women. Some women acquired jobs but this hardly freed women from their traditional roles in the family or gave women economic freedom because these wages were paid to the women's family. Women who were mobilized to increase production for the war effort increased women's working hours. Also known as the double burden, women were required to fulfill their traditional duties as a housewife, while they worked to support the war.<sup>79</sup>

It seemed that gender equality and the ideal communist society were easy to imagine, but harder to implement. There were members in the CCP who saw feminism as bourgeois, elitist, and narrow-minded.<sup>80</sup> Due to opposition, the CCP decided to focus on class struggle and not the issue of women. "Their solution was to subordinate the women's unions to the peasant associations and depoliticize women's rights issues whenever conflict arose, emphasizing instead common interests of men and women in establishing a new political and economic order."<sup>81</sup> Women in many of the earlier liberated areas were not allowed to attend women's associations because their husbands continued to view strong women as unvirtuous. In this sexist outlook, "virtuous" women would not attend such meetings or try to break away from traditional

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<sup>78</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 39-50.

<sup>79</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 71.

<sup>80</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 49.

ideologies. In a liberated area in Shantung, “loose” women were considered one of the struggle targets, Johnson explains.<sup>82</sup> While the CCP declared gender equality, even before the communist united the country, it was clear that sexist ideologies remained deeply embedded in Chinese society and in the CCP.

The famous writer and revolutionary, Ding Ling, an outspoken women’s rights activist, challenged the party by criticizing the party’s lack of reforms to improve the conditions of women in China. In her well known story written in 1941, “When I Was in Xia’s Village,” a woman who had escaped from a Japanese camp returned to serve as a comfort women in order to gather information on the Japanese as a spy for the Chinese government. After she returned to her village, instead of admiring her patriotic contribution to the war effort by sacrificing her body for her country, she was instead despised for having slept with so many men. Ding Ling criticized not only Chinese society for maintaining feudal beliefs that subordinate women, but also government, who did not speak out on her behalf after using her body to spy on the Japanese. The protagonist of the story, by losing what in Chinese society then was still considered essential to being a woman, decided to leave her village and pursued a better life in a new place where no one knew of her “shame.”<sup>83</sup> Ding Ling’s story accurately criticized the sexist society that women still faced in twentieth century China, even under the CCP rule.

Another reason for pushing the issue of women aside was the belief in the CCP Party that the issue of women will solve itself once the proletariat succeeded in the class struggle. Mao also believed that when a socialist society was realized, gender equality would naturally, effortlessly, come as well. In the women’s section of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, also known

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<sup>82</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 77-78.

<sup>83</sup> Ding Ling, "When I was in Xia Village," in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature*, edited by Lau, Joseph S. M. and Howard Goldblatt, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 143-158.

as the Little Red Book, Mao stated that, “the whole feudal-patriarchal ideology and system is tottering with the growth of the peasants’ power.”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the issue of women would be solved when feudalism was removed from Chinese society. For this reason, the CCP decided to minimize the issue of women’s rights and class struggle became the focus on the CCP.

The closing of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century was an exciting time for women in China. The radical ideas introduced to intellectuals were vastly different than the ones China was so accustomed to. Patriotic sentiments fueled the women’s rights movements of this time and a lot more opportunities began to open for women. The Qing state’s desperate last reforms to modernize China by ending age-old practices of footbinding and opening schools for girls were a start, although not entirely successful. The political powers which came afterwards, the KMT and later the CCP, saw the need to improve women’s status in China and the progress made during this period signified the power of state intervention of improving women’s condition. The family crisis in the early twentieth century afforded many women the opportunity to work in cities, and this independence was liberating for them.

However, the majority of rural women suffered during the family crisis and they often had to take on the most degrading and lowest paying jobs possible or did not work. Women’s status in China during the early twentieth century did not improve for most Chinese women. A lot of women were still treated poorly by their husbands, sold or married off by their parents, and some continued the practice of footbinding,<sup>85</sup> because the state was not able to implement policies in the majority of China’s regions. Due to this, customs and practices as well as ideology remained enacted and unaffected in most places. However, in the Jiangxi Soviet and Yanan, as

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<sup>84</sup> Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, Reissue edition ed., (San Francisco: China Books, 1990), 295.

<sup>85</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 72.

well as women's unions that were created in the early twentieth century, laws were created to protect women and gave them more rights. Overall, instability and constant wars that plagued China made it impossible for any real improvement to be implemented by the state. It was in the second half of the twentieth century, that the state was finally able to use its enormous power to make improvements to women's right on a national level.

### **Chapter 3 – “Women Hold Up Half the Sky,” Chinese Women’s New Status in Society**

This chapter covers the period from 1949 to 1976, the Mao years, and the progress and difficulties met by the Party in trying to achieve gender equality. The Communist Party was created with a different ideology than the states that had ruled before. Mao Zedong, the leader of the Party, was anti-Confucian and supported gender equality. Mao’s hatred for Confucianism included the subordination of women it encouraged. Therefore Marxism, which challenged Confucian ideology through its concepts of class struggle and revolution, appealed to Mao. The Party altered the traditional roles women played and practices related to the family, such as marriage decisions, women acquiring jobs, women’s rights, and large communes that took care of women’s domestic chores. There was a lot of resistance to the state’s intervention into family life because while the state’s ideology changed, and no longer supported the ideal Confucian hierarchical society, a lot of people’s ideology remained unchanged. While the Chinese Communist Party acknowledged women’s inferior status in society and sought to change this, the state ultimately did not enforce their laws to fully support women’s emancipation, instead focusing on other issues such as the class struggle.

Applying Marxist ideology to China, Mao saw the lowest class of society, the peasants, as the proletariat in Chinese society struggling against the bourgeois class, such as the landlords, gentries, etc. Women were also part of the exploited class, because Marx believed that the traditional family and women were “mere instruments of production.”<sup>86</sup> The Party also challenged the traditional family unit, critical in the ideal Confucian society. Deviating from Marxism regarding the abolition of countries and nationality, Mao believed in Communism

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<sup>86</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Robert C. Tucker, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed, (New York: Norton, 1978), 487-488.

without removing national boundaries, Marxism appealed to Mao because it was an alternative method of modernizing China and expelling foreign influences without becoming a capitalist country. Mao was a feminist, and believed that with the peasant movement, the opportunity for women “to lift up their heads and the authority of the husband [gets] shakier every day. In a word, the whole feudal-patriarchal ideology and system is tottering.”<sup>87</sup>

Immediately after the creation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the legal status of women drastically changed and since then, women’s rights have continued to improve. In 1950, the state created the first Marriage Law in China that legally protected women’s rights nationwide. It also carried out the land reform, which granted women, for the first time in Chinese history, land and the right to property. An unprecedented number of women also entered the workforce in the 1950s. However, the unpopularity of the Marriage Law reveals the resistance that many people had against women’s liberation. Women’s rights issues were set aside because, it was reasoned that gender equality would be realized when the proletariat struggle succeeded. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao sought to erase markers of gender, and femininity was condemned. However, during the Mao years, the land reform and Marriage Law campaigns that were suppose to grant women equality ultimately failed because the officials in the Party did not implement or enforce these campaigns. The state after the early 1950s shifted its focus from improving the domestic life of women, to mobilizing women for the workforce. Even the state’s acknowledgement of women’s double burden through creating communal groups that took care of domestic chores traditionally performed by women sustained the idea that these works were women’s work. Although many traditional rituals and practices survived during this period, drastic improvements in women’s rights did occur.

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<sup>87</sup> Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, Reissue edition ed, (San Francisco: China Books, 1990), 295.



### Before 1950 Marriage Law and Land Reform

Cultural movements such as the May Fourth Movement that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century positively impacted the lives of women in cities. However, the lives of rural women, who made up much of China's population, remained unchanged. The fall of the last dynasty, the warlord years, WWII, and the Civil War threw China into decades of chaos and instability. The Kuomintang and the Communist Party were both influenced by the cultural movements and sought to improve the lives of women. Both implemented laws that raised the status of women, the most successful model was in the Jiangxi Soviet base of the Communist Party. Due to war and chaos, China was not unified until 1949, when the Communist won the Civil War. Therefore, it makes sense that nationwide reform to improve women's rights did not start until China unified. From the creation of the People's Republic of China up until Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in 1978, women's lives drastically improved. Gender equality was not fully realized, but many improvements were made.

The land reform and Marriage Law of 1950 were life altering for many women because women in ancient China had been reduced to a less than human status. Prior to 1949, many Chinese women did not have legal rights or economic opportunities, and thus they were dependent on males. Women were inferior to men not only in society but in the family as well. In *The Dragon's Village*, an autobiographical novel about land reform in the 1950s, Broken Shoe, an outcast because she slept around with the village men, spoke up about the way women were treated in the village. "How many of you have sisters here? None, eh? Where are they? They were sold off to pay for your family debt. They were killed or exchanged for your food? How do

you know they're not living as I am?"<sup>88</sup> It was also common for the desperately poor to kill or sell off newborn daughters because raising daughters was something many peasants could not afford.<sup>89</sup> Patrilocal marriages, in which women were married out of the family, exacerbated the preference for sons. Families gave their limited resources to sons because males were believed to be better than females, but also because their sons would take care of their family and carry on important ancestor rituals.

Much like peasant fatalism that the Party worked hard to change, female fatalism contributed to women accepting their lower status in society. Dualism and Confucianism, both widely influential in ancient China, rationalized the subordination of women. Before 1949, the many dynasties that ruled China also enforced the subordination of women. Therefore, it is not surprising that many Chinese women believed they were fated to live sad and wretched lives, that everything was predestined and they could not improve their inferior status. Young urban cadre, Ling Ling, in *The Dragon's Village*, commented how uncomfortable the villagers were in the meeting because they were not used having women discuss important matters. "It disconcerted them and the older men to have men and women discussing serious matters in public as if they were all equals."<sup>90</sup> Meetings like this one was unprecedented, it was only because of the Party's power that this was allowed.

The Communist Party allowed women to join and participate in the creation of a new China so an unprecedented number of women joined, many of whom were teenagers who sought a better future different than that offered in traditional life. For example, in the Shaan-Gan-Ning region border, twenty-five percent of seats were reserved for women before 1949 and this

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<sup>88</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 108.

<sup>89</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 101, 193.

<sup>90</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 108.

number was raised to thirty percent after 1949.<sup>91</sup> Female cadres like Ling Ling in *The Dragon's Village* were a novelty. Women were not allowed to participate in political matters prior in ancient China and many peasants did not know what to make of the women who worked for the Party. Ling Ling's journey in the novel revealed that female cadres like her had to struggle to attain respect from people. By the end of the novel, Ling Ling gained respect despite the sexist ideas peasant men still held about women.<sup>92</sup> By giving political opportunities to young women like Ling Ling, the Party evidently did improve the status of some women.

### 1950 Marriage Law and Land Reform

Immediately after liberation, the Communist Party decided women's emancipation was one of its top priorities. The All-China Women's Federation was created March 1949, the first organization with the intention to seek and protect women's rights. The Marriage Law and land reform of 1950 were meant to realize this, granting women the legal protection and rights that would elevate the status of women and liberate women. Chinese women became legally equal to men, but this was only on paper. Emancipating Chinese women was difficult because there was opposition from both the masses and some Party members. In the end, the women's liberation issue was pushed to the background, and the Party decided to focus instead on class struggle, the reason being that women would naturally achieve liberation following the liberation of the proletariat.

The land reform of 1950 confiscated land and distributed it equally amongst everyone, regardless of age or gender. Many peasants, like the rural villagers in *The Dragon's Village*, did

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<sup>91</sup> Patricia Stanahan, *Yan'an Women and the Communist Party*, (California: University of California Berkeley, 1983), 102.

<sup>92</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 175.

not believe this was possible because it was against the Confucian ideology that they all believed. Men were also unhappy at the loss of power they would face if women in their family acquired land. Sun, like many male peasants, did not support land reform. This was evident in Sun's unhappiness about the birth of his daughter and his opposition against his wife and daughter acquiring land thanks to the reform.<sup>93</sup> So it is not surprising that when problems arose during the land reform process, peasants blamed it on the idea of women's emancipation. "The real cause of the crime, [the village's conservative peasant men] argued, was the way girls and women were now flaunting themselves in public. The unbridled behavior of young people in general was leading to the breakdown of social order. It was time to call a halt."<sup>94</sup> A young woman, Little Jade, was raped and a political battle ensued. In the eyes of these men, disruption in the traditional social order that normally kept women inside the house and away from political affairs, was to blame. Although the real problem was corruption and baseness amongst the villagers and Party cadres.

There were problems with granting women land after the land reform was successfully carried out. While on paper, women now owned land, a lot of this land was controlled by the male head of the house. Authorities who were responsible for distributing land would give the land over to the head of the house, always the oldest male in the family.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, because of the practice of patrilocal marriage, women could not take their land with them when they married out of the village, so the land stayed with her family. So while on paper, the land reform was successful in distributing land to men and women alike, it actually was not. Cadres and peasants viewed the land reform through traditional lens and many did not support granting

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<sup>93</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 281.

<sup>94</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 187.

<sup>95</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 110.

women property and the independence that comes with property, so it was not carried out correctly.<sup>96</sup>

The Marriage Law of 1950 fared even worse than the land reform. It was so unpopular amongst peasants and cadres alike that they suppressed women who tried to exercise the rights granted by the Marriage Law. It was important that the Marriage Law was implemented right with the land reform because the government wanted to make sure that the land given to women would belong legally to women. If the Marriage Law was not passed with the land reform, the lands would immediately become the male of the family's land, because prior to the Marriage Law, women could not inherit or own land. The Marriage Law in Article 10, gave women and men "equal rights in the possession and management of family property." Article 23 states that "in case of divorce, the wife retains such property as belonged to her prior to her marriage."<sup>97</sup> The right to divorce was itself an important right to these women. The Marriage Law also gave women custody of their own children in case of divorce, protection against domestic abuse, and set a legal age for marriage.<sup>98</sup> Setting a legal age for marriage was necessary because child brides were not uncommon in China. These rights and protection were necessary to include in the Marriage Law because Chinese women traditionally had could not make decisions concerning their own life. They could be married off against their will by their parents and did not have the right to stand up for themselves in bad marriages.

Many people, including the government, believed the Marriage Law of 1950 intended to "weaken family and clan authority over the individual." It is not surprising they believed this

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<sup>96</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 114.

<sup>97</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, "The 1950 Marriage Law," in *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 236, 239.

<sup>98</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, "The 1950 Marriage Law," in *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 235-239.

because it is true that a large number of divorces resulted from the immediately passing of the Marriage Law.<sup>99</sup> For many women, this drastically improved their lives. Prior to the passing of the law, women were forced to endure unhappy marriages. Rural women, like the village women in *The Dragon's Village*, thought it was lucky if they did not have a husband who would beat them terribly, because all husbands beat their wives.<sup>100</sup> Women were doomed to accept their marriage life no matter how difficult or horrible it was. Yet, for many men, giving women rights such as the right to divorce meant losing their power over their families and even worse, losing their families because their wives could now divorce them. So it is not surprising that many husbands complained that allowing women to participate in political matters was improper.<sup>101</sup>

China's urban areas tended to be less conservative than rural areas because the cultural movements that were influenced by western ideologies occurred amongst intellectual youths in cities. So more urban women were able to take advantage of the Marriage Law than rural women.<sup>102</sup> The family crisis of the early twentieth century, in which the chaos in China contributed to the disintegration of families, also reflected the same trend. The family crisis was not as liberating for rural women as it was for urban women. Kay Ann Johnson described the mindset of peasants regarding the Marriage Law.

The Party's important poor rural constituents, primarily poor males, were not likely to spontaneously share such a forwardlooking vision of the family. Peasants who experienced family disintegration as a profound loss of life chances, human dignity and existential meaning, and whose cultural universe provided no alternative vision of family life, were more likely to hope that a revolution to set

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<sup>99</sup> Craig Dietrich, *People's China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>100</sup> Chen Yuan-tsung, *The Dragon's Village*, 1st ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 79, 86, 174.

<sup>101</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 71.

<sup>102</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, "The 1950 Marriage Law," in *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 236, 117.

the world right would restore to them the cherished traditional family order which increasingly belonged only to the relatively privileged.<sup>103</sup>

Many rural peasants in 1949 onwards wished for nothing more than to recreate the traditional family. For many of these women, like rural men, decades of war and chaos had led these peasants to seek nothing more than a return to the traditional ways. They wished for nothing more than to recreate a strong core family, as defined by traditional ideology.

Resistance to the Marriage Law came from older women as well. Implementation of the law also meant that older women would have to give up their power and many older women resisted because like rural men, this would mean losing their power in the family. In the traditional Chinese family, young women were at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder and older women, because of their age and their role as the mother of the sons, enjoyed greater power over their daughters-in-law. Granting young women rights and protection in marriage and divorce not only threatened the men, it also threatened the older women in the family.<sup>104</sup>

Quite a few cadres did not support women who were brave enough to try to exercise their new legal rights. This included the Women's Federation, which failed to carry out the new law. "Cadres continued to hold and act upon traditional conceptions about women, they neglected to promote women's rights and some used their power to actively suppress those women who, even without their support, dared to struggle to obtain their rights."<sup>105</sup> Cadres, peasant men, and many peasant women strongly opposed the Marriage Law and this prevented progress for women. The extent of this opposition was evident in the bloodshed that resulted from this law. Women who fought for their rights were suppressed, and in some cases, the suppression was bloody. In the

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<sup>103</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 31.

<sup>104</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, "The 1950 Marriage Law," in *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 236, 71.

<sup>105</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 96, 130-131.

1950s, every year tens of thousands of women died opposing the pressure to conform to traditional norms. Practices such as selling daughters into slavery, servitude, or concubinage and early arranged marriage continued in some regions of China, revealing the unpopularity of this law.<sup>106</sup> Although the Women's Federation ensured that the Marriage Law was carried out in many places, in some areas, even women cadre "acted to support old family norms."<sup>107</sup> This also reveals not only the lack of enforcement by local cadres and care by higher Party officials, but also obstruction by the state in implementing the Marriage Law and emancipating Chinese women.

During the 1950s, the Party decided to choose a narrow approach to women's right issues. The Communist were able to implement women's reform in two cities before liberation, one in Yenan and the other in Jiangxi. The Yenan experience took a more conservative approach to women's reform and after 1949, the Party's policy toward women was closer to the Yenan way, limiting the improvement of women.<sup>108</sup> In a bizarre story told decades later by a former female cadre who joined the Party to escape traditional norms, this female cadre recounted the "mission" she was assigned by higher officials in the Party, in an interview a news station broadcaster in China, named Xinran. She was married off to senior officer that she did not know at all and told that it was her mission to be with him for the rest of her life. After the party officer climbed her bed, "'The next day, the Party informed [her] that they were holding a simple wedding party that night to celebrate our marriage. That officer is [her] husband now.'"<sup>109</sup> Like

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<sup>106</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 132, 135.

<sup>107</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 131.

<sup>108</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 88.

<sup>109</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 118.



many young girls who joined the Communist Revolution, this unnamed woman joined in her teenage years in hopes of removing the traditional roles society placed on her to do something greater for her country. Instead of granting her freedom, the Party enforces traditional norms by marrying her off to a stranger, without her permission.

Of course, the Marriage Law and land reform of 1950 were not failures. In 1953, another Marriage Law campaign was carried out. Its leniency towards cadres who might have suppressed the implementation of the Marriage Law meant there were probably many who resisted the law. This campaign in general was successful in improving free marriage.<sup>110</sup> The reaction to and enforcement of the law was different in different regions of China. The Marriage Law was unpopular and was not enforced well, but over time, as this chapter will show, support for women's rights gradually did improve. Nevertheless, gender disparity was not erased, and even women who did enjoy the reforms saw their limits. In Jung Chang's memoir, *Wild Swans*, her mother worked underground for the Communist Party and after liberation, became an important official in the Party. She also chose her own husband, even though her own mother never liked Chang's father. However, she was obligated to perform traditional rituals to honor her mother-in-law. After liberation, when Chang's mother visited her husband's hometown, "she knelt and kowtowed three times. This was the correct thing to do according to the traditional ritual."<sup>111</sup> In Liang Heng's memoir, *Son of the Revolution*, his grandmother "was so tall that tradition demanded that [Liang Heng's mother] obey[ed] her. [His father] was no help, because he was bound by the same filial laws as she."<sup>112</sup> While Liang Heng's mother was an important cadre in

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<sup>110</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 138-148.

<sup>111</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 155.

<sup>112</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 91st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 5.

the Party, like Chang's mother, she also could not escape traditional norms at home. Son preference also continued in many families, like Liang Heng's. His birth in his father's eyes was "a double victory, for at last he had a son to carry on the family line."<sup>113</sup> Liang Heng's father was himself a devoted Party cadre, believing in the cause of the Revolution. For many Party cadres like Chang and Liang's parents, traditional norms existed alongside the Communist ideology, they were not replaced with the new laws.

Mao believed gender equality would be realized through equal economic opportunities for women. In the *Little Red Book*, Mao said, "in order to build a great socialist society, it is of the utmost importance to arouse the broad masses of women to join in productive activities. Men and women must receive equal pay for equal work in production."<sup>114</sup> In the later Mao years, the state shifted its focus from improving the private sphere of women's lives to expanding women's public sphere. For many young girls, the First Five-Year Plan was very successful in terms of providing girls with education as many schools were created and literacy rates increased. Despite greater number of boys attending school than girls, especially in higher education,<sup>115</sup> many Chinese girls received education. Women's participation in the public sphere increased dramatically, from entering the workforce to political participation in the Red Guards.

### Great Leap Forward

The Communist Party, even before liberation, employed an unprecedented number of female cadres. Before 1949, female cadres made up eight percent of the Party, this number rose

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<sup>113</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 91st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 7.

<sup>114</sup> Zedong Mao, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, Reissue edition ed., (San Francisco: China Books, 1990), 297.

<sup>115</sup> Craig Dietrich, *People's China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

to fourteen point six percent in 1955.<sup>116</sup> During the Great Leap Forward, peasant men were mobilized to work on big building projects away from home. The country successfully mobilized women to replace men in agriculture and other jobs usually occupied in men. Mao believed “the people’s communes contain the sprouts of communism.”<sup>117</sup> The model women portrayed by media from the 1950s to the 1970s was still a mother and “obedient” wife, however, she now had a new role, a worker for the state. The state continues to portray women as understanding and caring wives and mothers. However, her husband can no longer expect her to stay at home. He should let her work and fulfill her duty to the country.<sup>118</sup> The state’s main priorities, though, were not to improve traditional roles and duties of women. “In fact, as long as the demand for female labor was not too great, the Party did not need to push very hard against the traditional family roles and duties of women.”<sup>119</sup> The demand for female labor force was great though, during the Great Leap Forward and women were encouraged to shed their traditional roles during the period from late 1950s to early 1960s.

Collectivism in these communes freed women from domestic chores and taking care of children to focus on the nationwide campaign. A problem that many women faced even if they could acquire a fulltime job and financially contribute to the family was the double burden. Women, whether they worked or not, are burdened by their traditional responsibilities, domestic chores, from cooking to cleaning to taking care of children. The creation of public “canteens,

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<sup>116</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 107.

<sup>117</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art,” in *Mao Zedong and China's Revolution: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Timothy Cheek, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 163.

<sup>118</sup> Harriet Evans, “Changing Images of the Ideal Wife,” in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Brownell, Susan, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, and Inc ebrary, 1st ed, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002;2001;), 336-337.

<sup>119</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 164.

nurseries, and retirement homes... freed women from domestic burdens to propel them to the front line.”<sup>120</sup> This was the state’s acknowledgement of the double burden, and its solution to lessen women’s burden by taking care of domestic responsibilities usually taken on by women. The employment of Chinese women was successful during the Great Leap Forward, with a “massive entry of women into the workforce... One estimate suggests that between 1957 and 1958, the numbers of clerical and industrial workers increased by over 20 million.”<sup>121</sup>

The state, during the Great Leap Forward, unquestionably acknowledged the capabilities of Chinese women. The 1962 movie, *Li Shuangshuang*, directed by Lu Ren, tells the story of a married woman.<sup>122</sup> She was smart and came up with an innovative idea that the whole village liked and decided to implement. Her husband benefitted from her innovative idea but became corrupt. Shuangshuang uncovered this corruption and saved the day. Not only that, but her husband transformed from an uncaring and mean man to a grateful husband by the end of the movie, after realizing Shuangshuang was correct. This movie not only portrayed an able woman righteously attacking her own husband, the movie ended with her husband admitting his wrongdoing, which validated Shuangshuang’s opinions and ideas.

Gender discrimination did not cease with the employment of women, despite the Party’s argument that equal work would create gender equality. Encouraging women to enter the workforce was “less about women performing jobs equivalent to those of men than about mobilizing women to take over the agricultural jobs formerly— but no longer— performed by male laborers, who had been recruited to work on major construction projects of the

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<sup>120</sup> Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962*, 1st U.S. ed, (New York: Walker & Co, 2010), 48.

<sup>121</sup> Craig Dietrich, *People's China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 129.

<sup>122</sup> *Li Shuangshuang*, directed by Lu Ren, (1962; United States, China Video Movies Distributing Co, 1987), VHS.

communes.”<sup>123</sup> Women did not achieve equality in the workplace, because many women complained about being paid poorly and discriminated against in the workplace.<sup>124</sup>

Discrimination in the workplace existed in different forms. There is an incident during the Great Leap Forward in which the female workers in a certain brigade were pressured into working topless because their supervisor reasoned, that “the more women work[ing] topless, the more enthusiasm there would be.” By doing this, these women were supposed to be “break[ing] away from feudal traditions,”<sup>125</sup> but this was clearly done to please the perverted supervisor. An example of wage disparity is the difference in work points between men and women who work the same jobs. In *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse*, Wang Fucheng, the village leader for over thirty years in the small village of Houhua, reasoned that “women got fewer points because they are weaker and can’t do some jobs as well as men.” However, he later mentioned that “the women did most of the farm work”<sup>126</sup> during the Great Leap Forward because men spent most of their time in meetings. This meant while the women were doing most of the villages’ farm work, they were still receiving less points than men.

While the shift from women in the domestic sphere of life to the public sphere of life through entering the workforce was radical, the idea that household affairs are the responsibility of women was never questioned. The state removed the double burden but never questioned the reasoning behind the double burden. In Kay Ann Johnsons, *Women, the Family, and Peasant*

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<sup>123</sup> Beverly Jo Bossler, ed, *Gender and Chinese History: Transformative Encounters*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), ProQuest Ebook Central, 190.

<sup>124</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 172.

<sup>125</sup> Zhou Xun, *Great Famine in China, 1958-1962: A Documentary History*, (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2012), 40.

<sup>126</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 47-48.

*Revolution in China*, the progressiveness of the state's policies in the Great Leap Forward are questioned.

Never was it suggested, even in the most utopian movements, that men should learn from women or that men should be sent down to the laundry or nursery to learn the value of, and how to perform, the nurturing human services relegated to women. Never did Maoists insist that women's traditional work be given greater respect and value; indeed the opposite was the case.<sup>127</sup>

So, while the double burden was removed for women to mobilize and enter the workforce, the traditional belief about women's obligation to take care of domestic affairs was left unchanged. During the Mao years, the women's movement focused on creating opportunities for women to enter what was traditionally the male sphere of life, to empower women, not to change the belief about the inferiority of the female sphere of life in China.

The traditional Confucian family unit was challenged during the Great Leap Forward as well. For those who grew up in the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1967, like Jung Chang and Liang Heng, much of their childhood was spent in daycares. Both recalled how busy their mothers were and the lack of time they spent with their mothers growing up. The responsibility of caring for children at home fell to grandparents, especially grandmothers.<sup>128</sup> Jung Chang remembers being sent to boarding nurseries with all her siblings because there was no one to take care of them at home. Chang and her siblings remember growing up missing their mother very much, because their mother was "too busy 'racing towards socialism.'"<sup>129</sup> For many working mothers during this period, the creation of large communes affected their relationship to their children. Mobilizing women into the workforce meant that a lot of these mothers could not take

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<sup>127</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 167.

<sup>128</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 91st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 4-5.

<sup>129</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 195, 204.

care of their children. Collectivizing domestic work, placing children in public nurseries, and mobilizing all abled adults of the family encouraged devotion to the Party, instead of individual families.

Large communes did not drastically alter traditional family norms, but did lessened women's burden in the domestic sphere. Viewed this way, the state's attempt to carry some of women's double burden was successful because public canteens, nurseries, and housekeeping removed some of the chores women were usually responsible for. However, the large communes themselves were a complete failure. Many people starved to death during the Great Leap Forward, in one of the greatest famines recorded in human history. Widespread corruption, competition between provinces to raise grain quotas despite not having enough to feed starving peasants, peasants were overworked, and mobilizing peasants to work on big projects such as melting steel instead of growing food, all led to disaster. Large communes, despite lessening women's burden in the domestic sphere, simply did not work.

### Cultural Revolution

By the 1964, the Great Leap Forward had already ended and the Cultural Revolution was about to start. The government during this year published a handbook which included a section called "The Correct Handling of Love, Marriage, and Family Problems." In the handbook, the state argued that premarital relationships were acceptable and explained how marriage decisions should be made. In the new socialist society, matchmaking "should be analyzed concretely, for one cannot say whether it is good or bad in general. Generally speaking, it is best for young men and women to find their beloveds by themselves to build up a love relationship through common

labor and common struggle.”<sup>130</sup> While parents’ role in their children’s marriage was purposely made vague because parents probably still played important roles in deciding their children’s marriage, the state was leaning towards a more liberal approach. Freedom to date and choose one’s own partner was encouraged.

During the Cultural Revolution, the large number of female students that joined the Red Guards and the pressure to erase femininity were the main ways in which the state tackled women’s issue. Many teenage girls participated politically by joining the Red Guards. Many memoirs written by former female Red Guards demonstrate this. At the time, Mao encouraged young people to stop going to school and create revolution. All over the country, schools were closed for years. In *Wild Swans* and *Son of the Revolution*, young teenage girls in both families participated in the revolution and joined the Red Guards to fight for Mao’s cause. For many of these young women, participating in the revolution was probably very empowering. The propaganda of the time also encouraged masculinity and discouraged femininity, so men and women looked alike. This follows Marxism because Marx and Engels believed “that women must become ‘more like men’ if they are to become equal.”<sup>131</sup>

Young women and men were taught to love Chairman Mao, especially the Red Guards, whose loyalty remained to the Party. Mao’s Red Guards were an attack on the traditional family, forcing children to denounce their own parents and spouses to denounce each other. Liang Heng in *Son of the Revolution*, was forced to denounce his own father and Liang Heng and his father denounce Liang Heng’s mother after the Party labeled her as a Rightist.<sup>132</sup> This attack on the

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<sup>130</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Correct Handling of Love, Marriage and Family Problems,” in *Chinese Civilization and Society: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Free Press, 1981), 373.

<sup>131</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 166.

<sup>132</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 91st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 10.



family unit was successful in some cases, as portrayed by “The Wounded,” a story about a young cadre cutting off all ties with her own counterrevolutionary mother because of her loyalty to the Party. Not only was Xiaohua isolated after her mother was labeled a counterrevolutionary, “because of her mother, she was expelled from the Red guards and suffered all kinds of discrimination. As a result, she hated her mother even more for her treacherous and shameful past.”<sup>133</sup> The Cultural Revolution put many families to the test but at the same time, by weakening the hold that the traditional Confucian family has on women, it can be argued that the Cultural Revolution was a liberating time for some women. Much like how the family crisis of the early twentieth century gave a few lucky women freedom and independence in cities, weakening the family could have given some women more independence and freedom during this period.

In propaganda posters, such as “Fully Criticize the Chinese Khrushchev From a Political, Ideological and Theoretical Perspective,”<sup>134</sup> made in 1967 and “He Who Dares to Encroach Upon Us Will Be Destroyed,”<sup>135</sup> made in 1970, women are drawn very much like men. Although it was still clear who is male and female, markers of femininity are erased. Women have the same hairstyles, same clothes, and same body physiques as men. This was drastically different from how women were portrayed before the Cultural Revolution. As late as 1962, femininity was still welcomed in propaganda posters. “Man Works Hard, Flowers Are Fragrant,” by artists Li

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<sup>133</sup> Lu Xinhua, “The Wounded” in *The Wounded: New Stories of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. Bennett Lee, (Hong Kong: Joint Pub. Co., 1979), 11.

<sup>134</sup> *Cong Zhengzhishang Sixiangshang Lilunshang Chedi Pidao Pixiu Zhongguode Heluxiaofu: 'Fully Criticize the Chinese Khrushchev From a Political, Ideological and Theoretical Perspective,'* Print no. 8081.10135, 1967, <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/30051001063285?locatt=view:level3>.

<sup>135</sup> Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Station of Yingtan Township., and Stefan R. Landsberger, *Shei Gan Qinfan Women Jiu Jiao Ta Miewang: 'He Who Dares to Encroach Upon Us Will Be Destroyed,'* Print No. 115, 1970, <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/30051001581989?locatt=view:level3>.

Mubai, and Jin Xuechen<sup>136</sup> illustrated a young and pretty woman working in the fields. Not only does she have long braided hair, but her clothing, her pale skin, and the rouge on her cheeks and lips contrasts with the young women shown in the 1967 and 1970 propaganda posters.

Erasing femininity did not elevate women's status to that of men's. Dualist and Confucian beliefs about gender continued to exist. The Party failed women through the long-held "essentialist construction of gender difference... to which biology defined that women were by nature weaker, less intelligent and creative, and more susceptible to emotional fluctuations and small-minded interests and so on, than men."<sup>137</sup> Harriet Evans agreed that the propaganda posters that were supposed to show women as equal to men, did not do so. Despite the sameness of men and women in these posters, women are shown wearing brighter clothes than men. This was to show that women were obsessed with "materialistic" interests and could not become true revolutionaries like men.<sup>138</sup> It is important to note that old men are portrayed in these posters but rarely are there any old women. Older women in Chinese society, therefore, did "not enjoy of authority through her age alone. Respect based on her age was necessarily mediated by her relationship to a man."<sup>139</sup>

In real life, this sameness became a requirement for many. Xinran interviewed many women who lived through the Cultural Revolution, and many agreed on the pressure they faced to hide any signs of femininity. "Between 1966 and 1976, the dark years of the Cultural Revolution, there was little in either cut or color to distinguish Chinese women's clothing from

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<sup>136</sup> Li Mubai, and Jin Xuechen, *Ren Qin Hua Xiang: 'Man Works Hard, Flowers Are Fragrant,'* Print no. 8085.2485, 1962, <http://hdl.handle.net/10622/30051001402178?locatt=view:level3>.

<sup>137</sup> Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 64.

<sup>138</sup> Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 73-74.

<sup>139</sup> Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 74-75.

men's. Objects specifically for women's use were rare."<sup>140</sup> The Party essentially tried to erase the markers of gender. "Overt signs of femininity in dress were considered the reflection of individualistic and bourgeois interests, compatible with the frugal, selfless commitment to the collective good required by party ideology."<sup>141</sup> Sexuality was also discouraged by the Party. "Girls and boys alike [were] instructed to direct their developing physical and psychological energies away from sexual concerns to intellectual, political or social ones."<sup>142</sup> "The majority of the people who lived through [the Cultural Revolution] endured a barren sexual environment, most of all women."<sup>143</sup> This was the case for Jung Chang, who remembered suppressing her sexuality and her interest in boys while growing up in the Cultural Revolution. Females were not allowed to express their sexuality, because according to Confucian ethics, "for a woman to enjoy sex was considered shameful."<sup>144</sup> Female who did not maintain distance from males risked being categorized as "loose" women, discouraging any closeness between sexes.

Freedom to choose one's own partners seemed more accepted by the Cultural Revolution. In Zhang Yimou's famous movie, *To Live*, is the story of an average family's life through China's turmoil years, from 1940s into the 1970s. When the family's daughter, Fengxia, was old enough to marry, the district leader and her parents played matchmaker. In deciding whether or not the man they introduced to their daughter to was the right fit, Fengxia's parents agreed it was ultimately up to her to make the decision. They did not see themselves as the deciders of

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<sup>140</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 202.

<sup>141</sup> Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 134.

<sup>142</sup> Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 58.

<sup>143</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 203.

<sup>144</sup> Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 420.

Fengxia's future husband, it was Fengxia who had the right to choose for herself.<sup>145</sup> This was not the case for all families, as Liang Heng recalled in his memoir his breakup with his girlfriend. Because she was from a high official family, her father was against their relationship and they were only able to see each other in secrecy.<sup>146</sup> When he tried to marry his girlfriend Judy, local cadres refused. They threatened to tell his parents and this scared Liang Heng which revealed the approval of parents remained important in marriage decisions during that time. Also, without Liang Heng's parents' approval, no official would have legalized their marriage.<sup>147</sup>

Something else that did not change was male dominance in China's state. During the Mao years, an unprecedented number of women joined the Party, the few women who held high position in parties were mostly wives of China's top leaders. Jiang Qing, also known as Madame Mao, was the most powerful women who came into power during twentieth century China, because of Mao. The leader of the Gang of Four, Jiang Qing was hated by the country for good reasons. After Mao's death, the Gang of Four, especially Jiang Qing, was blamed for the "injustices of the Cultural Revolution, wreaking havoc and cruelty without Mao's knowledge."<sup>148</sup> The truth was that Jiang Qing did lead the Cultural Revolution and was responsible for a lot of the horrors that occurred. "On the other hand, it must be noted that she was probably forced to be pushy... by a culture that, even among supposedly liberated revolutionaries, discouraged independence and leadership in women."<sup>149</sup> Since the Communist defeated the Kuomintang in the Civil War until current day, no woman in the Party has held as

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<sup>145</sup> *To Live*, directed by Yimou Zhang, 1994, (United States: MGM, 2007), DVD.

<sup>146</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 91st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 261-262.

<sup>147</sup> Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*, 91st Vintage Books ed, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 279-282.

<sup>148</sup> Roxane Witke, "The Last Days of Madame Mao," *Vanity Fair*, December 1991, 138.

<sup>149</sup> Craig Dietrich, *People's China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 43.

high of a position as Jiang Qing and no woman in the Party has been hated by the public as much as Jiang Qing either. This revealed the limited opportunities for women in the upper reaches of the Party, and the bias against women in the political arena.

### Conclusion

Despite the setbacks, the period from 1949 into the 1970s was a very liberating period for most Chinese women. For the first time, a state ruling over a united China sought to address the subordination of women and it was successful in implementing policies and laws that improved many Chinese women's lives. The radical Marriage Law and Land Reform of 1950 established equal rights and protection under the law, and gave women the right to property. The Great Leap Forward lessened women's double burden by collectivizing property and taking over household responsibilities, although it ended in disaster. The Cultural Revolution sought to erase gender inequality by practicing the Marxist idea that gender equality can be achieved by maculating women. Even though some traditional rituals and practices along with Confucian ideology persist, the changes made during this period proved the state's significant power and influence in liberating Chinese women. Peasants and cadres resisted women's emancipation and the state ultimately decided to take a more conservative stance regarding women's issues. It was because the state "[encouraged] women to engage in traditional masculine sphere of public endeavor while simultaneously [maintained] within that sphere a familiar hierarchy of gendered authority,"<sup>150</sup> that an even greater extent of progress did not occur. However, the state did continue to advocate for equal gender opportunities in the public sphere so most progressive changes for women occurred outside the home. Many women acquired jobs and with it, a certain

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<sup>150</sup> Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 76.

sense of independence. After the Mao years, the state deviated in its approach towards women's rights, and its success furthermore demonstrated the Chinese state's vital role in aiding in women's emancipation.

## **Chapter 4 – Chinese Women’s Status in After Economic Reforms, The State’s Critical Role**

State intervention is necessary in changing the customs and rituals as well as ideologies that subordinate women in Chinese society. This last chapter focuses on how the lives of many Chinese women improved from the period between after 1979, when Deng Xiaoping began China’s economic reforms, well into the early twenty-first century. Since the 1980s, Chinese women are more accepted in the workforce than ever before and old customs that helped subordinate women are shifting. The opening of China and modernization from the 1980s on created many job opportunities for Chinese people and this included women. These opportunities have positively changed the lives of many Chinese women and significant changes have occurred in rituals and practices concerning marriages and kinship and even ideology. Employment opportunities opened the doors for women’s personal freedom and elevation in the status of women in the family, as well as in society. The income that working women brought home helped support their families, thereby increasing respect for them in the family.

However, the state has not pushed for full gender equality, and some traditional patriarchal customs, rituals, ideologies still exist. The state does not fully protect women, and this is shown in China’s Labor Law. I argue that in China, gender equality cannot be realized without the support of the state and economic opportunities for women. The lack of enforcement of the Marriage Law update and the unpopularity of the one-child policy suggest that state’s creation of laws and policies promoting and stating the equal rights of women and men are not enough to create a society of gender equality. Gender equality needs to be enforced by the state in order to change the rituals and customs that have subordinated women for millennia. State intervention, customs and rituals, and ideologies are all essential in understanding gender

disparity in China and what necessary steps need to be taken to realize Chinese women's emancipation. The changes that occurred in China within the last century have resulted in the creation of the People's Republic of China, under a government that legally supports the equality of men and women. This has resulted in unprecedented improvements in the lives of many Chinese women, proving that the state has widespread power to improve the lives of women. The enforced policies and laws that push gender equality will change rituals and customs that subordinate women and ultimately, the ideologies that suppress women.

When Deng Xiaoping opened China's doors in 1978 and transformed the country into a socialist market economy, the lives of many Chinese women changed as well. The People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 successfully implemented a series of policies that improved the lives of Chinese women, but the policies and improvements that occurred in women's lives after the economic reforms of 1978 were drastically different. The shift towards a market economy gave more economic opportunities to women. As Deng Xiaoping said himself, "To get rich is glorious." The Four Modernizations proposed by Zhou Enlai in 1963 were to strengthen China's agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. This was carried out by Deng in the economic reforms that drastically changed China's economy. China before 1978 focused largely on collectivism, but Deng Xiaoping's reforms were more focused on individualism. One of Deng's reforms included smashing the "iron bowl," which guaranteed everyone a job and therefore, food, hence the name. State enterprises and government subsidies vanished. The encouragement by the state to get rich and the removal of guaranteed jobs for everyone were strong incentives for the Chinese to find employment and earn as much as they could.

Across China, everyone looked for opportunities to get wealthy. Decollectivization in agriculture was carried out and entrepreneurship was encouraged in the 1980s. Privatization and



leasing state-owned businesses were carried out from the 1980s to 1990s. Foreign investment poured into China and Special Economic Zones were set up. These Special Economic Zones were where many poor rural women migrated to for jobs. The first Special Economic Zones in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen were chosen in 1980 and in 1984, fourteen more cities were chosen. Stock markets in Shanghai and Shenzhen opened in 1990. Mao's communist China became unrecognizable. While these reforms were not specifically aimed at improving conditions for women in China, the economic reforms of the late twentieth century vastly improved the lives of many women.

While women in modern China enjoy more opportunities and rights than ever before, not every aspect of women's lives has improved. The Chinese government continued to seek improvement in women's rights through updating laws like the Marriage Law and the Labor Law, aimed at protecting women. Yet, the state itself continued to stress the importance of motherhood for young women, and women who deviate from marriage are stigmatized. Patrilocal marriage is still practiced and this contributes to daughter discrimination. The one-child policy was enacted in 1979 to control China's massive, growing population, but it was also intended to stop families from favoring sons. The idea was that if there was only one child in the family and that child was a girl, families would spoil and love their daughter like they would their son. However, it is clear that families continue to prefer boys to girls, especially in rural families. The continued practices of certain traditional customs and rituals, the lack of protection for domestic workers in the Labor Laws, and the unpopularity of the one-child policy show that traditional ideologies are still embedded in Chinese society and families. Dualism and Confucianism continue to affect the lives of some women, who are expected to manage domestic

affairs. In addition, the belief that certain jobs are unfit for women due to their physiology prevails and this easily creates a sexist bias against women in the workplace.

Even in the short period that this chapter focuses on, it is evident that economic opportunities have greatly improved the lives of many rural migrant women. This is significant because rural China has always been more conservative when it comes to women's emancipation. The largest obstacle faced by the Communists in emancipating women during the years before 1978 was the avid refusal of male peasants to improve women's condition in Chinese society. Unlike ancient China, the PRC actively supported the legal protection of women and by law, women are equal to men. The state has also enforced different ideologies and rituals than practiced traditionally, in the hopes of altering the conditions that supported the subordination of women in Chinese society. However, some rituals and customs, as well as traditional ideologies, continue to exist today. The economic and educational opportunities that the state has opened for women are not enough to change the core traditional values and the important rituals and customs of the Chinese. The state has a lot of influence over ideologies that subordinate women in Chinese society. The vast improvements made during this time period was largely thanks to the state, so gender equality can only be realized when the Chinese state fully supports women's emancipation.

### Employment and Economic Contribution to Household

Many rural Chinese women started to migrate to cities to work from the 1980s onwards for better wages and this really changed the lives of women, especially many rural women. In 1980, Deng Xiaoping chose Shenzhen as the first Special Economic Zone, and foreign investments flooded into China with the promise of cheap labor. Before 1990, the majority of

migrant workers were women. From 1982 onwards, the number of male migrant workers increased to surpass that of women migrant workers in 1990.<sup>151</sup> By 1990, women who migrated to cities to find employment, made up forty-one percent of the total migrating population.<sup>152</sup> Since then, the migrating population has continued to drastically increase. By 2010, there were over 221 million migrant workers in China, making up a total of sixteen point fifty-three percent of the total population in China.<sup>153</sup>

Many of the factory workers in Chinese cities in the 1980s were women who were in their late twenties, typically mothers with families. Domestic services, such as becoming housekeepers, was also another career choice for these rural women. Many female factory workers migrated from rural areas to cities, because the wages were higher than they could find in rural China despite the fact that jobs that they found in cities were not stable, state intervention when issues arose were minimal, the working hours were long, and conditions were poor.<sup>154</sup> For domestic workers, cities also offered better job opportunities despite the exploitation, long work hours, and unreasonable working conditions that make a lot of these workers feel like slaves. “Moreover, an employer’s control over the worker’s spare time, the lack of privacy, and lack of free to manage the process of work... leave [domestic] workers feeling psychologically ‘stressed

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<sup>151</sup> Lu, Ming, Xia Yiran, “Migration in the People’s Republic of China,” in *ADB Working Paper No. 593*, (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute, 2016), 8, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/191876/adbi-wp593.pdf>.

<sup>152</sup> Delia Davin, “Gender and Rural-Urban Migration in China,” *Gender and Development* 4, no. 1 (1996), 29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4030354>.

<sup>153</sup> Lu, Ming, Xia Yiran, “Migration in the People’s Republic of China,” in *ADB Working Paper No. 593*, (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute, 2016), 8, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/191876/adbi-wp593.pdf>.

<sup>154</sup> Pun Ngai, *Made in China*, (Durham: Duke University Press Books: 2005), 108.

and depressed.”<sup>155</sup> Rural areas in China were the most conservative, so the flow of rural women to Chinese cities challenged traditional beliefs about women.

The rural migrant workers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century were optimistic and strived to create a better future for themselves, despite the societal and family barriers. Female migration to cities to find employment defied Dualist norms, which dictated that women belong inside the house, performing domestic chores. Therefore, the first generation of migrant workers of the 1980s were probably the pioneers of their families in terms of women migrating faraway to work and support their families. These women were probably the first generation of their families to have ever taken such a bold step. A young woman, Qiaoling, remembered in her diary how reluctant her father in letting her migrate to Beijing to work. She said this stemmed “from his shame at having an unmarried daughter working for strangers and doing menial labor, in violation of norms of gender and social respectability that reflected poorly on the family.”<sup>156</sup> Migration, for rural women like Qiaoling was, therefore, seen as morally degrading and in violation of traditional social and gender expectation. For women from Chinese families to migrate to cities to work was unprecedented. However, many young rural women migrated to find city jobs and by the 2000s, the acceptance of women working far from home became more accepted.

Not all rural women had to migrate to cities take advantage of the new economic opportunities. Some of the rural women who stayed at home in the 1980s and 1990s were able to become successful merchants and open their own businesses.

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<sup>155</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 64.

<sup>156</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 2.

By the early 1990s, rural women also became very important in commercial business. As recently reported by *China's Women's News*, about 4.6 million females from the countryside now run private businesses, comprising one third of the private businesses in the countryside. Similarly, in the most commercially developed areas, rural female merchants constitute 50 percent of the workforce.<sup>157</sup>

Even rural women who did not migrate were able to take advantage of the new opportunities that came with China's opening, and many were successful. Like migrating to cities and earning enough to support their families, successful businesswomen in China challenged the traditional ideas about women.

The increase in women's roles outside the family has also increased these women's status inside the family, as well as in society. Respect and status came hand in hand with the income these women are able to bring into the family.<sup>158</sup> Journalist Leslie T. Chang in *Factory Girls* interviewed a young factory girl named Min, revealing how different the lives of the younger generation working in the 2000's were. "Migration has become the chief source of village income. Together, Min and her older sister had sent home six hundred dollars the previous year... The money paid for the schooling of the younger children, and it gave the sisters a voice in family affairs."<sup>159</sup> Not only that, but the author also observes Min's behavior at home, which vastly differs from that expected of women traditionally. While Min's parents busied themselves with housework, "Min did not help out with housework... she spoke sharply to older relatives she didn't like. I never saw her do anything she didn't want to do."<sup>160</sup> She was nice to relatives she liked and ignored relatives she did not like. Min's life differed greatly than that of her

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<sup>157</sup> Zhou Kate Xiao, "Women Divided: The Blessing and the Curse of China's Changing Economy," in *Harvard International Review* 20, no. 1 (1997), 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4276367>.

<sup>158</sup> Zhou Kate Xiao, *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 216.

<sup>159</sup> Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 284.

<sup>160</sup> Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 281, 291.

mother's. Although factory workers like her make very little, it is enough for women like Min to support their entire family in rural villages, while retaining some money for themselves. The ability to buy personal things for oneself and gifts for others is also empowering for these young women.<sup>161</sup> It showed that the money earned by these women belongs to themselves; they are not required to hand everything over to their family.

With economic freedom comes personal freedom for some working young women, but not all. Liu Xia, a 17-year-old factory girl, came from a farming family. Like many young girls of her age, her life was very different than that of her parents. "Living in the village as a child, Liu Xia had never worked on the farm. Her hands were soft, her skin not reddened or roughened by exposure to the sun. She rarely took part in household chores."<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, Liu did not know how to cook, indicating her comfortable upbringing. Kam Wing Chang explained that the younger migrating generation has enjoyed far more opportunities and has greater aspirations than their parents.

Being younger and better educated than their parents, this new cohort of migrant workers has also greater aspirations to stay in the city. They are also far more aware of their rights and what unsatisfactory conditions they face than the previous generation – and are demanding change.<sup>163</sup>

In the case of many of these factory girls, the ability to work and support the family lessened traditional expectations usually placed on rural women. However, other factory workers like a young woman named Wang Chun Ling, are not as fortunate. From a poor rural family, Wang

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<sup>161</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 92.

<sup>162</sup> Behzad Yaghmaian, "The Migrant Girls' Long March." In *The Accidental Capitalist: A People's Story of the New China*, (London: Pluto Press, 2012), doi:10.2307/j.ctt183p8wt.8, 73.

<sup>163</sup> Chan Kam Wing, "Migration and Development in China: Trends, Geography and Current Issues," *Migration and Development*, 1:2, (London: Routledge, 2012), 199, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2012.739316>.

remembered helping her mother with household chores since the age of five.<sup>164</sup> Traditional duties are still expected of migrant working women like Wang, and others like Liu live lives vastly different from that of their parents. From this, it seems employment opportunities have started to shift the traditional roles given to young women in some families, but not others.

Even though the practice of having wives and daughters migrate to cities to work was considered unvirtuous by traditional standards, many Chinese women have overcome this hurdle and received unprecedented independence in the socialist market economy. Women's role has increased both inside and outside the family. Over time, women became less the passive force described in Dualist ideology and families are starting to accept this change. "Compared with the peasants of the 1970s, today's peasants are more willing to accept women working [outside the home]." <sup>165</sup> If so much can change in the span of such a short of period of time, the future for working Chinese women looks optimistic.

### Gender-Specific Jobs

Despite the unprecedented job opportunities offered to women, however, occupational disparities and gender discrimination persisted in Chinese workplace. Men and women have continued to believe that some jobs, such as the textile and weaving industry, are simply better suited for women because these were jobs traditionally occupied by women. Women were also still largely responsible for domestic chores or matters inside the household. This stemmed from the traditional Dualist and Confucian idea that women belonged inside and men outside. Women are also believed to be better suited for some jobs, such as domestic service and other lower

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<sup>164</sup> Behzad Yaghmaian, "The Migrant Girls' Long March." In *The Accidental Capitalist: A People's Story of the New China*, (London: Pluto Press, 2012), doi:10.2307/j.ctt183p8wt.8, 62.

<sup>165</sup> Gao Xiaoxian, "China's Modernization and Changes in Social Status," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, edited by Gilmartin, Christina K. Vol. 10.;10;, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 88.

positions, while higher positions are occupied mostly by men. Although it is believed on paper that women enjoy equal job opportunities, this did not reflect reality.

The rediscovery of women's femininity after its suppression during the Mao Era raised the question of what it meant to be a woman in China and women started pursuing careers they thought they were more suited for. World-renowned physicist and the former president of Fudan University, Xie Xide, at a women's conference in 1992, described the problem with women's identity in choosing their occupations. The number of women who joined the physics department at Fudan dramatically increased after the 1950s, but decreased after 1980s. Xie stated, "A whole generation of women had come to feel that they have to channel their intelligence into more 'feminine' occupations."<sup>166</sup> The traditional Dualist belief which described a woman's place in the world still very much exist in modern China. Many Chinese, including many women themselves, has continued to believe in the traditional characteristics which defined femininity in ancient China.

Interviews with a few full-time working mothers revealed that they were expected to take on all the responsibilities at home after work, the "double" burden. Liu Jieyu interviewed two of these women, Gao Yun and Ding Jiahua. Even after their husbands became unemployed, these women "took charge of everything: 'anything in the family, as long as it is called housework, falls upon me.' Ding Jiahua's husband was in a similar situation and had been unemployed for five years, but did nothing to help her, even though she had become re-employed."<sup>167</sup> Hong is another example. She was a college graduate who was expected to work a full-time job and also take care of all household matters. During an interview in the 2000s, Hong's husband, Ming,

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<sup>166</sup> Wang Zheng, "Research on women in Contemporary China," in *Mapping the Social, Economic, and Policy Changes in Chinese Women's Lives*, ed. by Du Fangqin and Zheng Xinrong, (Ewha Womans University Press, 2005), 143.

<sup>167</sup> Liu Jieyu, *Gender and Work in Urban China: Women Workers of the Unlucky Generation*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 117.



reasoned “that male is dominant in public life and the female in domestic life. It is the wife’s duty to do all the household chores even if she is working outside.”<sup>168</sup>

Living in a rural household, Chao Sao’s husband, Zhichao, also shared similar ideas. After their marriage, both started working full-time. Chao Sao also takes care household chores, cooks, and takes care of their child while Zhichao did not help, even if he had free time. Yuen Law Ho explained that their marriage was better than a traditional marriage in China because at least he took her feelings into consideration. However, Yuen in 2004 analyzed that “to a large extent, his courtship and marriage show that he is a believer that the relationship between husband and wife is one of ‘men dominant, women subservient.’”<sup>169</sup> These interviews showed the unequal work distribution within the Chinese family. Whether in urban cities or in rural villages, the dilemma within contemporary Chinese families is the additional responsibilities women had to carry outside and inside the family. While Chinese women’s status and respect has risen in the family, it seemed the belief that domestic life should be taken care of by women has not changed. This belief, deriving from the Dualist and Confucianism idea mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, reinforced the notion that women are inferior to men. Men’s ‘rightful’ place in society and women’s ‘rightful’ place inside the house comes from the perception that men are superior to women.<sup>170</sup>

Chinese women also faced discrimination in the workplace despite an article by *China Daily* that argues that, as of the year 2001, Chinese women receive equal job opportunities.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Zhang Lixi, “Tradition and Change,” in *Mapping the Social, Economic, and Policy Changes in Chinese Women’s Lives*, ed. by Du Fangqin and Zheng Xinrong, (Ewha Womans University Press, 2005), 61.

<sup>169</sup> Ruan Xinbang, Peilin Luo, and Yuk-ying Ho, *Marriage, Gender, and Sex in a Contemporary Chinese Village*, english language ed, (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 72.

<sup>170</sup> Zhang Lixi, “Tradition and Change,” in *Mapping the Social, economic, and Policy Changes in Chinese Women’s Lives*, ed. by Du Fangqin and Zheng Xinrong, (Ewha Womans University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>171</sup> Gu Xiulian, “Women Enjoy Better Social Status in China,” *China Daily*, accessed date January 19, 2018, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/supp/2001-08/27/content\\_79249.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/supp/2001-08/27/content_79249.htm).

Gao explained that there are many more men than women in China who hold jobs that are considered prestigious. “The more highly skilled jobs are usually held by men. There are very few women in the kinds of job-enterprise manager, technician, salesperson, accountant-that peasants consider highly prestigious.”<sup>172</sup> While more women have entered the workforce, the jobs they acquire tend to be less prestigious. Women would work in textile and apparel factories, for example, which derived from the traditional duties of women. The law has not protected domestic service workers, one of the main jobs taken by migrating women from rural areas. Article 27 in the Labor Laws of the PRC, is supposed to protect against gender discrimination in the workplace, stating that, “The State guarantees that women enjoy equal right to work as men.”<sup>173</sup> However, Arianne M. Gaetano expressed her doubt in Beijing domestic workers protection under the municipal Labor Bureau, which was supposed to be enforced by the Women’s Federation.<sup>174</sup> These domestic workers usually do not have adequate insurance, do not have good working contracts, are not compensated for working overtime, are not well protected from harassment or discrimination.<sup>175</sup>

Women’s physiology was one of the main reasons believed by both employers and women themselves that prevent women from achieving occupational equality. An article published by *China Daily* including clauses to the "Progress in China's Human Rights Cause in 2000," was released by the Information Office of the State Council in Beijing. Clause 5,

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<sup>172</sup> Gao Xiaoxian, “China’s Modernization and Changes in Social Status,” in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, edited by Gilmartin, Christina K. Vol. 10.;10;, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 89.

<sup>173</sup> National People’s Congress, *Social Laws*, accessed February 5th, 2018, [http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2009-02/20/content\\_1471590.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2009-02/20/content_1471590.htm).

<sup>174</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 42.

<sup>175</sup> International Labor Organization, *Situational Analysis of Domestic Work in China*, date issued: 2009, accessed February 15th, 2018, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms\\_114261.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_114261.pdf).

dedicated to protecting the rights of women and children, explained that there has been a shift in the industries that women are more dominant. Beijing argued that, women “have tended to shift to tertiary industries from conventional industries... [which] facilitates the comprehensive development of women in economic activities, which are more suited to women's physiological characteristics.”<sup>176</sup> This explanation suggested that women, due to their physiology, are more suitable for certain jobs. For some migrant women, investment “in [their] traditional identities... provide meaning and support amid the uncertainties and instabilities posed by migration and work.”<sup>177</sup> Interviews with women workers in the 1990s showed that some women agreed with the idea that “women’s health” should be considered and that certain jobs are more suitable while others are less fit for women, because women also carried the responsibility of producing our future generation.<sup>178</sup>

Sometimes, employers in job descriptions outright discriminate against employees, many hiring employees based on looks and gender. Some employers “capitalize” on the attractiveness of young and attractive women. Those who look better have better chance getting good jobs. In *Factory Girls*, Leslie T. Chang explained that “bosses like their clerks female, pretty, and single, and they would only consider men for certain technical jobs.”<sup>179</sup> These discriminations against women based on looks makes occupational equality very hard for women. Women in the job market are judged while seeking jobs in different ways than men would be. For women, they quickly learned to rely “mainly upon their social networks, their youthful femininity and

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<sup>176</sup> “Nation Makes Progress on Human Rights,” *China Daily*, last modified April 10, 2001, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/cd/2001-04/10/content\\_51077.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/cd/2001-04/10/content_51077.htm).

<sup>177</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 114.

<sup>178</sup> Margaret Y. K. Woo, “Chinese Women Workers,” in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, edited by Gilmartin, Christina K, Vol. 10.;10;, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994) 291.

<sup>179</sup> Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 90.

sexuality, and their ingenuity and persistence,”<sup>180</sup> to survive in China’s job market. The value placed on women is therefore reduced to appearances and certain characteristics. Bosses like the one mentioned by Chang who only hire men for technical jobs shows that there is still prejudice against women who wished to either advance their career or join a field uncommon for women in the workplace.

This prejudice extended to the state as well. A public domestic service company, created by the Women’s Federation in 1983, was created with the assumption that domestic workers would all be women. Gaetano explained that the “All-China Women’s Federation, was closely involved in the founding of [the March 8th Housework Service Company] reinforced the notion of domestic service as exclusively women’s work.”<sup>181</sup> This type of thinking is similar to the philosophy of Dualism, the idea that women and men are naturally different, therefore it made sense that women and men were not equal. Women are the inferior *yin*, and men the superior *yang*. So of course, it made sense that certain jobs suited women’s physiology better and other jobs suited men’s physiology better. Any imbalance in the workplace could therefore be rationalized through this line of thought.

The truth concerning occupational disparity and discrimination in the workforce does not seem to be acknowledged by the government. Legally and on paper, there does not seem to be much gender discrimination in the workplace. However, some women continued to carry the “double” burden and a glass ceiling exists for women in the workplace. The state assigned the role of mother as well as caregivers in the domestic realm of life, but this is something believed by many women as well. This partially explains the less prestigious jobs women occupy in the

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<sup>180</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 90.

<sup>181</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 14.

current workplace. Although women membership in the CCP has increased, by the end of 1997, the percentage of female officials in the Party only stood at a little less than seventeen percent, about one-sixth of the entire Party, which is still too low.<sup>182</sup> The World Bank's Gender Data Portal shows that in terms of Chinese women's employment ratio to men, Chinese women hold fewer jobs than men. The employment gap was smallest in low income jobs and the highest in middle-income jobs; while high-income jobs are in the middle, with a ratio of 72 women working in high-income jobs per 100 men in 2000.<sup>183</sup> The good news is that this employment gap has decreased over time, but it will take more time. The glass ceiling for Chinese women in the workplace today is caused by long-held beliefs about the responsibilities of Chinese women and reinforced by the state.

### Marriage

Marriage was and is still considered one of the most important changes in Chinese women's lives. The state has always played an instrumental role in either subordinating women or improving the status of women in China through marriage. Without the support of the state, it is hard to change rituals and customs and ultimately, the ideologies of the Chinese people. The state, through the Marriage Law has, and continues to seek the protection of equal for women's rights. However, Chinese women continue to face marriage discrimination. In society, it is still believed that women have different responsibilities than men, and one of the most important role for women is becoming mothers.<sup>184</sup> In contemporary China, women who do not conform to this

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<sup>182</sup> Sebastian Heilmann and Sarah Kirchberger, "The Chinese Nomenklatura in Transition," in *China Analysis* no. 1 (2000): 9, 13, <http://www.chinapolitik.de/files/analysis1.pdf>.

<sup>183</sup> The World Bank, *China Gender Data Portal*, <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/china>.

<sup>184</sup> Margaret Y. K. Woo, "Chinese Women Workers," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, edited by Gilmartin, Christina K, Vol. 10.;10.;, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994) 291.

role are condemned by society. This disapproval by society is supported and even enforced by the state.

Thanks to the reforms during the Mao years, women in the 1980s were able to enjoy unprecedented rights and opportunities, although there were evidently still a lot of improvements to be made. The Marriage Law of 1950 was the first Marriage Law aimed at protecting the marriage rights of women nationwide. The Chinese government has, through updates to the Marriage Law and other laws, further protected women. The Marriage Law of 1980 sought to improve the previous Marriage Law, improving the protection of women in marriages, further emphasizing that marriage decisions must be voluntary.<sup>185</sup> According to *China Daily*, the Information Office of the State Council released a white paper stating in 2000:

The State has adopted measures to effectively protect women's rights. To curb domestic violence, bigamy and the taking of concubines more effectively, to improve the family property system, and to protect women's rights in marriage and the family, the NPC mobilized people from various circles to conduct serious research for the revision of the Marriage Law, and publicized draft amendments to the Marriage Law in January 2001 for public discussion.<sup>186</sup>

The state's goal to continue improving and discussing the Marriage Law is evidence that the law needs further improvements. This brings up the question of implementation and enforcement; whether the Chinese state and local government have been taking steps to implement the Marriage Law today.

After the Cultural Revolution, at the local level, it seemed there was progress in women's freedom to choose their partners but not in life after marriage. Xinran interviewed a woman named Zhou Ting. Zhou Ting recounted meeting her first husband through friends as a common

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<sup>185</sup> National People's Congress, *Marriage Laws of the People's Republic of China*, accessed February 13th, 2018, [http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/13/content\\_1384064.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/13/content_1384064.htm).

<sup>186</sup> "Nation Makes Progress on Human Rights," *China Daily*, last modified April 10, 2001, accessed date January 19, 2018, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/cd/2001-04/10/content\\_51077.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/cd/2001-04/10/content_51077.htm).

practice, whereas compared to before 1949, families usually made marriage decisions for their daughters. Zhou Ting's marriage "'was just like many others in China. Friends introduced me to the man who became my husband.'"<sup>187</sup> Even her reason for marrying him was unprecedented in pre-liberation China, "'Love is unconditional, it is a kind of sacrifice. If you love someone, how can you abandon him when he is in trouble?'"<sup>188</sup> This was Zhou Ting's reason for marrying her crippled fiancée who could not support her and would be the source of a lot of problems.

Many traditional ideas concerning marriage life persisted for the most part. When it came to domestic abuse, "a man battering his wife or beating his children [was] still considered to be 'putting his house in order' by many Chinese,"<sup>189</sup> according to Xinran. Neighbors of Zhou Ting thought the police were being meddlesome when the police arrived to stop Zhou Ting's husband from beating her. While this belief was most prominent amongst the older generation, including older women, when Zhou Ting tried put her husband in prison, no one was on her side. After she successfully divorced her husband, the police officers who were witnesses to her abuse stated they had no record of the abuse.

'Make a report? To whom? Before I could even go back to the police station to beg them to testify for me, the local paper had published a report headlined, "A Wife's Revenge." I was portrayed as a violent woman who was being divorced by her husband. The report was reprinted in other papers and every time it appeared it was touched up: by the end I was a madwoman cackling in a pool of blood!'<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 208.

<sup>188</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 209.

<sup>189</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 212.

<sup>190</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 216.

Following this, Zhou Ting became labeled as a bad woman. It seemed as a whole, the state continued to place “the main responsibility on women to deal with their ‘private problems’ and get on with the expansion of their public responsibilities without complaint.”<sup>191</sup>

Women who decide to choose a career or any other aspect of their life over marriage are also shamed by Chinese society. *Sheng nu*, translates to “leftover women,” a term that carries a negative connotation describing women who have passed their mid-twenties and are not married. This term was made popular through the China’s Women Federation, controlled by the Chinese government. Many of the women who are described as *sheng nu* tend to be successful women who have surpassed the achievements of most Chinese women. They have a harder time finding partners because Chinese men dislike accomplished women. “Many of the Chinese professional women had been rejected by their male romantic partners and suitors because of their strong economic accomplishments.”<sup>192</sup> The state evidently wishes to pressure women into marrying because those who do not are considered “leftover.” “Chinese state media have increasingly campaigned for the virtue of ‘women returning home’ and have tried to ‘educate’ women on the importance of marriage and family.”<sup>193</sup> This instills Chinese women with the idea that marriage is of utmost importance in their lives, beyond any careers, and pressures women to avoid being defined as *sheng nu*. However, in recent years, “some women are rejecting marriage altogether, not in the name of celibacy but in order to enjoy the possibility of social and sexual

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<sup>191</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 182.

<sup>192</sup> Sandy To, “Understanding Sheng Nu (‘Leftover Women’): The Phenomenon of Late Marriage Among Chinese Professional Women,” in *Symbolic Interaction*, 36: 10, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/store/10.1002/symb.46/asset/symb46.pdf?v=1&t=jdldzdfwi&s=90659da7cac5baedb1500fe62825d5c7dfbf87cd>.

<sup>193</sup> Alex Tang, “China Ranks 100th in Gender Equality, According to New World Economic Forum Report,” *Shanghaiist*, last modified November 5, 2017, accessed February 1, 2018, <http://shanghaiist.com/2017/11/02/gender-equality-ranking.php>.



independence outside the perceived limitations of marriage.”<sup>194</sup> While the state legally granted marriage equality to women, the state has continue to support the importance of marriage to women.

There is still a lot of social stigma against women who do not marry and become mothers. These traditional expectations persist into current times because the state assigned women these roles. While the state believes in offering women economic opportunities and the independence derived from employment, marriage is considered more important. This means that women are taught to put marriage over their careers, possibly hindering career advancement. Those who remain unmarried by a certain age are stigmatized in Chinese society as being leftover, unwanted by men. Some Chinese men also dislike accomplished women, choosing instead women who are less accomplished as partners. The progress of women’s rights on paper is impressive considering the first Marriage Law was only passed in 1950. However, women face great pressure to marry and those who do marry find themselves limited in their freedom.

### Patrilocal Marriage

The persistent marriage rituals such as patrilocal marriages and bride prices suggest that women are still subordinated because practices such as patrilocal marriages and bride prices undermine gender equality and has supported the subordination of women for millennia.

Patrilocal marriages, a traditional Chinese practice, seem to be very popular even in current times.<sup>195</sup> The idea that women are married out of the family and men marry someone into their

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<sup>194</sup> Harriet Evans, “Changing Images of the Ideal Wife,” in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Brownell, Susan, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, and Inc ebrary, 1st ed, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002;2001;), 352.

<sup>195</sup> William Lavelly, “Marriage and Mobility under Rural Collectivism,” in *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society*, ed. Watson, Rubie S., Patricia Buckley Ebrey, and Joint Committee on Chinese Studies (U.S.), Vol. 12.;12;, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 287.

own family continues to hinder women's position not only in their natal family, but also later, in their husbands' family. "Although most marriages in the 1980's were based on free choice, a woman was still marrying not just a husband, but an entire family as well."<sup>196</sup> Like in traditional China, patrilocal marriages can put women in a vulnerable position because she is the outsider in the family.

Patrilocal marriage affects the relationship daughters have with their natal family. Daughters are usually discriminated against because they are seen as outsiders that will one day leave the family. There is an idiom in Chinese that goes, "Daughters are water poured out of the family after they get married." When interviewed by Laurel Bossen in 1993, Shu Lingqiao, from a rural business family, explained why she and her sisters will not receive inheritance. Instead, all the inheritance, which is enough to share amongst her siblings, will probably all go to her younger brother. "I think it is not possible, because we are an independent household that has gone out. If my two younger sisters call in a son-in-law to our family, then they could. That could happen."<sup>197</sup> When the women in her family marry, they marry out of the family. The inheritance goes to her brother because he will marry his wife into the family. Bringing a son-in-law into the family means the man will change his surname to the family's surname and their children will have the women's surname, which to this day is still considered very shameful and emasculating in Chinese culture.

Bride prices also upheld the traditional beliefs about marriage and women's relationship to their natal families. Bride prices, which are more expensive in some regions of China than others, are paid by men to their future wives' natal family. The price suggests that the man is

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<sup>196</sup>Emily Honig, and Gail Hershtatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 91.

<sup>197</sup> Laurel Bossen, *Chinese Women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu Village, Yunnan*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 256.

paying for all that the natal family has contributed to his future wife, therefore, buying literally her into his family. Kay Ann Johnson highlighted the meaning behind the persistent practice of bride price, “family practices such as bride prices and the very meaning of ‘marriage’ for a woman reinforce the presumption that her fertility belongs to her husband and his family more than to herself.”<sup>198</sup> The relationship between a married couple in China that practice bride prices are unequal from the start, where men have to pay a price for wives to the wives’ family.

Although Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter explained in *Personal Voices* that studies do show that parents continued to have an important influence concerning their children’s marriage in the 1980s;<sup>199</sup> since then, young women have started to exercise more control over their personal lives. The legal protection and the increase in personal freedom have changed the limits traditional marriage customs place on Chinese women. Chastity remained important for women in the 1980’s, but many accounts of migrant women revealed that premarital romantic relationships are becoming more acceptable in Chinese society. By the 2000s, there seemed to a change in marriage customs in China; young working women have also gained personal freedom. In Leslie T. Chang’s *Factory Girls*, Min’s sister, Guimin, argued with their mother and in the end, she chose her boyfriend even though her mother disapproved.<sup>200</sup> More than ever before, young working women like Min and Guimin are able to choose their boyfriends, even against their parents’ wishes. “Migration allowed them to assert more control over the timing of their marriage and the choice of marriage partner, to experiment with an emergent dating culture

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<sup>198</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 228.

<sup>199</sup> Emily Honig, and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980’s*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 90-91.

<sup>200</sup> Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*, (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009), 284.

and to pursue a better match than otherwise possible.”<sup>201</sup> Although migrating away from one’s family could be dangerous, for many Chinese working women today, it is liberating.

This freedom that comes with migration and employment also extends to married women as well, but it is not without a cost. The ability to choose their partners is a critical step towards equality for women. Zhou Kate Xiao also highlighted the importance of migration, because women who marry away from their family and their husbands’ families can avoid controlling in-laws.<sup>202</sup> More than ever before, women enjoy greater status in the family. However, this comes at a cost as Shen Yifei observes in a typical 2008 Chinese family. The rise in the status of daughters-in-law decreases the status of older women in the household. “Mothers-in-law of the past also did some housework, but at least they had some say in matters. Today’s mothers-in-law must ‘work more and say less.’ They do more housework, but have lost the right to speak up.”<sup>203</sup> In other words, young women today are more respected in families. However, the chores and responsibilities that daughters-in-law usually have are given to the older women in the household. This means that women continue to do more than men in the house. Things seem to have improved because working daughters-in-law receive more respect, but this burden falls on older women of the house.

The practice of patrilocal marriages continues to hinder women’s emancipation in China. Daughters are still viewed as temporary family members who will one day marry out of the family. As in ancient China, this increases the vulnerability of women because they are treated as outsiders by their natal family before marriage and by their husband’s family after marriage.

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<sup>201</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 128.

<sup>202</sup> Zhou Kate Xiao, *How the Farmers Changed China: Power of the People*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 225.

<sup>203</sup> Shen Yifei, “China in the ‘Post-Patriarchal Era,’” in *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology*, vol 43, no. 4 Summer 2011, 19, doi:10.2753/CSA0009-4625430401.

However, there are shifts in this traditional structure of Chinese families and women's economic contributions are one of the reasons. Employment has increased personal freedom for many Chinese women. Working young women enjoy more personal freedom to choose partners in premarital and marital relationships. An article in *South China Morning Post*, show that as of 2017, marriage rates in China are down and divorce rates have continued to increase.<sup>204</sup> This might be a sign that there are an increasing number of unhappy marriages in China, but it also show that people have attained more freedom in marriage and divorce choices. Even in marriages, women enjoy more respect from their husbands and in-laws. However, traditional female responsibilities such as domestic chores and taking care of children fall to older women in the household. It is questionable whether there is greater gender equality in the family because the shift in domestic responsibilities are not equally shared between men and women, instead they are shifted from younger women to older women.

### One-child policy and Early Life

The one-child policy was introduced in 1979 to curb China's massive, growing population and to end the age-old discrimination against daughters. It quickly became evident that the policy was not welcomed by Chinese, especially the rural masses, indicating that the age-old practice of son-preference persists in Chinese families. Selective infanticide, putting daughters up for adoption, and not registering babies are steps that parents have taken to defy the government's one-child-policy and reveals the lengths to which Chinese parents will go to have a son. China's poor social welfare policy and the practice of patrilocal marriage heightens parents'

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<sup>204</sup> Zhou Viola, "Marriage Rate Down, Divorce Rate Up as More Chinese Couples Say 'I don't' or 'I won't Any More,'" in *South China Morning Post*, last modified September 06, 2017, accessed January 19, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2109868/marriage-rate-down-divorce-rate-more-chinese-couples-say-i-dont>.

needs to bear a son so they can be taken care of as they age. This has resulted in the disproportionate ratio of males to females in China. This problem is made worse due to the of the lack of enforcement by the state because some local cadres would turn blind eyes parents who violate the one-child policy.

In the family, son preference continues and this is evident in how the one-child policy of 1979 is received by the public. “Perhaps the most significant evidence suggesting that son preference remains extremely strong are the lengths to which rural parents are prepared to go to when the opportunity to have a son is threatened or denied by stringent birth control policies, including the one- or two-child rule.”<sup>205</sup> This included selective infanticide, where parents would abort their baby if they find out the gender is female. The one-child policy was implemented the same time ultrasound scans were available to determine the gender of the baby, so parents were able to plan whether or not they wanted a daughter. This practice became so widespread that the state made it illegal for doctors to reveal the baby’s gender to parents due to fear that they would abort the child if it was a girl. Some parents left their baby daughters in orphanages, so they could continue to try for a son.

Another way is simply not registering babies. Chinese families are only allowed to register one child so if their first child was a girl and they want a boy, or if they are having their second child, some parents simply choose not to register their children. While some families might not have registered their newborn daughter because they have already registered another daughter, the disproportionate number of missing daughters to son show that this is usually not the case. “Most studies and reports suggest that the vast majority of these girls are truly missing

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<sup>205</sup> Elizabeth Croll, *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 80.

from society owing to the cultural preference for sons.”<sup>206</sup> Registering children is very important because without legal documents to prove the existence of a child, that child would not have access to the basic human rights provided by the government, such as access to education, ability to work, get married, or any form of government aid in any stage of their lives, putting them at a serious disadvantage.

The state’s efforts to prevent families from having more than one child is met with a lot of resistance. In Houhua Village, the village leader, Wang Dejun explained in an interview in 1994 that patrilocal marriages make it necessary for parents to have sons.

Farmers depend on boys for their labor and for support in their old age... Some pregnant women flee the village so they will not be forced to have an abortion. To prevent that, the government policy in the past two years have been to seize everyone in her family and try to make them bring her back for an abortion. If that fails, the township government will levy a heavy fine or tear down the family’s house. The fine used to be 4,000 yuan. It is now 6,800 yuan. Those who cannot pay the fine are arrested and forced to borrow from relatives and friends or to sign an agreement to pay in installments. If they do not pay, they are arrested again and put in jail.<sup>207</sup>

The need for the government to create harsher penalties means many families have resisted the one-child policy. Whether it is selective abortion, leaving their child in orphanages, or not registering their child, Chinese parents are willing to go to great lengths to ensure the birth of a son. With over 8.5 million daughters missing due to selective abortions and 4.3 million missing due to lack of registration, the local government and village neighbors have played a large part in China’s son preference.

Shi Yaojiang and John James Kennedy argued “that a large proportion of the missing girls may be the result of a massive uncoordinated cover up to hide policy infringements. One

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<sup>206</sup> Shi Yaojiang, and John James Kennedy, “Delayed Registration and Identifying the ‘Missing Girls’ in China,” In *The China Quarterly* 228 (2016): 1019, doi:10.1017/S0305741016001132.

<sup>207</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 126.

factor is local officials lacking the capacity and willingness to implement family planning fully.”<sup>208</sup> For local officials, the ability to enforce the one-child policy affects their performance and underreporting would make provinces look better on paper. For villagers, this meant they would be able to have more children so there is widespread cooperation in hiding children. Son preference also influenced when children were registered, with girls on average registered later than boys; sometimes this difference is years.<sup>209</sup>

Strong resistance to the one-child policy highlights the importance of sons in today’s China. Maybe more so than in any other sphere of current Chinese society, daughter discrimination in the family in twenty-first century China reveals how much more work remains in promoting gender equality more women; in creating more respect and elevating the status of women in China. Elizabeth Croll explained that,

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that over the past 20 years the single-child family policy has been one of the most unpopular policies, largely because it challenged the age-old preference for sons. Indeed the ensuing scale of discrimination against daughters was deemed so unacceptable that the government felt that it had no choice but to amend the policy to permit two children in certain circumstances.<sup>210</sup>

Especially in rural areas of China, where traditional values have always been more prominent than in urban areas, it is not surprising that opposition to the one-child policy was so strong that state had to tweak its policies to allow two children per family instead of one in the countryside.<sup>211</sup> Over time, the son preference has caused a shortage of daughters, meaning a

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<sup>208</sup> Shi Yaojiang, and John James Kennedy, “Delayed Registration and Identifying the ‘Missing Girls’ in China,” In *The China Quarterly* 228 (2016): 1020-21, 1024-25, doi:10.1017/S0305741016001132.

<sup>209</sup> Shi Yaojiang, and John James Kennedy, “Delayed Registration and Identifying the ‘Missing Girls’ in China,” In *The China Quarterly* 228 (2016): 1021, doi:10.1017/S0305741016001132.

<sup>210</sup> Elizabeth Croll, *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 22.

<sup>211</sup> Zhang Junsen, “The Evolution of the China’s One-Child Policy and Its Effects on Family Outcomes,” in *Journal of Economic Perspectives* Vol 31, 144, <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.31.1.141>.



shortage of brides for Chinese men. In Houhua Village, human-trafficking had become a growing problem. “Individual families have bought [girls] as wives... Some unscrupulous people make their living by selling girls [as well.]”<sup>212</sup> However, the shortage of brides have not decreased son preference.

This also brings into question the different contributions sons and daughters make to the family. China’s social welfare policy has always been poor since the state removed the iron rice bowl. In China, pensions are usually taken partially out of each person’s account and most of it is provided by the employer. The social welfare system in China has always been weak and the state has been lax in implementing this policy.<sup>213</sup> The one-child policy removed large families that used to support aging parents and without a good social welfare policy, parents have to rely on their own child, and in the countryside, two children. However, patrilocal marriages, which are still popular in China, remove daughters from their natal family after marriage. This means that without a son, parents do not have anyone to support them in old age. In rural areas, China’s poorest need two children, possibly two sons, to provide support in old age. China is seeking to improve its current social welfare system but there is still a lot of improvements to be made. Therefore, it makes sense that poor rural families would persist in birthing a son because otherwise, no one would care for them in old age. As in ancient China, daughter discrimination is consciously planned and calculated to better fit the needs of the family.<sup>214</sup>

However, daughter discrimination seems to result also from the belief in Chinese families that daughters are inferior to sons in because families continue to discriminate against daughters

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<sup>212</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>213</sup> China Labour Bulletin, “China’s Social Security System,” *China Labour Bulletin*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.clb.org.hk/content/china%E2%80%99s-social-security-system>.

<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth Croll, *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 13.

despite the rise in daughters' contribution to families. There are other incentives as to why parents, especially mothers, prefer sons to daughters. Studies have shown that mothers who gave birth to sons were treated better by their family than mothers who gave birth to daughters.

Due to son preference in rural China, mothers with sons, especially first-born sons, are glorified by their families and gain higher bargaining power. The key outcome of this higher bargaining power is a reduction in maternal chore time. Additional empirical evidence includes increased maternal leisure time, increased maternal private consumption, and a higher likelihood of paternal grandparents' co-residence.<sup>215</sup>

It makes sense that mothers would prefer sons if it means they will live an easier, more enjoyable life. The practice of daughter discrimination is widely practiced in Chinese society and everyone contributes. In Houhua Village, Wang, explained there is a benefit in bearing more sons. "If there are several sons in a family, the family is considered powerful... [families without sons are] at a disadvantage because it lack[s] male power."<sup>216</sup> Economic contribution to families have not erase the age-old son preference in families because traditional prejudice against daughters remain.

Even today, Chinese girls continue to face discrimination in their own families. From an early age, Elizabeth Croll outlined the roles that daughters are taught in the family.

Within the family... girls learn early the inferior and stereotyped roles deemed acceptable for girls and women. They are given less food and fewer economic resources than boys and men and are denied access to educational, employment, recreational and other opportunities. They shoulder a disproportionate burden of domestic work and childcare, are denied an equal right to own property and are denied equal participation in decision-making.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Yi Fan, Yi Junjian, Ye Yuan, Junsen Zhang, "The Glorified Mothers of Sons: Evidence from Child Sex Composition and Parental Time Allocation in Rural China," in *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, no. 145, (2018), 259, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2017.11.012>.

<sup>216</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>217</sup> UNICEF, *Equality, Development, and Peace*, (New York: UNICEF, 2000), [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/pub\\_equality\\_en.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/pub_equality_en.pdf).

In ancient China, women were taught to be inferior to men and this continues to be the case even after women achieve higher status in society. The inferiority of women persists in Chinese families. “Although women may be educated, enter the labour force and have a modicum of independence from fathers, husbands and sons, young daughters still cannot substitute for sons, and indeed are increasingly traded for sons.”<sup>218</sup> The belief in the inferiority of daughters seem to be the fundamental reason for this. Son preference does not stem solely from what children can contribute to their family, but also from traditional Dualist and Confucian beliefs that put sons in a higher status than daughters in the family.

Suyin, interviewed by Arianne M. Gaetano, is a migrant worker from a poor peasant family with many siblings, and she recalled her sadness when her parents forced her out of school. Suyin remembered loving school, but she was not able to complete a full middle school education, like all her sisters. “Suyin recounted with strong emotions how her parents forced her to drop out after just year of middle school. She cried and pleaded with them to let her stay in school.”<sup>219</sup> Her parents were very poor and with limited resources, and decided they could not afford their daughters’ middle school education, investing more into their son. For young women like Suyin, life in rural China can be very limiting because of their status in the family.<sup>220</sup> This is not the case for all families. In *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse*, Wang Dejun, the leader of Houhua Village, has three children, two daughters and one son. Their youngest daughter, Yongxia, he said in the 1990s, “does the best in school. She is always reading and is the cleverest of the three. If she does well in the entrance examination, [her parents decided they] will urge her

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<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Croll, *Endangered Daughters: Discrimination and Development in Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 17.

<sup>219</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 39.

<sup>220</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 39-40.

to go as far as she can.”<sup>221</sup> For the Wang family, a relatively poor farmer family, they decided to pool their resources to support the smartest child, her daughter. So not all Chinese families discriminated and limited resources to their daughters.

This could explain the persistence of young and rural women since the 1980s to migrate. Even with resistance from their families, these girls have nothing to lose by leaving their family and everything to gain by finding employment in cities.<sup>222</sup> With economic opportunities come personal freedom for many rural young women who migrated to cities for work, even if they are low paying factory jobs. For many young women, migrating to urban areas full of opportunities away from their families mean a brighter future, one that gives these women new identities and changes the traditional roles they would otherwise have no choice but to occupy.<sup>223</sup> Harriet Evans described the reality that migrant women face when they return home.

A Women’s Federation survey...showed that, for 70 percent of women interviewed, family conflicts followed their return home. The women reported depression, low self-esteem, and a loss of social status and recognition. Women also wrote that the ‘move back home’ required them to confront the realities of men’s backwardness as well as of the lack of sexual equality.<sup>224</sup>

By leaving their families and migrating to cities, these women can break out of the constraints of the traditional family and acquire their own freedom and independence. They leave behind the traditional conformities that restrict them from their own freedom.

The two-child policy was implemented in the beginning of 2016, but it is questionable

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<sup>221</sup> Peter J Seybolt, *Throwing the Emperor from His Horse: Portrait of a Village Leader in China, 1923-1995*, (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 105.

<sup>222</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 40.

<sup>223</sup> Arianne M. Gaetano, *Out to Work: Migration, Gender, and the Changing Lives of Rural Women in Contemporary China*, (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 42.

<sup>224</sup> Harriet Evans, “Changing Images of the Ideal Wife,” in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Brownell, Susan, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, and Inc ebrary, 1st ed, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002;2001;), 353.

whether this will improve daughter discrimination other than by creating fewer missing daughters. The one-child policy was unpopular because so many parents continued to prefer sons. Parents might be able to afford keeping their daughters now because they would no longer have to pay a fee if they want to keep trying for a son. "If [couples'] determination to have a son is strong enough, and laws targeting sex-selective abortion are weak enough, it is possible that the gender ratio could worsen, not improve."<sup>225</sup> However, because the one-child policy was not successful in eliminating son-preference in the family, it is highly unlikely the two-child policy will lessen the importance of sons to Chinese families.

However, there is no doubt that improvements have been made in Chinese women's status in the family. The World Bank revealed that girls receive either equal or better educational opportunities compared to boys in both high-income and middle-income families. It is only in low-income families that girls receive less educational opportunities than boys. This would make sense because most rural families in China are poor and with limited resources, so parents decide their daughters' education is not as important. The good thing is that this has evidently improved over the years, from 70 girls per 100 boys from low-income families receiving education in 2000 to 84 girls per 100 boys in 2015.<sup>226</sup> Even in the country, "male peasants recognize women's competence and authority in the house, discuss important issues with their wives, subsidize their daughters' school attendance, and are beginning to help with household chores."<sup>227</sup> While there is no doubt that China has a long way to go before son preference is eliminated in Chinese families, the progress so far cannot be overlooked.

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<sup>225</sup> "POPULATION AND THE ECONOMY: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF ONE AND TWO," In *Control*, edited by Golley Jane, Jaivin Linda, and Tomba Luigi, (Australia: ANU Press, 2017) 91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1sq5tvf.11>.

<sup>226</sup> The World Bank, *China Gender Data Portal*, <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/china>.

<sup>227</sup> Gao Xiaoxian, "China's Modernization and Changes in Social Status," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, edited by Gilmartin, Christina K. Vol. 10.;10;, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 88.

The state has played a large role in improving the conditions of women in the family by offering women economic opportunities and implementing laws to protect women's rights. Therefore, it makes sense that improvements in the subordination of daughters would require future state action. In China's unique circumstances, parents have to worry about their own social welfare as they age because the state's social welfare policy is weak; and aging parents cannot rely on the support of large families due to the one or two-child policy and or the end of iron rice bowl. The state can improve its social welfare policy so parents can rely less on their children and more on the state. The still popular patrilocal marriages practice means that daughters continue to be married out of the family and parents have to rely on their son as they age, further exacerbating the need of Chinese families, especially poor rural peasants, to have sons. The state has a large role in improving the lives of Chinese women in the family but there are clearly more work to be done.

### Conclusion

Chinese history in the past century has shown that if the state intervenes, stubborn traditional ideologies can change. Chinese women's lives have significantly improved over the last century. However, while the future for gender equality in China looks optimistic, women are still discriminated against in many aspects of life. In the work environment, women are widely believed to be better suited for certain jobs. The glass ceiling exists as well and men occupy higher positions in the workplace. The state also believes women are better suited for such jobs as domestic work. Furthermore, society still strongly believes in the important role of motherhood, and this affects women's career opportunities. Marriage is critical, in the eyes of society, and the state enforces this as well by attaching negative connotations to women who

choose career over marriage. Neither the Marriage Law or the Labor Law, which are supposed to protect the equal rights of women, are fully enforced by the state. Patrilocal marriage and bride prices, which has subordinated women for millennia, is still practiced in China. This exacerbates daughter discrimination in Chinese family because daughters are believed to belong to another family, since they will be married out. It is “not only because of misogynous cultural values and attitudes of disdain, but also by structural patterns inherent in marriage and kinship, patterns that ... made each new generation of women ‘outsiders’ to social organization.”<sup>228</sup>

The one-child policy has not solved this problem because parents go to great length to hide their second child and there is evidence that the local cadres cooperate in hide missing children. Most of these missing children are daughters, many of whom are aborted, left in orphanages, or are hidden away, unregistered.<sup>229</sup> The poor social welfare policy in China makes aging parents vulnerable because they no longer have big families to support them and the government is of little help. With the practice of patrilocal marriages, many parents needed to have sons, so someone can take care of them when they are old. In some families, many daughters are still taught that they are inferior to men and accept discrimination and a lower status in society because of their gender. Xinran, interviewed some young women and one of them said, “‘Men labor hard for money, women labor hard because that’s their fate.’”<sup>230</sup> The pessimism tied to being a woman stems from traditional expectations of women in ancient China. It is a self-defeating idea that causes women to accept gender inequality and unfair treatment of women.

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<sup>228</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 25.

<sup>229</sup> Shi Yaojiang, and John James Kennedy, “Delayed Registration and Identifying the ‘Missing Girls’ in China,” in *The China Quarterly* 228 (2016): 1020-21, 1024-25, doi:10.1017/S0305741016001132.

<sup>230</sup> Xinran and Esther Tyldesley, *The Good Women of China: Hidden Voices*, 1st American ed, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 92.

Contrary to the belief that economic emancipation will grant women equality, China has not eliminated gender disparity through economic independence for women. Kay Ann Johnson suggested there are other factors as well that are important to consider.

My analytic perspective suggests that women's secondary roles and relatively low participation rates in major areas of the economy deprived them of important means of influence and narrowed the sphere in which they could act. But it did not in itself cause the basic subordination of women, which derived from fundamental principles of kinship organization and family formation, both of which in turn organized society... Rather, it is to stress that those who would seek to fundamentally alter women's traditional subordination to men would have to make reform of the ideology, norms and structures of family and kinship central to their efforts.<sup>231</sup>

There must be more emphasizes on rituals and practices because like employment opportunities, they play a critical role in the subordination of women. In figuring out how rituals and practices can be altered, ideology should be considered. The vast improvements in the status of women in Chinese society as result of state intervention show that changes in practices and rituals as well as ideology must come from the top. It is the Chinese government that plays the deciding women's role in society and even in the family. Policies and laws that promote gender equality are necessary but unless they are enforced, full gender equality will not be recognized.

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<sup>231</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 25.



## Conclusion

Historically, Chinese women occupied a very low status in society. Ancient Chinese society was organized so that the only way women could achieved power and lessened their vulnerability was to support the society and ideology that subordinated them. Women had to serve their fathers before marriage, husband after marriage, and son in widowhood because women in ancient China did not have the rights and independence to do otherwise. The support of the state in creating this society was important. The most prestigious occupation in ancient China, working in bureaucracy, was only accessible to men. Women were praised if they were obedient, self-sacrificing, and submissive. According to Confucianism, ignorance in women was a virtue. Dualism and Confucianism sacrificed women's rights and freedom for a "harmonious" society. The state encouraged rituals and practices that confirmed these ideologies and this very much limited Chinese women's lives.

"Few societies in history have prescribed for women a more lowly status or treated them in a more routinely brutal way than traditional Confucian China."<sup>232</sup> Through these words, Kay Ann Johnson clarified why women's emancipation is necessary in China, and why we need to push for even greater change. Therefore, it cannot be emphasized enough how significant the feat of improving Chinese women's rights in the last century has been. China has accomplished the unthinkable and the lives of Chinese women of today are infinitely better than the lives of Chinese women just a mere century ago. Young women today enjoy greater personal freedom and a greater ability to make their own choices. Age-old traditional practices that limited women's freedom and rights have started to change with the economic reforms. The Chinese

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<sup>232</sup> Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, 1.

government have played a very important role in this, proving that the state holds enormous power in improving women's status in China by battling traditional customs and ideologies.

As of 2016, according to the World Economic Forum, the gender gap in China is 0.68 where 0.00 is inequality and 1.00 is equality. On average, for every dollar a woman earned, her male counterpart earned 1.61 dollars. Over seventy percent of women are in the labor force while almost eighty-five percent of men are in the labor force. The literacy rate for women is ninety-four-point seven percent and ninety-eight point sixteenth percent for men. Overall, China scored 100th out of 144 countries in gender equality.<sup>233</sup> Compared to ancient Chinese society, this is a worthy improvement but gender equality is still far from being realized. The economic opportunities that Chinese women now have has not eliminated the gender disparity in China. The state has not fully enforced gender equality, so it really exists only on paper. Traditional expectations about women remain. Rituals and practices such as patrilocal marriage and patrilineal lineage continue to favor sons and daughters are still considered outsiders in the family.

To solve this, the state could focus on improving its social welfare policy, prevent discrimination in the workplace. Education, for example, is a very important tool for young girls to create a better future for themselves. Among China's most conservative population, rural peasants, "improvements in peasants' cultural literacy is a key factor in the modernization of peasant values."<sup>234</sup> The Chinese history of women's subordination and the progress achieved within the last century should inspire further action. Despite the seemingly impossibility of the

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<sup>233</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2016), [http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1517516897.0057899951934814453125#economy=CHN](http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/?doing_wp_cron=1517516897.0057899951934814453125#economy=CHN).

<sup>234</sup> Gao Xiaoxian, "China's Modernization and Changes in Social Status," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, edited by Gilmartin, Christina K. Vol. 10.;10;, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 89.

task, the Chinese state has risen to the challenge and accomplished the unimaginable. With enormous power comes enormous responsibility. As long as the state continues to work towards bettering the lives of Chinese women, the future is optimistic.

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