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A FEMINIST BRAVE NEW WORLD:
THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION MODEL THEATER REVISITED

DISSertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

The "model theater" produced during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China (1965-1976) is generally viewed as the dead-end of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s political and ideological appropriation of art, or as an artistic weapon serving the Party’s propagandistic purposes. This dissertation proposes a revisionist reading of model theater’s position in China’s cultural history, and asserts its significance in subverting hegemonic Party ideology.

Through a close reading of its texts, this study argues that model theater is, in its cultural essence, a feminist literary production. Its feminism lies in its systematic construction of heroic women’s images against the background of CCP history, and it lies in its strategic appropriation of class and political identities to escape subordinate gender identities. Within a discourse of class struggle, model theater creates a feminist utopia where androgyny and awomanhood—cí, the social form in which women can have an ungendered identity, are very much prevalent.
Dedicated to my parents and my son
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the completion of this dissertation, I would like to thank my dissertation committee for its help and guidance. I am especially indebted to my co-advisers Professor Kirk Denton and Professor Marlene Longenecker, for their thoughtful comments and suggestions. Professor Denton’s intelligent critique and detailed commentaries on each chapter have been invaluable in shaping this study. Professor Longenecker has been inspirational throughout my study at the Ohio State University. Both made valued recommendations regarding the theoretical dimensions and the political ramifications of my argument.

For enlightening classes that have played an important part in forming my critical thinking, I would like to express my gratitude to Professors Judith Mayne and Susan Hartmann in Women’s Studies, Professors Xiaomei Chen, Timothy Wong, Yan-shuan Lao and David Chen in the East Asian Languages and Literatures Department, and to Professor Pan Weibai of Heilongjiang University in China. Appreciation also to Nick Kaldis for frequently sharing his provocative thoughts with me, and to Barry Keenan for his friendly support.

Thanks, finally, to my parents, Wang Feng and Bai Qiming, and to my son Mike who have always believed in my feminist pursuits and have sacrificed for them.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation proposes a revisionist view of yangban xi, the "model theater" produced during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1965 to 1976 (hereafter the Cultural Revolution).

A collection of Beijing operas and ballets revised and reformed under the tutelage of Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing (1914-1992), the model theater dominated the Chinese cultural world for a decade. During these ten odd years, model theater was praised for its revolutionary reformation of the Chinese literary scene; it was "a great program for socialist literature and art" inspired by Mao Zedong's 1942 " Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" (hereafter "Yan'an Talks").

Organized around the central theme of eulogizing the victories of the Chinese Communist Party-led revolution and socialist construction,

1 Except some authors' names in the publications I quote, I use pinyin for all Chinese terms in this dissertation in order to have a consistent style.

model theater created a group of idealized characters and a
series of idealized situations that trumpeted the virtues of
Chinese communist ideology. It was a powerful weapon to
educate the people, indoctrinating them into a standardized
view of revolutionary history and class struggle.

In the West, model theater has been generally regarded as
the dead-end of the Chinese Communist Party's political and
ideological appropriation of art that began with Mao Zedong's
"Yan'an Talks." It is trashed by its critics as "artless,
sterile, without depth, without truth, and without reality." As
such, it does not deserve a place in the history of modern
Chinese literature. Characteristic of this line of thinking is
Joseph S. Lau and Howard Goldblatt's recent The Columbia
Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature which skips the
Cultural Revolution period completely.\textsuperscript{1} The erasure of
Cultural Revolution literature in general, and model theater
in particular, from the history of modern Chinese literature
is also symptomatic of a perplexing two-fold problem which is
most evident in the studies of model theater.

Generally speaking, the existing scholarship in the West
on model theater, whether descriptive or analytical, has

\textsuperscript{1} Walter Meserve. Modern Drama from Communist China (New

\textsuperscript{1} Joseph S.M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt, eds. The Columbia
Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature (New York: Columbia
University Press, 1995).
fallen into two similar types. The first, as represented by Walter Meserve, views model theater primarily in terms of its political context, and consequently assumes that it has scant literary or dramatic value. The second kind of scholarship analyzes the literary-artistic value in model theater and largely restricts its focus to form. This approach is interested in how the work is constructed as popular art and how it is a product of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter CCP)’s manipulation of mass performing art and popular culture. Bonnie S. McDougall’s *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People’s Republic of China 1949-1979* is one such study. In either case, when model theater is viewed solely as propaganda or as an artistic weapon for propagandistic purposes, its texts are seldom approached outside of the confinement of anti-Maoist interpretation.

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the start of the relative liberalism of the post-Mao era, critics in the People’s Republic of China (hereafter PRC) have attacked model theater out of a shared sense of righteous opposition to what they see as the evil products of a political and cultural disaster. The reason for the existence of model theater was to serve and satisfy Jiang Qing’s evil personal ambition, according to these critics. Model theater is here

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viewed solely in terms of its political context, or as a part of that political context itself. In other words, it is not only regarded as the product of the political turmoil, but also as being partially responsible for that turmoil. As the core of Cultural Revolution "propaganda," the model theater has been ignored and thrown into critical oblivion.

However, the reasons for erasing model theater in PRC scholarship differ from those of the West. While Western scholars usually take model theater as the pinnacle of Mao's "Yan'an Talks" and argue that "Jiang Qing's line on literature and art naturally met his [Mao's] requirements," the PRC scholars seldom admit that model theater is the continuation of Mao's literary policy. Rather it is looked at as a deviation from the Party literary tradition.

* Yan Jiaqi's opinion is representative in this regard: "She [Jiang Qing] made great efforts to expand her influence in the ideological and the cultural field with the help of the Beijing opera reform. She waved the banner of the 'eight model dramas,' which were also the result of the Beijing opera reform, hoping that people would gather around her banner and elevate her to the throne as the future queen of China." In Turbulent Decade, a History of the Cultural Revolution. Trans. D.W.Y.Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p. 400.


It is clear that there is a lack in the present scholarship on model theater. What is needed is an in-depth study of the texts themselves which does not take anti-Mao or anti-Jiang Qing sentiment as its theoretical starting point. The present study aims to be a critical intervention that attempts to redefine model theater as it exists in the texts of eight plays. The goal is to reach a fresh understanding of its position in the PRC's cultural history as well as to recognize its significance in subverting the hegemonic Party ideology. To achieve this end, we have to liberate the reading of model theater from the overarching political and formalistic shackles that have denied its unique cultural incongruity within the CCP's literary tradition. This incongruity, I argue, arises from model theater's radical and thoroughgoing disruption of Chinese gender construction. Through close readings of the texts, this study proposes that model theater is in its cultural essence feminist. Its feminism lies in its systematic construction of heroic women's images against the background of CCP history, and of their strategic appropriation of class and political identities in order to escape from subordinate gender identities. Within a discourse of class struggle, model theater creates a feminist utopia where androgyny and lesbianism, "the only social form in which we [women] can
live freely." are very much prevalent.' The feminism embedded in it sets it apart from canonical CCP literature and accounts for its oft-noted and reviled extremes in character portraiture.

Writing a dissertation in the late 1990s--a post-modern, post-structuralist age--about reconceptualizing feminism in model theater could be misconstrued as an act of extreme naivete or worse. First, feminism itself has already become a problem-ridden concept. The wide spectrum of feminist thought invites difficulties in naming what is a politically and culturally constructive feminism. For instance, strong women's images in the public arena can be prone to various kinds of interpretations, ranging from women's liberation to a mere parodying of masculinity. Indeed, any attempt to present a "real" woman acting independently of an authoritative male presence or source of meaning is challenged by its own ontological impossibility. For it is often the case that when a woman writes or speaks, she is looked at as the self-erasing copy of man, the psychic and


Writing positively about the Cultural Revolution model plays might make the writer look like an apologist for or supporter of the radical Maoist politics of the Cultural Revolution. However, I am not concerned with the specific politics of the Cultural Revolution, nor in being an apologist for its destructive aspect. What I intend to do is to grant the model theater the rigorous feminist reading that has been absent to this point.
social embodiment of all those masculinist discursive qualities the patriarchy needs to fictionally or culturally represent and complete itself. Contemporary feminism seems to eagerly embrace the notion that the subaltern cannot talk. Thus, reading model theater as a feminist product is difficult in today’s academic climate.

The French feminist Julia Kristeva was among the first, both in China and in the West, to discuss the gender issues in model theater from a feminist point of view. Instead of accepting the official Party statement at the time that model theater demonstrates women’s liberation, she questioned the essence of the strong women images. In her book About Chinese Women, written after visiting China in 1974, she records this keen observation: “the opera [that] presents a heroic ideal in the character of a heroine—not one of the productions we saw has a male hero—[and] portrays women as the catalysts in dramatic situation, or as the oracles of the hidden truths of society, but never as the miraculous agents of success” (emphasis added). She goes on to state that the intervention of “some [male] Party representatives, some deus-ex-machina who gives the performance a happy ending and validates the efforts of the heroine/pioneer.” In this male intervention she sees a mysterious struggle between “the influence of the powerful matrilinear descent, and Confucianism.” Looking at model opera and other social and
cultural phenomena in 1970’s PRC, she concludes that the Chinese patriarchy is so strong that it gets an upper hand over the female tradition. Thus, there is “no room whatever in the psyche, the libido, the imagination” for Chinese women’s personal development and liberation.\(^\text{11}\)

It is not my concern here to discuss point by point Kristeva’s controversial pronouncement on the Chinese matrilineal tradition. My point is that her overall (mis)interpretation of this issue leads her to misunderstand the gender issues in model theater. Owing to the limited selection of model plays she had been exposed to, she failed to see that the deus-ex-machina is not always male. On the contrary, there are indeed more women than men playing the role of leaders of a new order. However, Kristeva does represent a widely-held opinion that when a woman acts as the mind and soul within the discourse of class struggle, she only serves as the mouthpiece of the male-dominated Party’s hegemonic ideology. In doing so, she does not have a voice, she does not have agency.

My reading of model theater challenges and contests the above point of view. Feminist sinologist Elisabeth Croll sees women’s images presented by the Cultural Revolution as “politically astute and capable,” and “designed to challenge

old attitudes of patronage and popularize the importance of women in political affairs." I agree with her in that model theater can be assessed as feminist mainly in terms of women's roles, and such roles are not in conformity with the traditional notions of female sexuality, femininity and womanhood. My reading, in other words, is to revisit the very basic notion of feminism, that is gender, which Chinese feminist criticism and Western feminism have already moved beyond.

Given the wide array of women's allegiances and positions with respect to race, class, nationality or sexual orientation, the strains that have developed within feminist politics are often mutually exclusive. Some actually emerged as a refutation of others. One cannot thus expect that there will be universally acceptable strategies or methods in feminist readings. A feminist reading of model theater must be grounded in a larger understanding of feminism's project and position in the late 90's. I believe that feminists throughout the world need to move towards cooperation and away from self-interest; they need to decenter the white


heterosexual middle-class woman as feminism's standard, while adapting a feminist politics based on affinity of interest. We should share theories and strategies across classes and races without generalization and totalization, but with the idea that some patterns of oppression can sometimes be better understood and hence resisted through evaluative comparison and contrast. I restate my fundamental belief, the source of both my methodology and praxis: gender is the rallying point for women in their struggle for liberation.

Gender is a complex notion. Unlike naturally attributed sex, it is situationally accomplished. Learning to behave in accordance with one's gender identity is an indispensable stage in the early development of all men and women. The process of acquiring a gender identity is one of learning how a girl/woman or boy/man should feel, think and act in a social setting. Feminist gender theories make it clear that to dissolve rigid sex-gender roles is one of the tasks of primary importance to women's liberation. Such gender-based feminist theories have been instrumental in developing my own conceptualizing of model theater as feminist.

My rereading of model theater so as to elucidate and understand its disruption of Chinese gender construction is also a direct response to a troubling social phenomenon. It is the current cultural trend in post-Mao China to reestablish clear gender roles. During the current economic
reforms, official publications argue that the "responsibility system" and labor efficiency considerations justify women's return to the kitchen, resuming the role of "a virtuous wife and good mother." As Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter have observed in their study of Chinese women in the early eighties, "public discussion in the 1980s was shaped by a decisive rejection of the experiences of the Cultural Revolution. The fervor and enthusiasm with which women beautified themselves, the wide-spread support for moving women back into 'suitable' lines of work, the discussions of womanly virtues in the press, must all be understood in part as a reaction to Cultural Revolution norms."

If this widely recognized trend of Chinese women going back to their traditional gender roles is a backlash against women's degendered image of "holding up half the sky" stressed in the Cultural Revolution period, then that degendering deserves closer critical attention. We have to

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" Xiaorong Li, "Gender Inequality in China and Cultural Relativism" in Women, Culture, and Development, eds. Martha Nussbaum & Jonathan Glover (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 411. Li also points out that the change of women's image in the media is buttressed by the social reality of increased gender disparity. For instance, the traditional business of selling women for marriage is coming back. "In 1990 alone, 18,692 cases were investigated by the authorities." Also, the nation's education system has given "first priority to males, and illiterates and school dropouts have been mainly female." (408)

ask the question: why are the redomestication and regendering of women that are occurring as China transforms itself into a capitalist economy being seen as backlash against women's images in the Cultural Revolution? In other words, what is there in the Cultural Revolution that stands so starkly as the antithesis to the current regendering of women?

While attempting to answer these questions, this dissertation considers the feminist nature of model theater against the backdrop of a major issue concerning Chinese feminism's relationship with Chinese modernity. Even though the twentieth-century realization of Chinese women as an oppressed social group and the ensuing effort to liberate women came with China's entering the modern age, the feminist discussion of Chinese women in terms of modernity is intrinsically problematic. The critical problems facing feminist scholars of modern China concern the very nature of modernity itself. As manifested in Chinese feminist studies in recent years, modernity centers on a double concern. On the one hand, it ties the emergence of the quintessential woman, the very site of inquiry, to the modern (age) that has

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been generally characterized by nationalism. On the other hand, modernity is to historicize, designating a certain need to re-interpret the modern events. As such, it is an interpretive discourse which reflects critically on the modern in order to find the meaning to the present concern." Indeed, modernity is an epistemological pattern which both frames the interpretation of the texts involved, and constructs a discursive context in the re-interpretation of modern literature and culture.

By the discursive context, I mean the mainstream ideology that is seen to shape and define the events of Chinese modernity. Since the modern started with men's effort at modernizing the nation, women's liberation is usually looked upon as a by-product of men's nationalist struggle. The quote below is representative:

From the outset, the liberation of Chinese women was not a spontaneous movement presupposed by gender awakening. The issue of women's equal status (with men) was first raised by men of foresight who had an enlightened understanding of China's national history in the modern/contemporary

era; and, later equality was legislated as law by the government of the People's Republic of China."

In this grand elaboration of the genesis of the Chinese women's movement, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua articulate the official rhetoric of China's evaluation and understanding of the nature of women's liberation in China. Most of the scholarship on Chinese women in the West shares this viewpoint, assuming that men, from the very outset of the modern age, have been the acting agency for the cause of women. I do not wish to belittle men's progressive role in liberating women, only to point out that recognizing women's liberation as such potentially nullifies the existence of Chinese women's feminist concerns. The view that men were initiators of women's liberation, and women in turn were only responding and subordinated to the male agenda is so prevalent that it never questions the gendered concerns of those men who had "enlightened understandings of the history," in their efforts toward strengthening the nation.

Addressing the disjuncture between tradition and modernity, Tani Barlow, a leading feminist critic in Chinese studies, best illustrates this modernity problématique in her

"Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, Fuchu lishi dibiao (Voices Emerging into the Foreground of History) (Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiyie youxian gongsi, 1993), p. 28. Unless noted, the translation is mine.
"Theorizing Woman: Funu, Guojia, Jiating" (Chinese woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family). She suggests that "woman" is a colonial category since it was generated by the Chinese nationalist movement and the Chinese modern state. Prior to the modern, Barlow argues, there was no generic category of woman in Chinese discourse. Women traditionally were signified by their relationships with others as daughters, wives, or mothers. ¹ What is germane to my concern here is not so much the dubious thesis of China’s womanless condition in the premodern era as the gender identity of the creating agent behind this modern woman. If woman, according to Barlow, was a mere category constructed by men for use in the nationalist salvation movement, then the liberation of this woman was not only part and parcel of that movement, but also naturally subordinate to it. If this man-made woman is the subject of a modern women’s liberation movement, there seems little opportunity for women to move beyond the male agenda. So Barlow’s argument retains an inherent acceptance of the modernity problematic. I would like to point out that understanding the women’s movement as an appendix to larger social movements in fact sidesteps and minimizes women’s agency in responding to social forces and in shaping their

own lives. It serves to diffuse and to negate women's power in defining themselves, in negotiation with and subversion of male discourse. Instead of centering our attention on how men have constructed modern woman, we should look into how modern woman has been created, consciously or not, by women themselves.

Barlow's stand is presaged by some if not most feminist studies on women inside and outside China. A History of the Chinese Women’s Movement, the first comprehensive work on women’s history ever done in China after 1949, delineates the modern development of the women’s movement in China between the end of the nineteenth century and the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. It reiterates the familiar rhetoric that Chinese women’s experience in the early half of the century proved that no significant change in their status could have taken place without broader social and political changes. Positioning the women’s movement as secondary to the nationalist and socialist movements, the book asserts that only through participating in these movements, did women in China succeed in bringing about fundamental changes in their status.

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Another book with the same concern is *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution*. Written by a Japanese scholar Ono Kazuko, it develops the importance of women's roles in the nationalist movement. It is a much quoted and respected work utilizing some previously unknown historical sources. Though the study conveys the remarkable pride of Chinese women in their struggle for their rights and emancipation, it stresses the promises the Chinese revolution held out to them. It centers on the male contribution to women's liberation.\textsuperscript{2}

In search for an alternative to their own movement in the 1970s, Western feminist scholars were fascinated by the exaggerated progress of Chinese women. Believing the CCP's dedication to the emancipation of women, they found in China a symbol and ideal of how socialism could liberate women. The most noted scholarship of this period was collected in two important volumes: *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism* (1973), edited by Marilyn B. Young, and *Women in Chinese Society* (1975), edited by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke. Dealing with diverse women's issues in China from the turn of the century to the present, these two books' major concern is to illustrate the effect of social change on women.

The early eighties' scholarship in the West--permeated

with disappointment and disillusion with the China model—cried out that the Chinese nationalist revolution did not fundamentally change the status of women. The crux of the problem, they held, lay in the Chinese Communist Party's lack of a strong commitment to women's liberation.21

Indeed, earlier studies routinely interpret Chinese women through examination of the male attitude towards women. The central problem they all tried to solve is whether Chinese women are liberated. From the celebration over Liang Qichao-Kang Youwei's pioneering promotion of women's education, to the disappointment over the failure of the CCP's highly anticipated women's liberation program, they treat the women's movement as a dependent entity in which the liberating agency seldom came from women themselves.

The late eighties and early nineties saw a drastic turn in scholarship on Chinese women characterized by new methodologies and new categories of analysis. For instance, Chinese women's experience was placed in a comparative perspective with other third world and socialist countries by the distribution of Feminism and Nationalism in the Third

World in the US and the publication of Promissory Notes. Although issues and perspectives differ, this scholarship interprets the tension between theory and practice in the socialist revolution of different countries in view of their commitment to promoting women's interests. During this period, scholarship on Chinese women consistently reveals a uniform assumption: that woman has never stepped outside of the domain of the three mainstream movements that the modern fed on--the late Qing reforms and Republican Revolution, the May Fourth movement, and the socialist/communist revolution. These movements provided the indispensable context against which the textual woman could be approached. When woman is thus defined and confined, her much sought-after subjectivity and agency are obviously in jeopardy.

Rey Chow's 1991 Women and Chinese Modernity attempts to correct this discursive marginalization of women by feminist studies. However, with her acute post-colonialist concern, Chow constructs a Third World Woman (out of modern Chinese woman) who is caught between tradition and modernization. She starts her argument by quoting Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine

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nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "Third World woman" caught between tradition and modernization.

Putting aside my reservations about her questionable usage of a monolithic Third World Woman, this woman for Rey Chow has to be approached from two angles: one is tradition, the other is modernization. If my reading of her is correct, then Chow's theoretical attempt to move woman from the margin to the center is an impossible one. Exactly because her woman is sandwiched between an overarching western and a deep-rooted Chinese tradition, the center position Rey Chow attempts to construct for her is at best a marginalized center. In her discussion of Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly literature, she points out that because "(w)ithin the hierarchy of Chinese letters, Butterfly literature occupies a feminized position that carries with it the irony of all feminized positions," so it fails "to become good 'canonical' literature." Rey Chow is not interested in why the feminized position of Butterfly fiction as well as the feminized position of woman are marginalized. Instead she suggests that "a reading by way of 'woman'" would "produce a

\[25\] Rey Chow, p.55. Butterfly fiction occurred during the first three decades of the century. It is written by a large number of old school novelists writing about sentimental love stories adhering to more traditional styles vis-a-vis the May Fourth Movement's relative progressiveness.
different understanding of Butterfly literature."\(^{26}\) This argument does not adequately question the cultural connotation of femininity, and the gender construction of the female in traditional Chinese culture, or the culture of the imperialist West. Without the successful destruction of femininity, I think feminized woman is always at the periphery of culture, precisely because the very definition of femininity has been developed from within patriarchal discourse.

In fact Rey Chow’s woman is not only marginalized but twice victimized. If Rey Chow assumes that Chinese modernity is built upon Chinese men being seen, being feminized and otherized by the ubiquitous West, Chinese women are this other’s other. In her reading of the film The Last Emperor, Chow sees the last Qing Emperor Pu Yi symbolizing China as a feminized spectacle in the eyes (camera and spectatorship) of the masculine West. My problem with her argument is that if Chinese man and the West occupy the two spaces of the gender dichotomy, where is Chinese woman? Is she still trapped in the mainstream containment? Does she only passively correspond and respond to two patriarchal forces—Chinese and the West? Or she is totally squeezed out of sight?

Another theoretical impasse for Chow to construct a subject out of “the other’s other” is her inability to

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.39.
situate herself in her historicizing effort. From her outside-third-world privileged position, her construction of the third world woman is in essence colonialist, which is revealed in her theoretical concern that itself engages more in the first world discourse than in her own postcolonial culture. Her writings are embellished with up-to-date western philosophical jargon or structured with an elite style of fluidity. Her third-world woman status is a theoretical one that enables her to be more politically correct in the western feminist debate, rather than a practical one that would help understand women and gender in China.

Now I would like to come back to address the nature of Chinese woman in the modern. Tani Barlow’s synchronization of the male construction of woman and the construction of the nation-state suggests to me that male-constructed woman could be seen as an “imagined” identity. Following Benedict Anderson’s notion of nations as politically “imagined communities,” it calls into question the very gender nature of modern woman and her relationship with the nation. If Nuxing-Woman was created to fill in the other “half of the Western, exclusionary, essentialized, male/female binary,” and funu-women was a “Communist inscription” engaged in

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27 Barlow, p. 262.

28 Ibid., p. 269.
socialist discourse, could there be any ex-male-discursive woman who was independent (even partially) from the male imagination, who contested the masculinist construction in the modern? Is this modern woman merely a pliable bedfellow who feeds on the phantasmagoria of the masculine mind, or is she a historical and cultural practice performed by women in the modern? In other words, can there exist a gender-conscious woman outside of the domain of masculinist modernity? The creation of woman, the liberation of woman, the marginization of woman, the utilization of woman, the definition of woman, are all these not presumed to be inseparably connected with modernity with its dualistic format: colonialism and nationalism? While the development of gender relations in the modern era is never free from the influence of nation/nationalism, woman as a social category and its location in nationalist movements should be both a dependent and an independent variable. Positioned as women in a struggle that most immediately concerned men, women have to negotiate this indirect relationship between nationalism and their gender concerns.

This study intends to recover a historical legacy by tracing the trajectory of the development of modern Chinese feminism which started at the turn of the century. The degendering found in model theater is thus not seen as an isolated cultural event. With a historical precedent to it,
model theater's degendering represents a line of feminist thought which locates women's liberation in an escape from traditional womanhood.

In the following chapter, I will attempt to present a typology of gender-conscious woman--Qiu Jin in the Republican Revolution and Xiao Hong in the May Fourth Movement. In the second chapter, I will continue this genealogy with Ding Ling and Jiang Qing in the communist era. Collectively these women, themselves and their literary productions, provide a feminist text located inside the megatext/context of the three major movements that most immediately concerned men in modern China. I will argue that there were always two agendas in the women's liberation movement demarcated along gender lines. While Chinese men, from the onset of modernity, tried to incorporate women in their national as well as their personal salvation, some women aimed at degendering themselves, negotiating their indirect relationship with mainstream movements and establishing their political standing from within those movements. So in this sense, the modern movements served as prerequisites to engaging in their own gender-conscious agenda.

The concept of gender used in this study points to the ultimate representation of a dualistic and hierarchical way of looking at sexual differences. Gilmartin is right that "Gender signifies that the categories female and male--the
meanings assigned to them, the behaviors expected of them, the sense of self associated with them, and the relations among and between those female and male selves—are cultural constructions."

So by gender-conscious I mean not merely the realization of the distinctive differences society constructs between man and woman, but also woman's vision of self and the subjective construction of self. It concerns the way feminist discourse is constructed and practiced, how it intertwines with and determines subjectivity in the text and by the reading of the text.

Within this framework, I see Qiu Jin, Xiao Hong, Ding Ling and Jiang Qing as potentially effective agents in influencing cultural/political outcomes rather than as confined by the contextual forces they neither recognize nor control. The uncanny affinity linking them was their shared defiance of the social gender arrangements, traditional or modern, which trap women in the family as mother and wife. At different historical times, through different media, these women voiced similar concerns: explorations of the possibility of being a woman outside of the domain of wifehood and motherhood. The feminist nature of their discourse has always been obstructed, blurred, and even canceled because it is not only radical, but also anti-

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establishment. What it has achieved is a double disavowal: a break from both tradition's enslavement and modernity's containment, by which I mean the male-advocated women's liberation platform.

I divide my genealogy into three groups, each representing a different movement in the modern. Each group is composed of contrasting agendas of the leading male women's liberation advocates, namely Liang Qichao, Lu Xun and the institution of the Chinese Communist Party, on the one hand, with women feminists Qiu Jin, Xiao Hong, Ding Ling and Jiang Qing on the other. The object of such pairing is to force each to serve as foil to the other and to demonstrate how different the two sets of agendas were. This genealogy of feminism will enable me to address these feminists identity construction independent, to some degree, of the movements in which they were historically located. And it will also help determine to what degree there did exist a gender-conscious feminist thought in modern China.

In sum, this dissertation contests and counters the common belief that Chinese women, in their liberation process, are appropriated or controlled discursively by Chinese men. It argues that Chinese feminists utilize dominant male political discourse as a useful milieu to escape their gendered wifehood and motherhood and to redefine their roles in society. By doing so, they create a brand new
image for themselves, the image model theater successfully represents.
CHAPTER 1
MEN’S Appropriation of Women’s Liberation Versus Women’s Agency

1.1. The 1898 Reforms: Liang Qichao and Qiu Jin

“All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender,” and reformation of the nation depends on the reorganization of gender relations. China was no exception. The idea of bourgeois urban women’s liberation was advocated first in China by the reformers in the 1898 Reforms, and credit has been duly given to the leading reformers such as Liang Qichao, Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong. The reformers’ position on women’s liberation was essentially an argument for women’s education. When Liang Qichao, for example, first raised the issue of women’s education, he positioned women in his much acclaimed nationalist revival. Chang Peng-yuan in his “The Tenacity of Tradition: Liang Qichao and Gender Relations” summarizes Liang’s ideas on women’s liberation and education:

Deeply sympathetic with the plight of Chinese women of his time, Liang spearheaded a women’s liberation


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drive as early as the 1890s. He refuted as "absurd" the traditionalists' contention that only women without learning could be virtuous, declaring that this erroneous view was largely responsible for China's weakness as a nation. He expounded his argument from four different angles.

1) Uneducated women had to depend on men for their livelihood. As women accounted for half of the population, their absence from the workforce was detrimental to the development of the national economy....

2) Women without learning were "short-sighted" and "their interests were confined to haggling over the price of vegetables." Such women were incapable of "furnishing a tasteful home or entering into engaging conversation." Less so would they be able to "inspire nobility of spirit or arouse great ambition in their children."...

3) Ignorant women could not play an adequate role in the formative years of their children. Mothers held a pivotal position in the family, for the education of a child starts with the mother....

4) Education for women was the first step to preserving the human race....If pregnant women were strong in body and sound in mind, their offspring would be well developed physically and mentally.¹

Women should be educated, according to Liang, because they were social parasites who did not produce, who only consumed and received social benefits. Education would end the parasitical status of women, relieving men of a burden and

freeing them to strengthen the nation. More importantly, for Liang, education would make good mothers out of women to better nurture and raise good citizens for the nation. Liang Qichao did not directly blame women as partially responsible for China's problems, but he did not exempt them from it either.

As Cynthia Enloe succinctly points out, nationalism is "typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope." The women's education program within the reformers' nationalist agenda cannot escape its fate of catering to the masculinized agenda. It is not difficult to discern the ends of male reconstruction of gender: wifehood and motherhood. Indeed, from these pro-feminine women's education programs, we can see that not only were the needs of the nation here identified with the frustration and aspiration of men, but with the representation of male national power, and the regaining and the reconstructing of the power that depended to some degree on the reconstruction of gender differences.

Liang Qichao's idea of women's education can be seen in "Bianfa tongyi" (General discussion of reform) published in Shiwubao in 1897. See Zhong Weizhen and Wan Fayun's Liang Qichao sixiang yanjiu (A Study of Liang Qichao's Thought) (Hainan: Renmin chuban she, 1986).

Cynthia Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, Making Feminist Sense of International Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 44.
If masculinized women's education programs construed women as the symbolic bearers of the nation by being economically-contributing wives and educated mothers, but denied them any direct relation to national agency, Qiu Jin was its ironic antithesis. A product of the women's education program, Qiu Jin was a feminist symbol that not only established women in direct relation with the nation, but disrupted the male reconstruction of women by her outright denial of wifehood and motherhood.

Qiu Jin (1874-1907) is conventionally and superficially portrayed as a female who successfully transformed herself from a traditional woman with bound feet and arranged marriage to the nation's most vocal female educator and nationalist. After studying in Japan, she came back to China where she founded a school for girls, taught in a school for boys, and started the first women's newspaper. She is remembered for plotting an armed uprising against the Qing government in the region of Jiangxi, and attempting to assassinate the governor there. Arrested and convicted, she refused to make a confession; she was executed in 1907 at the age of thirty-two.

However, Qiu Jin was not universally admired as a heroine. She inspired "fascination" and "admiration," but she also aroused "indignation" among her contemporaries. The

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Ono, p. 62.
controversy centered around her gender ambiguity. In contrast to Liang Qichao's women as symbolic bearers of the nation, Qiu's nationalism was built upon the destruction of that gendered notion. In her much understudied literary works and speeches, such as "Jingwei shi" ("Stones of the Jingwei Bird") in 1905, she repeatedly attacked "men" for their impotence in governing the nation and held them responsible for the fall of the nation. Chinese men, according to Qiu Jin, had misplaced their energy and potency in enslaving women. Women's liberation is more of a gender concern than a nationalist one. In order to achieve it, she argued that first of all women have to be independent. Independence was not an economic choice, but an existential necessity. Although men had been promoting women's education and women's rights, their advocacy amounted merely to a program for women's education convenient for men, and women's rights convenient for men. Men were unreliable, so independence was essential.'

Qiu Jin acted out the independence she advocated. She was arguably the first woman known in Chinese history to publicly invite her husband to divorce her, and to desert her two children. For Qiu, wifehood and motherhood were the

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See her "Gao nutongpao shu" ("A Notice to Women Compatriots"). Qiu Jin represented a generation of women. The statement of the same nature can be found in Chen Xuefen's "Duli pian" (On Independence) which ran in the pages of Nubao Qiu Jin founded.
end result of male enslavement of women, of a consistent genderization that begins with the birth of a girl and continues throughout her life with mental degradation. Wife and mother are the final products and representation of the female dependency on men. Qiu Jin even created a social category to accommodate the new identity of being/becoming nonwife/mother: "ci." She regarded herself as "ci" by adopting the name Jingxiong (rivaling masculinity). I think this "ci" represents a defining moment of Chinese feminism. Qiu Jin challenged and negated the seemingly essentialist, transhistorical, and universal composite required for being a "woman"--wifehood and motherhood.

Qiu Jin's "ci" is also a cross-dresser. Ono describes her appearance as follows: "There was something awe-inspiring in the look of this woman--sitting dashingly astride a horse and wearing a man's dark blue long-sleeved gown--that did not generally make one think of women." Her crossdressing is commonly accepted as an effort to assume male identity in order to solidify her legitimacy in the nationalist movement.

"Jing wei shi," pp. 119-25.

"Ci" is conventionally translated as femininity in contrast to "Xiong" (masculinity). Ci and xiong denote more biological differences between female and male, since they are also used to distinguish the sexes of animals. Qiu Jin's use of "ci" is unconventional, agreeing with neither of the above. "Ci" is a feminist woman.

Ono, p. 65.
and to increase her acceptability among her comrades, and as an inheritance of a line of heroic women in Chinese history who "transgressed unfairly gendered boundaries" by masquerading as men. Throughout Chinese history, there were many such women who dressed as males. For example, Hua Mulan of the Liang dynasty (502-556 C.E.) is a well-known filial daughter who entered the draft in place of her old father and her young brother who was the "only" male descendent in the family. Qiu Jin's drag differs from Hua's masquerade in two ways. First, Hua dressed as a male to disguise her gender identity not because she wanted to abandon her gender role, but because it was a remedy to mend her lack--parental disappointment over a daughter's inadequacy and inability to serve the family inside the patriarchal structure. Disguised as a man, she succeeded in protecting the patrilineal line. By doing so, she followed the ideal male projection of a daughter's role--filial obedience and filial sacrifice. Secondly, the happy ending for Hua's twelve years of heroic military service as her father's proxy was to return home and assume again her female role, decorating her hair with a yellow flower and waiting to be married off. Reassuming her gender identity, she succumbed to the redomestication of women.

"Barlow, p. 264."
Qiu Jin, however, crossdressed not to make sacrifice for husband or father. Neither did she attempt to disguise herself out of shame at being female. She crossdressed to reveal that she was a female. Outside of her role as wife and mother, her dressing in masculine/foreign outfits is a gender drag that blurs the commonsense demarcation between men and women. If Hua Mulan and other women identified with masculinity by following the gender roles, Qiu Jin’s masquerading project let her clothes unmake the woman: "that did not generally make one think of women," and to identify as the being her clothes evoked. By breaking up (blurring) the gender boundary, she exercised her agency effectively in defining herself, and in calling into question the wide historical and cultural configuration of the concept of woman.

In this sense, Qiu Jin reminds me of Virginia Woolf’s Orlando. Orlando’s sex/gender change is owed (partially) to clothes. "There is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them," declared Woolf, adding that "we may make them take the mold of arm or breast, but (clothes) mold our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking." Orlando’s costume is inseparable from his/her identity--indeed, that costume creates identity." Qiu Jin’s

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"Ono, p. 66.

"Virginia Woolf, Orlando (New York: Harcourt, 1928), p.188.
drag creates an identity for her woman "ci." This new social category jars us from old perceptual patterns. "Ci" as agency disrupts and inverts the male definition of womanhood.

One of Qiu Jin’s poems, “Women’s Rights,” combines her feminist and patriotic sentiments

We want our emancipation!
For our liberty we’ll drink a cup,
Men and women are born equal,
Why should we let men hold sway?
We will rise and save ourselves,
Ridding the nation of all her shame
In the steps of Joan of Arc
With our own hands we will regain our land."

Qiu Jin illustrates the wedding of feminist and nationalist commitments. Her nationalism germinated from her belief that men were incapable of saving the nation. It was only natural that she accepted Russian anarchist ideas of terrorism, and died a hero’s death. Her life and her death make possible a new interpretation of the relationship between women and nation. Women can play the active role in saving the nation instead of being saved along with the nation. Through participating in revolutionary movements, women gain the

““Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, (Routledge, 1978) pp.68-69. Qiu Jin resembled Joan of Arc in many ways, especially in her cross-dressing. When taken prisoner, Joan of Arc refused to wear female clothing throughout her imprisonment. This served to underline her independence and defiance. Because of this, she was perceived as the agent of the devil.
opportunity of disentangling themselves from traditional
gender roles. She declared in one of her magazine articles:

I desire that they [women] be leaders, awakened
lions, advance messengers of learning and
intelligence; that they may serve as rafts crossing
cloudy ferries, as lamps in dark chambers. That
they may let shine, from the center of women’s
realm in our country, bright light resplendent,
glittering race in the beauty of its color; that,
on the whole earth ball, they startle the hearts,
snatch the eyes of men, causing all to applaud,
rejoice."

Qiu Jin’s saga did not end with her execution by the
Manchus. Her attempt to degender herself was further
sabotaged by tradition and her male comrades in the national
salvation movement. After her death, her body was buried
beside her divorced husband, in some ways ironically
reinforcing her estranged gender role. Moreover, the
nationalist revolutionary ideology was so strongly imbued
with a male identity that it mitigated against the creation
of a full-fledged woman. Qiu Jin’s comrade, Sun Yat-sen, the

"Ibid., p.68."
father of the Chinese republican revolution to which Qiu gave her life, refused to build a memorial for her.

From the vintage point of hindsight, we might easily see Qiu Jin as a product of her time. Her discourse is always linked to personal vulnerability and inconsistency. However Qiu Jin marked the birth of feminism in its real sense—an inquiry that forces women to reconceive the very concepts and relations of “self” and “world” rather than being defined by tradition. Her refusal to be a wife and a mother, as well as her crossdressing, demonstrate the ultimate feminist belief that gender roles and stereotypes of gender are socially constructed and wrongly constructed. The construction should not only be contested, as Qiu Jin showed, but could be destroyed.

According to the recent study by Christina K. Gilmartin, Qiu Jin might have had a lingering animosity toward Sun Yat-sen. Her obvious nationalism and her sacrifice generally escaped the attention of the then revolutionary government which did not show much interest in retrieving her memory from history and infusing her image with political symbolism. See Gilmartin, p.205. Elisabeth Croll’s study of Qiu Jin reveals an incident of the same nature. Qiu Jin “founded a revolutionary society among women students and applied to become a member of the Restoration League, later part of Sun Yat-sen’s ‘Revolutionary Alliance.’ At first her application was refused ‘on the grounds of her sex’ for ‘it would not be proper for a woman to mix with the working men.’” See Croll, 1978, p. 66.
1.2. The May Fourth Movement: Lu Xun and Xiao Hong

If Sun Yat-sen decided in favor of maintaining male dominance in the symbolic realm of nationalism in the 1911 Revolution by refusing to build a mausoleum in Qiu’s memory, Qiu Jin did not fare well in the May Fourth era (1915-1924) either. While her participation in the nationalist movement was condoned by the iconoclastic New Culture movement, her ambiguous social gender posed a problem. Symptomatic of it is Lu Xun’s well-known short story “Medicine.” According to Lu Xun’s brother, Zhou Zuoren, the revolutionary, Xia Yu, in the story who was executed by the Qing government, is modeled after Qiu Jin. Lu Xun nevertheless transforms the hero into a male. Betraying the gender problematique of the May Fourth women’s liberation platform, Lu Xun expresses male “hesitation” and frustration about locating women within their iconoclastic cultural revolution."

The fall of the Qing dynasty in the 1911 Revolution brought the morality of China’s traditional kinship system under attack as well. The youth of the May Fourth movement found themselves in a new

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"That Xia Yu is modeled after Qiu Jin is discussed in Lu Xun’s brother Zhou Xiashou (Zuoren)’s book *Characters in Lu Xun’s Novels* (Lu Xun xiaoshuo li de renwu) (Shanghai: Shanghai chuban gongsi, 1954), pp.21-22.

" Lu Xun put most of his literary works concerning women and family in a volume entitled “Hesitation,” compared to his other works criticizing tradition and striving for national survival in the collection entitled “Nahan” (Outcry). Further study is needed about this topic.
environment, the Republic of China, which had been laid open for them by the Revolution, and they sought to clear away the despair and gloom of that time. Bringing down autocratic rule, which had been the root cause of the republican movement, brought with it no less than a total transformation of every human being who supported the structure of autocracy. Such were the origins of the May Fourth and New Culture Movement.¹⁹

Ono here defines the May Fourth movement as a social/political/cultural movement. The 1911 Republican Revolution brought down the imperial system, dismantling the first social relationship of the established Confucian order. The cornerstone of the five relationships—the relationship between ruler and subject—had been torn away, leaving only "four relationships."²⁰ As a result, she notes, the raison d'être of these remaining principles could more easily be called into question.

The May Fourth movement may be seen psychologically and socially as an unprecedented large-scale reconceptualizing and reorganizing of the Chinese family. Initiated and

¹⁹Ono, p.95.

²⁰The "three bonds" and "five relationships" supplied the groundwork for Confucian/traditional Chinese morality. They consisted of the ties that bound subject to ruler, son to father, and wife to husband, together with the relationships between elder and younger brother, and friend and friend. With the exception of the relationship between friends, which is similar to Plato's spiritual love, all these bonds placed individuals in a hierarchy of superiority and subordination.
conducted by youth, this struggle was centered on the radical rearrangement of their own relationships with their fathers. Grounded in a self-centered humanism borrowed from the West, the May Fourth's immediate need was to redefine and readjust young men's social position.

In the Confucian social structure, the father/son relation is not so much a biological tie as a form of total generational repression and subordination. More importantly, this hierarchical relationship generates a mental and psychological retardedness on the sons' part. The fathers' warping dominance over sons reveals itself in the former's delaying the rite of passage of the latter in the form of arranged marriage. By arranging and dictating whom sons should marry, with the help of the patrilocal customary practice, fathers managed to imprison sons in their grasp, curtailing their independence.

The first outcry of the May Fourth sons was to claim themselves as victims of their fathers. One of the characteristics of this victim discourse was to ask for the right to grow up, enfranchised by the freedom of marriage and freedom of love. The freedom in choosing marital/sexual partners in this context was treated not only as a right, but as an entitlement, as a psychological necessity. So in this sense, the May Fourth movement was psychologically Oedipal. It tried to solve the Chinese Oedipus complex that sons had
suffered for too long, and was manifested as open opposition to the parent of the same sex. If the May Fourth revolution is a conflict between generations, then it is primarily an Oedipal one. The Chinese Oedipal complex differs from the Freudian triangle in its binary nature, with the mother out of the picture.

According to Freud, while the unity of mother and son symbolizes a physical and emotional completeness for the son, it nevertheless hinders the son from entering the Symbolic--overcoming the castration fear and building a masculine identity. So it is the emotionally-distanced father who represents the demands of culture and society and disrupts the mother/son unity. Once the child, after a series of painful processes, has managed to disentangle himself from the loving though strangulating relationship with his mother, he unifies with the father by entering the Symbolic system on which social relations rest, and by claiming his

"The cross-cultural validity of the Freudian Oedipus complex is discussed in Jingyuan Zhang's *Psychoanalysis in China, Literary Transformations* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992), pp. 68-84. According to Zhang, the Oedipal complex does exist in Chinese literature. However, the Chinese Oedipal complex differs fundamentally from the Greek version. In the rivalry between the father and the son, the Chinese father figure "is presented as a powerful, treacherous, and jealous man who would do anything to prevent others--even his own son--from surpassing his powers." This powerful father is not only reluctant to let the son grow to maturity, but kills the son if he feels challenged. So Zhang concludes, "instead of parricide, the Chinese Oedipal story ends in pedocide." See p.70.
heterosexual/masculinist identity, and in the process othering females as sexual objects. In this sense, a Freudian father who introduces the son to a new culture and Symbolic order is Oedipal. The Chinese Confucian father, on the other hand, is pre-Oedipal; instead of allowing the son to become a man, the Chinese father's major function is to delay the son's maturing process. The power structure within the Chinese family, in terms of relations between father and son, mandates the father's exercising psychological violence to keep his son from forming an independent social identity.

In psychodynamic terms, the May Fourth youth have attempted to disengage themselves from the father's overbearing hegemony to enter the Symbolic as a self. In the May Fourth schema, we may well notice, father is a mental hurdle against which a son measures constantly the degree of his liberation. We should also be aware that in this seemingly uncompromising struggle against the father's authority, the father's authoritative status is ironically a destination to which the son aspires. The May Fourth son aspires to fatherhood.

The binary nature of the Chinese Oedipal complex, however, should not be regarded as an all-male relationship. Women, as mothers, wives, and lovers are constituent parts in the father/son conflict. Since the son's entering the Symbolic is vested with gender meanings--they wanted to
become fathers—women were indispensably deployed by the May Fourth youth. While they enthusiastically advocated women’s liberation, they used women as a weapon to subvert the father’s authority, to gain an immediate self image of social maturity. So unlike the 1898 generation of men who saw subjugated women as the quintessential expression of China’s backwardness, the May Fourth youth held that women’s liberation lay at the heart of their unraveling the Oedipus complex, so they seized upon it as an urgent goal inextricably linked to their own emancipation. That is why this goal of women’s liberation was so relentlessly pursued, and the outcry for women’s emancipation was so loud in the May Fourth “masculinist frame of anti-Confucian discourse” at the time."

To illustrate my point above, I would like to scrutinize Lu Xun who championed May Fourth ostensibly male-feminist interests in his two short stories, “New Year’s Sacrifice” and “Regret for the Past.” It is important to point out how these two stories, generally read as feminist, cut across gender investment in their portraying of the feminine, in their providing interesting connotations that are relevant to building masculinity. My reading will show that instead of the conventional belief that the stories are concerned with

\footnote{Barlow, p. 265.}
victimized women, they actually center on the May Fourth male youth's relationship with women.

"The New Year's Sacrifice" is a story about a woman, Xianglin Sao. After her first husband died, her mother-in-law sells her to another man. When her second husband dies and her son is devoured by a wolf, she falls into poverty. She is forced to return to work as a servant in a gentry family. But the feudal code of female chastity destroys her. As a twice-married widow, she is deemed particularly impure. She is deprived of the right to touch any food or implement connected with the family's ancestral sacrifices. Condemned by the whole town, she becomes a beggar who is not only turned away from every door, but also suffers the terror of believing she will be cut in two when her two husbands' fight over her in the afterlife. Xianglin Sao dies as the town is celebrating the arrival of the new year.

"Regret for the Past" tells the story of Juansheng, a young man of the May Fourth generation who has convinced his girl-friend, Zijun, that romantic love and independence from the control of her parents are of paramount interest. They decide to live together. Because of their untraditional behavior, society reacts with restrictions: they have trouble finding a room, she is cast off from her family, and the young man loses his job. From anger at the old tyrannical traditions and a desire for independence, he gradually comes
to feel tied down by his responsibility towards Zijun, his love becomes a liability. Zijun leaves him to go back to her family and dies. Juansheng is left mourning Zijun's death and his ideals are in ruins.

Both stories are about women, and both are told from the perspective of young educated men. Employing the same narrative structure, both stories start with the first person narrator returning to his past residence searching for a certain kind of meaning which is unconsciously invested in women. In both, women function as structural constants to assist "I"'s Oedipal transformation, first, by his investigating the role of the father's repression of women; secondly by his own role in perpetuating women's suffering.

The narrator in "New Year's Sacrifice," a social rebel against the Confucian order, returns to his hometown to spend a traditional Chinese festival with his Fourth Uncle, a surrogate father. The narrator's reluctant, yet necessary, return to tradition, symbolized by the superstitious village and a strict Confucian Fourth Uncle, represents unmistakably the return of the repressed desire of the association with the father. At first "I" presents himself as an obedient "son" who never utters a defensive word to the barrage of Fourth Uncle's attack on the Republican Revolution. His frustration over staying in his uncle's house and his inability to leave reveal that "I" is suspended on the
threshold between the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal. "I" unconsciously waits for some stimulation to instigate his departure from the suffocating family and tradition.

The appearance of Xianglin Sao, a woman beggar victimized by Confucian morality, serves as that stimulation. His psyche drastically changes when she crosses his path. Xianglin Sao functions structurally in three ways. First of all, she is a story to be told by "I"; she thus gives meaning to "I"'s stay in town and transforms him into an investigating agent. The difficulties in breaking the traditional bond between father and son experienced by "I" is neatly encapsulated in, or displaced onto, the telling of the fate of a woman. Secondly, she mirrors his own Oedipal fears within the family confinement. He "was seized with foreboding" and this triggers his decision to leave his hometown and family the next day. She serves as a reminder of, a testimony to, the father's cruelty, both towards her and himself. Fourth Uncle is mad at the untimely death of Xianglin Sao on New Year's Eve. "All I heard was my uncle saying loudly as he walked out: 'Not earlier nor later, but just at this time—sure sign of a bad character.' " In suspecting that Fourth Uncle is angry at him too, the

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24 Ibid., p. 155.
narrator sees an affiliation between himself and Xianglin Sao.

From his [the uncle’s] solemn expression I suddenly suspected that he looked on me as choosing not earlier nor later but just this time to come and trouble him, and that I was also a bad character."

"I" relates himself to Xianglin Sao. Her death instigates his final determination to leave, symbolic of the first successful effort to resolve the Oedipal complex. He feels relief upon learning of the death of Xianglin Sao. "My heart already felt lighter,...in the present world when a meaningless existence [my stress] ends, so that someone whom others are tired of seeing is no longer seen, it is just as well both for the individual and for others." His final identification/union with the father, symptomized by his "real sense of relief" over a woman’s death, and more importantly by regarding her as "a meaningless existence," illustrates the very gendered nature of "I"’s transcendence. At this moment, the narrator is a parody of Fourth Uncle, not only in terms of mimicking the latter’s attitude toward women in general, but also in terms of reaffirming the traditional view of women’s value. Xianglin Sao’s life is “meaningless” because she tragically fails the roles of both wife and

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Ibid., p. 156.

Ibid., p. 157.
mother. Her two husbands died and her only son was eaten by a wolf. Indeed, if a woman in traditional Chinese culture fails as wife and/or mother, what is the meaning of her existence? In this regard, if we hold the father responsible for having created the humiliating social gender category of wifehood and motherhood, the young May Fourth narrator inherits that gender construction. “I” enters the Symbolic carrying with him an unconscious desire that women outside of their traditional roles be dislocated in the culture.

Whereas the narrator in “New Year’s Sacrifice” acts more as a raconteur than a straight witness telling the story of a victimized woman, Juansheng, the “I” narrator in “Regret for the Past,” tells a story of his own manipulating relationship with women. The story manifests another form of “I”‘s Oedipal use of women. In “Regret for the Past,” it is the Oedipal “I” who chooses his sexual partner outside of the traditional marriage system. In asserting his freedom of love, he reaches manhood/adulthood, but it is achieved only by gaining his lover Zijun. “I love Zijun, and thanks to her I escaped from this dead quiet and emptiness.” \[1\] Enlightening Zijun in order to gain her love is a romantic adventure for Juasheng: “…the shabby room would be filled with the sound of my voice as I held forth on the tyranny of the home, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women.

\[1\] Selected Works of Lu Hsun, Vol.1, p.239.
Ibsen, Tagore, and Shelley. Soon Zijun has been successfully enlightened; his rhetoric of freedom and equality affects Zijun, as is made clear by her determination to break with her family. "I am my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me.' She came out with this statement clearly, firmly and gravely.

The reader soon discovers that Zijun is not, and cannot be, an equal partner in her relationship with Juansheng. From the onset, she is fetishized by Juansheng and is the passive audience to his narcissistic chatter. When first introduced in the story, she is described only by sounds: "the tapping of (her) high heels on the brick pavement would galvanize me into life."

I seemed able to hear all the footsteps outside the gate, those of Zijun among the rest. Her steps often sounded as if they were drawing nearer and nearer—only to grow fainter again, until they were lost in the tramping of other feet.

Zijun's body, "her pale round face dimpling in a smile, her thin arms, striped cotton blouse and black skirt," all these are sensuous objects to "I." Without them, he will fall into "sheer boredom" and "the old silence and emptiness."

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 239.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 240.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 238-239.}\]
The fetishization of Zijun is part and parcel of “I”’s brave new world of freedom of love and shows that he does not accept her as a whole being. She is his sexual stimulation, the tool in his own liberation project, and in his rejection of the father. He reduces her to only a physical presence and a fragmentary object.

Once “I” is elevated to the status of manhood by owning Zijun, and placing Zijun in “a small home in Chichao Street,” Zijun loses her romantic appeal. She is no longer fetishized, thus no longer loved. She is a bore, a nagging wife, a domestic lack. Zijun finally returns to her father, and soon dies.

In Juansheng, son and father are collapsed into one figure; for he is simultaneously the son who must exploit women to buttress and build his symbolic fatherhood and the father who oppresses and kills women. In “New Year’s Sacrifice,” Xianglin Sao’s death has affected “I” as catharsis in terms of unburdening his own guilt in her victimization. Zijun’s death is therapeutic to Juansheng. While crying for her death, he is “burying her in oblivion.”

I want to forget. For my own sake I don’t want to remember the oblivion I gave Zijun for her burial.

Ibid., p. 238.
I must make a fresh start in life. I must hide the truth deep in my wounded heart, and advance silently, taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide....

In the midst of the May Fourth male clamor for women's liberation, a female voice also spoke for women's liberation. This voice is justifiably recognized as signs of women "emerging from the horizon of history." However, this voice is usually subordinated to that of the male and has seldom been looked at as a counter-discourse to the male feminist agenda of the time. Women writers in the May Fourth period—as Lydia Liu points out in her brilliant study of Xiao Hong—can hardly be read and understood today "without being aware of the existence of a highly developed, institutionalized, male-centered critical tradition that has tried to frame and determine the meaning" of their works.

To exemplify my assertion that some women writers in the May Fourth era have a different view on women's liberation from that of their male counterparts, I would like to offer a reading of Xiao Hong's novel The Field of Life and Death.

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"Ibid., p. 261.

"The phrase used here "emerging from the horizon of history is the title of Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua's Fuchu lishi dibiao (Emerging from the horizon of history).

The novel is a statement of women's understanding of gender oppression and their vision of liberation. Through its portraits of women of various ages, and the predicaments attending each stage of a women's development, the novel resonates with Qiu Jin's feminist realization that a gendered womanhood composed of wifehood and motherhood can only suffocate and kill women.

*The Field of Life and Death* is difficult to summarize as a story. Howard Goldblatt thinks of it not as "the story of any particular individual," but a "grim and powerful portrait of the lives of peasants in Northeast China." According to Goldblatt, the portrait the novel presents is not very clear, "the spotlight shifts from one individual or family to another, it seldom stops long enough to give much definition." However, as ambiguous and unfocused as the novel is, there is no mistake that nearly every critic of it has recognized its feminist nature, even though the meaning of feminism in the novel is prone to different interpretations. For instance, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua see it as "a marginalized work by a marginalized woman writer."

During the time Xiao Hong was writing the book, Meng and Dai note, she was subordinate mentally and financially to her

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then lover Xiao Jun. This marginalized situation has a special impact on her consciousness of writing as a woman.14

Goldblatt looks at the theme of feminism in the novel as the writer’s reaction to her personal experiences with men. "Xiao Hong’s dependence upon men, her willingness to allow them to use her for their own ends, and the anger that erupted when she was abandoned or mistreated are nearly exactly duplicated" in her characters. So Goldblatt concludes that framed by her abusive relationship with men, Xiao Hong is very perceptive in describing in her novel that women are relegated by a patriarchal society "to domestic functions."17

For French scholar Simone Cros-Morea, the novel is in some way feminist because it shows point-blank a female hatred for men. Her article starts with a quote from one of the major characters, Golden Bough. "Before I only hated men, now I hate the Japs as well..." This sentence, according to Cros-Morea, "reveals "Xiao Hong’s own attitude towards men, and epitomizes the novel’s main theme."

Without giving reasons why Xiao Hong hates men, and why man-
hating is relevant to feminist theme of the book, Cros-Morea goes on to say that Xiao Hong represents a kind of feminism different from that of Qiu Jin's. Qiu Jin is "an ardent feminist fighter," Cros-Morea says, who "devoted her life to undermining male dominance of society." Qiu "described explicitly male exploitation and oppression, inciting women to revolt and reject their lot, never losing hope in the crusade that led to her execution." Even though Xiao Hong covered the same ground as Qiu Jin in her description of the situation of women in the traditional family, her feminism is at best a "passive" one, which is "neither pointing to solutions or even calling for resistance."^1

Interestingly, where Cros-Morea sees Xiao Hong's feminism as different from Qiu Jin's, Lydia Liu detects a similarity. The second half of the novel, where the attention of the writer shifts from description of women's lives to the nationalist fight the villagers put on against the Japanese invasion, makes Lydia Liu question the relationship between women and nationalism. I think Liu is correct in pointing out that women's oppression "makes it difficult to idealize the patriarchal society before or after (Japanese) occupation. Whatever happens to the nation, it is always the female body that suffers most." However, Xiao Hong does describe women's, especially widows', active participation in

[^1] Ibid., p. 343.
the nationalist struggle. In their oath-taking to save the
nation, "the widows and the single men who had lost their
families" gathered in the village to form "an impressive
assembly." To the male leader's call for sacrifice to the
Chinese nation, "(r)esponse came first from the widows.
'Yes, even if we are cut into a million pieces!'" Lydia Liu
explains this scene: "When the widows respond to the call,
they immediately lose their gender [emphasis is mine] and
join the rank of the brothers...One can hardly miss the
familiar tone of the tragic Qiu Jin in their (widows') vows."
For Liu, it is an "interesting enough" phenomenon that "women
joining the army--all widows--must reject their female
identity [emphasis is mine] in a suicidal manner to become
Chinese and fight for the nation."^2

My problem with this interpretation is only that
picturing women losing their gender and female identity as a
"sacrifice" is quite strange if one takes into consideration
that the first nine chapters of the novel describe, in the
most grotesque details, what being a gendered woman means in
1920s rural China. We have mentioned that The Field of Life
and Death deals not with an individual life of a woman. It
is about women as a collective. It paints women's shared

^0 Hsiao Hung, p. 86.
^1 Ibid., p. 87.
^2 Lydia Liu, p. 171.
life experiences so realistically that the picture looks almost surrealistically mythological."

In the world described by Xiao Hong, the relationship between men and women is characterized by misogyny and hierarchy. The gendered constructs of womanhood, female sexuality, wifehood and motherhood, entail nothing but suffering. An extreme pessimism permeates the bleak description of female sexuality and female body. Sex in most cases is associated with slavery, oppression and submission to men. Sexuality is equated with reproduction, and consequently, with motherhood. It confines the woman within the harsh reality of a life where the man is always the boss. Women in Xiao Hong's novel do not enjoy sex. They are being raped by their husbands, by other men and by the Japanese.

Wives in the novel always live with a feeling of dread: "For like the child of a patriarchal society, she lived in dread of her man." The fear of husbands, of getting pregnant, of being beaten, scolded, humiliated or raped is women's daily experiences. "I'm afraid of men," Fufa's Wife tells her nephew. "A man is as hard as a rock. I don't dare

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"Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua regard this novel as a writing of the nature of "primitive myth." See their book Emerging from the horizon of history, p. 256.

"Hsiao Hung, p. 55.

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even to touch one." She also shares her wisdom with other women: "I know it is a bad thing to be a man's wife."

In this women's world, husbands' mistreatment is the rule. They are heartless, generally selfish and tyrannical, regarding their wives as chattels. Golden Bough, who is raped by her future husband before their marriage, feels that "men are heartless human beings, a feeling shared by the rest of the village women."

If wifehood is fear for women, then motherhood is a dreadful hell. When Golden Bough discovers she is pregnant, "her head shuddered as though it were retching. She was seized with terror." And "her stomach had become a hideous monstrosity." She was "sullenly thrown into a panic as she realized that she might be with child." Motherhood for women is a punishment full of blood and death. The novel materializes abstract motherhood by describing the grotesque scenes of women giving birth. When Fifth Sister's elder sister is in labor, "her face turned first ashen and then yellow" with pain. However "she was not allowed even a single moan," because her husband did not like the sight of

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 19.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 30.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 53.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 25.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 34.}\]
her giving birth. "He took the tobacco pouch at his side and flung it at the corpse-like figure." He also "raised his fearful hand and threw a big bucket of water" onto his wife in labor. The novel tells us, "It was like this every year: whenever he saw his wife giving birth, this was how he showed his disapproval." The poor woman, after giving birth to a dead child, "lies in her own blood, soaking it up with her body." When Golden Bough is in labor, she knew that "punishment descended upon her" and "she soon would become a mother. The woman's punishment would soon catch up with her." Childbirth is a recurrent punishment to these village women who seem to give birth annually.

Now let's return to the point Lydia Liu has raised that widows' joining the nationalist fight sacrifice their gender identity to allow nationalism to appropriate their bodies. If this gendered female body is a site of violence where women's sexual and gender oppression takes place, then why can the loss of this body and its gendered meanings not be a liberatory victory for women? If the sexualized body for women causes a constant fear of violence, if wifehood is marked by husbands' abuses both mental and physical, if motherhood is the ultimate punishment, then wouldn't it be relief for those widows to desert their gender identity to

50 Ibid., p. 53.
51 Ibid., p. 54.
take on a political one? The relationship between women and nationalism portrayed in the novel, as I see it, is less a "nationalist appropriation of the female body" than women's appropriation of nationalism as a means of rejecting that body.

In addition to joining the nationalist struggle, women in the novel are offered another escape from that horrifying womanhood. Golden Bough wants to become a nun, permanently to be away from men. However, the Japanese invasion deprives her of a chance of becoming one, for the temple has been destroyed by bombs. "But where should Golden Bough go? The temple on which she had set her heart had long been abandoned."  

In drawing a genealogical line from Qiu Jin to Xiao Hong, we can see that their feminism lies in their shared awareness of gendered womanhood--the sexualized female body, wifehood and motherhood--as the core of women's oppression. This realization demarcates a kind of women's feminism, what I call gender-conscious feminism from the women's liberation advocated by their male contemporaries. Qiu Jin demonstrates this awareness by lucid revolt, Xiao Hong exhibits it through a quiet but insistent resolve.

\*\* Hsiao Hung, p. 106. \*\*
2.1. The CCP’s “Marriage Law”

Since the May Fourth movement made women’s liberation, with its multifaceted and sometimes ambiguous agenda, a badge of modernity in China’s political and cultural discourse, all political forces in China that claimed to be progressive had to uphold the banner of women’s liberation. The Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1921 by a group of cultural and political radicals who regarded women’s emancipation as one of their commitments, began to institutionalize the ideal of women’s liberation, first in the National Revolution (1924-1927), then in the Red Base Areas it governed (1929-1949), and later in the People’s Republic of China.

However, the CCP’s advocacy of women’s liberation was not without resistance from women. Conflicts between the Party and women came to the fore especially when the liberal May Fourth ideal of women’s liberation, characterized by the dual concerns of personal salvation and national salvation, was adopted by the Party. As Christina Gilmartin points out in...
her study of the relationship between the CCP and women, "at the same time that they [the founders of the CCP] formulated a radical program on gender transformation that challenged the dominant culture, however, they reproduced and reinscribed central aspects of the gender system from the larger society within their own party organizations."¹

Before I go into an examination of the gendered nature of the conflicts of interest, I would like to first discuss the limitations of a recently popularized conceptualization of the CCP ideology called "Mao style." "Mao style," sometimes used interchangeably with "Mao discourse," was first coined by Li Tuo, a prominent PRC literary critic. Bothered by what he saw as the "monological" nature of literary language that Chinese writers used from 1942, when Mao Zedong's "Yan'an Talks" were delivered, to the late 1970s, Li argues that this dominant literary language has produced, as well as reflects, the dominant ideology--"Chinese Marxist-Maoist discourse or dialectical materialism."² The notion of Mao style or Mao discourse promulgated by Li Tuo and adopted and elaborated by other critics is described as a "closed system of discourse." As an official language, it is "homogenizing, unilinear,


flattening in its inattentiveness to any categories other than those of the official class structure." It is "the Party's monological 'highest order.'" This highest order aims at nothing but ensuring Mao Zedong's political upperhand in the "endless fighting between various political cliques" within the Party.

In contrast to Li Tuo's characterization of Mao style as a politically "unified," linguistically monological discourse, many theorists point instead to the open-ended nature of all discourse. Michele Le Doeuff, for example, argues convincingly that discourses can never attain closure. Discourses are in fact compromises which are constantly self-revised, self-negated. If Li Tuo were correct in his reductive summary of the homogeneous effect of Mao style on the CCP's reign, then it is hard to imagine any rationale for the Cultural Revolution in 1966 at all, which was launched as

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' Lu Tonglin, p.194.


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an attack on conservative elements within the Party and their interpretation of Marxism.

To define Maoist discourse in a narrow political fashion is inadequate in addressing the multifaceted, multilateral conflicts and contradictions existing in the CCP-led cultural, economical, and political transformation of Chinese society. The CCP's women's liberation platform, for instance, is one place where Mao discourse theory in its strongly political focus fails, precisely because it neglects sex/gender systems and the conflicts and problems they create in a culture.

The concept of "sex-gender system" that has framed my understanding of gender is the feminist interpretation of what Claude Levi-Strauss calls the kinship system in his book The Elementary Structure of Kinship. The work of this French structuralist anthropologist is a grand statement on the origin and nature of human society. What fascinates Marxist feminists, like Gayle Rubin, in this book is the assumption that the first form of social relations—the kinship system—is built upon the exchange of women between two parties of men. The first transaction human beings, which mean men, engage in is the traffic in women. In another words, the

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* For more elaboration of the effects of Mao style, see Jing Wang's book High Culture Fever, Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), footnote No. 19, p. 313.
very notion of society originates from the exchange of women, whether as gifts or commodities traded among male subjects.

Whether Levi-Strauss is correct in seeing the exchange of women as the fundamental principle of kinship in human societies does not matter for the purpose of my argument. What is important is that this view provides conceptual tools with which one can build descriptions of the roles played in social life by the oppression of women. It is this part of social life that Gayle Rubin calls a “sex/gender system.” Rubin recognizes a need to distinguish between economic, political systems, and sexual systems, so as to indicate that sexual systems have a certain autonomy which cannot always be explained by or reduced to economic forces. The economic explanation is, perhaps, even a pretext for marginalizing or avoiding the importance of the sexual.

There is little doubt that in the CCP’s effort to transform both the social superstructure and its economic base, a dual task required by dialectical materialism, it never lost sight of the need to change the sex/gender systems in Chinese society. Mao style theory fails to deal with this portion of the CCP ideology by reducing the Party ideology to the politically monolithic, omitting its sex/gender program.

The CCP's official discourse on women's liberation is itself multifaceted. Inherited mainly from the May Fourth liberal feminism, it is a hybrid of many intellectual trends. It has embraced Marxist theories of communist revolution and the history of private ownership, European socialist views on women's liberation and the Soviet model of women's liberation. It was also influenced by the nationalism of the early twentieth century when the Party was first founded.

The CCP's discursive practices are characterized in the transformation of their wide range of ideological and political origins into not only a coherent theory of women's liberation, but also a codified legal form: marriage regulations and marriage laws. In this long and complicated process of legalizing women's rights, the CCP has successfully, to some extent, institutionalized a loosely combined, sometimes contradictory ideology of women's emancipation. The marriage law, originally formulated in the Jiangxi Soviet areas in 1931 and completed and passed as the very first law of the People's Republic of China in May 1950, has been hailed as signaling the CCP's faith and sincerity in women's liberation, inheriting the core principles of May Fourth feminism.

The progressiveness of the marriage law speaks for itself: it promotes and promises men and women their freedom in choosing their spouses. With slightly different wording, all versions of marriage regulations and laws stress in the first few articles that "the feudal marriage system which is based on arbitrary and compulsory arrangements of parents, and the superiority of man over woman and ignores the children's interests shall be abolished." "The New-Democratic marriage system, which is based on the free choice of partners, on monogamy, on equal rights for both sexes, and on the protection of the lawful interests of women and children, shall be put into effect."

What the law mainly strives for is, first of all, to abolish the "feudal" practices which aimed at establishing a contractual relationship between families, and it was for the purpose of conscious perpetuation of the patrilineal family line that parents would marry off their sons and daughters. By abolishing this trade between families which deprived young people, especially women, of autonomy in deciding their own lives, the marriage law remolds a brand new marital relationship in the age of the "new democracy." It materializes the lofty principles of freedom of choice in marriage and gender equality in social participation.

While the political progressiveness of the marriage law is fully recognized, a kind of cultural conservatism embedded in the legal rhetoric is seldom critiqued. In other words, the political progressiveness, in terms of redefining family and mobilizing the masses, in the marriage law is so obvious that criticism tends to focus on its correct implementation or lack thereof rather than the legal code itself. When examined closely, however, the document appears as a regression from the radicalness of the May Fourth's ideal of a couple living together as airen (loved ones) instead of being bound in the institution of marriage. Liberating men and women to choose a spouse of their own liking is indeed a progression away from forced marriage, and into a more democratic relationship between two sexes. However, whether forced or freed, one is still implicitly obliged to realize one's social role through heterosexual marriage.

It is highly significant that after the People's Republic was founded in October 1949, the very first endeavor in carrying out socialist reform was to promulgate the Marriage Law, beginning May 1, 1950. What followed was the passing of the Land Reform Law on June 2 of the same year. One cannot help but conclude that the passing of the two laws neatly represented the CCP's effort in transforming both the superstructure and the economic base of Chinese society in an attempt to realize the ideal society. Thus it is possible to
suggest that in the socialist institutionalizing of CCP ideology, the reform of marriage was viewed as a top priority. It is well articulated in this law that "family is a component part of the marriage system." Family is defined as a "social cell," within which a new social order should be founded. Since family is discursively established as a "cell of society," and "society's stability rests on the stability of family," and since men and women are asked to stay in the marital relationship in order to keep social stability, then so-called free marriage loses its freedom. The family is loaded with traditionally embedded obligations, both personal and social. And these in turn are rigidly gendered according to traditional Chinese social practices. The family was regarded as the smallest controllable social unit by the state, and the CCP needed to dictate and sanction the new moral and social order after the chaos of many years of war.

Though employing a new terminology in describing the relationship between public and private, the cultural essence of the CCP rhetoric failed to break from the traditional Confucian interpretation of the relationship between family

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"It took a relatively long time for the People's Republic of China to pass its constitution, in 1954.

"Meijer, p. 73.

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and state." Both Confucianism and CCP ideology accept the importance of a stable family in constructing an orderly society. If a new social order has to be attained with the family, and family is defined in accordance with traditional heterosexual, patrilineal and patrilocal standards and practices, then the family as an institution of gender oppression will be reified, not redefined. In other words, the socio-cultural function of marriage was never adequately subverted or questioned in the framing of the new marriage law. As in traditional Chinese culture, marriage was still viewed as the place where woman defines her relevance to the culture through being firmly rooted in the private sphere. In the CCP’s paradigm of freedom of choice, marriage, especially for women, in most cases, can hardly be called a

"The Great Learning, states that the social function of junzi (gentlemen) is to qi jia, zhiguo, ping tianxia. James Legge's translation is: "(after their persons being cultivated,) their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy." See Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean. Trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983), p. 359.
choice. It is a social and economical necessity." As a structural constant, it cuts across the CCP's gender platform, revealing its underlying cultural conservatism. Thus, the traditional institution of marriage, replete with all its gendered roles, biases, and hierarchies, was allowed to carry over into CCP society. Its radicalness lay more in the individual's function in spouse choosing and divorce processes, while leaving the internal construct of marriage itself sanctified and intact.

The cultural conservatism sedimented in the marriage law can be understood first of all by its institutionalization of the many trends of radical thoughts in the May Fourth era. Such a retrogression seems inevitable when an ideology is hypostatized into a concrete entity. This phenomenon is well-articulated by Arif Dirlik in his analysis of the relationship between ideology and organization in the process of the founding of the CCP. When ideology is institutionalized, according to Dirlik, a natural/necessary

"Until recently, women in China, rural and urban, had to rely on their male relatives--fathers and husbands--to get social benefits. For instance, a single woman would not be assigned private housing by her work unit. Marriage would make it possible for a couple get a private unit for themselves. It is the husbands' work unit that does the housing distribution. This form of sex discrimination was first brought up by Funu quanyi baozhang fa (The Protective Law of Women's Rights and Benefits) passed in 1992. See Zhongguo funu falu shiyong quanshu (A Practical Encyclopedia of Laws Concerning Women in China), ed. Zhonghua quanguo funu lianhe hui (Beijing: Falu chuban she, 1993).
compromise takes place. Ideology without organization would result in "a sea of political and ideological chaos." Thus "(t)he transformation of a diffuse political and cultural radicalism into organized political activity," into a "unifying principle or concerted action" is necessary. The coherence gained has the new power to transform a society."  

Dirlik's dialectic provides an adequate explanation of any institution's fundamentally conservative nature. This can be seen when tracking the trajectory of the development of the marriage law from its inception in the Party's 1931 Marriage Regulations to the final legal codes in 1950. This span of nearly twenty years saw a tendency to increasingly restrict the freedoms the law was supposed to advocate. This occurred because the bureaucratic party-state became more regulated and solidified. From the constant changes in the legal codes concerning divorce, for example, we get a glimpse of an increasingly limited freedom. In the 1931 Marriage Regulations, Article Nine states that "(f)reedom of divorce is established. Whenever both the man and the woman agree to divorce, the divorce shall have immediate effect. When one


— Both the 1931 Marriage Regulations and 1950 Marriage Law are signed by Mao Zedong, first as chair of the Chinese Soviet Republic, the second as chairman of the PRC.
party, either the man or the woman, is determined to claim a
divorce it shall have immediate effect." The 1934 version
qualifies this when it names certain conditions and grounds
under which a divorce can or cannot be filed. For instance,
Red Army soldiers' spouses do not have the freedom to file
for divorce. Article Eleven states: "Wives of soldiers of
the Red Army when claiming a divorce must obtain the consent
of their husbands." This radical modification asks those
women to owe a special duty to the party/state to ensure the
recruitment of soldiers. For the sake of stabilizing the
army, they are excluded from exercising their freedom in
divorce. By the time of the 1950 Marriage Law, mediation to
prevent divorce was added. Divorce can only be granted after
failed mediation for conciliation. Article Seventeen lists
numerous conditions under which divorce is granted.

In the event of either the husband or the wife
alone insisting upon divorce, it may be granted
only when mediation by the district people's
government and the judicial organ has failed to
bring about a reconciliation.... When only one
party insists on divorce, the district people's
government may try to effect a reconciliation. If
such mediation fails, it shall, without delay,
refer the case to the county or municipal people's
court for decision.... In dealing with a divorce
case, the county or municipal people's court must,

" Meijer, p. 281.

Ibid., p. 284.
in the first instance, try to bring about a reconciliation between the parties...”

The negotiated nature of freedom in marriage can be best illustrated in the 1934 Marriage Law in the Jiangxi Soviet Areas and in the 1943 Marriage Regulations in Jinchaji Border Area. In 1934, a registration system was installed to eliminate the traditional common-law style marriage. For the first time in Chinese history, marriage, as well as divorce, was legal only by the approval of the government. Designed to ensure monogamy, the registration system assured the party-state the function of supervising and monitoring the contractual relationship between men and women. Within this system, the party-state owned the right to judge who can marry whom. It replaced the “feudal” parents, but did nothing to alter the feudal nature of marriage practices.”

The CCP’s neo-familialism is further evidenced in the 1943 Jinchaji Marriage Regulations. Article Nine clearly stated that if adultery causes a divorce, after the divorce is granted, the adulterous divorcée and the third party involved in the cause of divorce cannot be permitted to marry.

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8 Ibid., p.301.
9 Ibid., p.283.
10 Ibid., p. 292.
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If compulsory heterosexual marriage remains the social norm within which man and woman’s social identities take shape, then freedom, the ostensible hallmark of the marriage law, is at best a socially contested domain. For the only available and conceivable model of marriage relations was a traditional one already saturated with inequality. Also, if marriage and family are regarded as a prerequisite for an orderly society, then personal freedom interrupting that order has to be contained, defined and negotiated. From the very first effort of the CCP to form sex-gender relations through the discourse of marriage, it consciously drew the line as to what kind of freedom could be accepted, and what kind could not. Most explicit is the “Plan for Work Among Women” drawn up by the Special Committee for Northern Jiangxi of the Central Committee of the CCP. The document is dated March 3, 1931, when the first Marriage regulation was put into effect.

In practice (of the Marriage Regulation) we must start from the premise that both parties, husband and wife, serve the cause of revolution....(W)e must resolutely oppose the idea of absolute freedom of marriage as it creates chaotic conditions in society and antagonizes the peasants and the Red Army. We must make it clear that the Central Committee never maintained absolute freedom of
divorce either, because that would be an anarchistic practice."

On the surface, it would appear that in making this directive, the CCP struggled to find the ideal middle ground between "freedom" of marriage and divorce within specified boundaries and "absolute freedom" in defining the terms of one's divorce. But when we expand our investigation into the conditions which gave rise to the draft of this directive, we become aware of a clear gender bias, already hinted at in the title of the plan: "The Plan for Work Among Women." It targets women as the cause of the problem of absolute freedom in marriage. Criticized as displaying "absolute freedom," the person behaving "anarchistically and immorally" was most often a woman. Likewise the party suffering from this "abuse" of absolute freedom of marriage and divorce was a male member of the peasant class and/or a soldier in the Red Army.

With its cultural ambivalence, the marriage law is simultaneously sending two opposing messages. It nominally

"Meijer, p.39. The CCP's demarcation of "freedom" and "absolute freedom" can also be understood as the adjustment to the Nationalist ultraconservative propaganda over the politicization of gender issues. The Nationalists discovered that the freedom of marriage advocated by the CCP was an extremely effective weapon to accuse the Communists of promoting sexual chaos and sexual immorality. For detailed study, see the concluding chapter of Christina Gilmartin's Engendering the Chinese Revolution, Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
advocates women and men's freedom of marriage by abolishing parental authority, while simultaneously substituting the government's supervision and intervention in order "to guarantee freedom of marriage and divorce." It aims at liberating women from the feudal shackles and enabling them to participate in social activity and production, while simultaneously making an inherently oppressive traditional marriage their social and familial obligation. In this way, the marriage law not only legitimizes the contractual marriage in which this unequal husband-wife relationship remains (with some modification) the social norm, it also codifies and solidifies the absolute necessity of marriage by its very place in the legal system, part of the superstructure guaranteeing the new social order. The concept of freedom in marriage has never extended to the freedom of not getting married.

The marriage law is the confluence of contradicting concerns. It is a compromise of the different though somewhat intertwined interests and agendas of Chinese communism and feminism. The necessary union of the CCP and the Chinese women's movement symbolized by the law is in fact

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Meijer, p.39.

a "marriage," to borrow Heidi Hartmann's metaphor. In this
union, the CCP is the dominant husband, feminism the
subordinate wife. For the wife, this marriage is an
"unhappy" one." For the sake of maintaining social morality
and national interests, parodying Helmer, the husband in
Henrik Ibsen's play A Doll's House, the Party tells Chinese
women: "Before all else you are a wife and mother." 

2.2. Ding Ling and Her "Thoughts on March 8"

From the outset, there was never an absence of struggle on
the part of communist women in their effort to infuse the
revolution with progressive feminist concerns, to induce the
revolution to answer to their needs and aspirations. There
is a constant voice from women who wished to both participate
in the political life of the revolution alongside of men and
to ensure that their own gender needs were met. Even when
women in no way militated directly for women's rights, they
struggled to affect policy in accordance with an inherently
feminist project.

The earliest effort of women in making a feminist agenda
an integral part in the general policies of the Party is

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"See Heidi Hartmann's article "The Unhappy Marriage of
Marxism and Feminism," in Women and Revolution, a Discussion
of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, ed. Lydia

Merriam, Eve. After Nora Slammed the Door (Cleveland and
exhibited in the actions of Xiang Jingyu (1895-1928). One of the most prominent communist women leaders in the twenties, Xiang was a strong independent person "who paid little heed to conventional women's roles." She formulated a strong program within the Party aimed at promoting "a radical alteration of gender relations in the revolutionary movement as well as for combating gender oppression within the Party."*

But the most piercing feminist voice questioning gender relations in the CCP after the marriage law took shape came from Ding Ling. Her 1942 essay "Thoughts on March 8th" is a sarcastic account of the sexist view of womanhood prevalent in Yan'an, where the headquarters of the CCP were located. Triggered by the yearly celebration of "International Women's Day" in Yan'an, Ding Ling felt it crucial to expose the ironic nature of setting aside one day a year for the celebration of women, in contrast to the daily sexist, misogynist treatment of women that existed in the Soviet Base Areas.

Sexism in Yan'an betrayed itself in two aspects, according to Ding Ling. First, women comrades were assigned to play traditional gender roles in an anti-traditional revolution. In light of this bias, she noted: "It doesn't

*Ibid., p 75.*

"* Gilmartin ed., Engendering the Chinese Revolution, p.5. *
seem to surprise anyone that women make up a big proportion of the staff in the hospitals, sanatoria, and clinics.\textsuperscript{28} Even though women worked in the public domain, they surely provided a traditional domestic “feminine comfort” for their brothers—their male comrades and their husbands by “darning their socks, and patching their shoes.” The nature and extent of women’s oppression in Yan’an could be seen not only through their function as revolutionary nurturers and secretaries, feeding, healing, supporting, and loving their male comrades. On the occasions when they participated in the front lines of battle, they did so as quasi-revolutionary cheerleaders, sidelined as entertainers in the propaganda teams. Secondly and more importantly, Ding Ling gingerly pointed out that the very legitimacy of women comrades as revolutionaries was primarily recognized through their relations with male comrades. Within the revolutionary family, women were destined to be sex-objects or, better still, wives for their revolutionary brothers. A woman must get married, because “people [in Yan’an] are interested when women comrades get married.” If a woman comrade did not get married duly, then she would be maligned by rumors and gossip that she was too “choosy,” for “it is even more of a sin not to be married, and single women are even more of a target for

\textsuperscript{28} Barlow, Tani ed. \textit{I Myself am a Woman; Selected Writings of Ding Ling} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 318.
rumors and slanderous gossip." While women's marriage was obligatory, freedom of divorce was handy when male comrades were tired of their wives: "in the great majority of cases, it is the husband who petitions for divorce," and "the pretext for divorce is invariably the wife's political backwardness." Conversely, it is "immoral for women to even ask for one.""^

After getting married, women "inevitably have children." "When women capable of working sacrifice their careers for the joys of motherhood, people always sing their praises.""* If a woman refused to give birth by having her uterus surgically removed in order to avoid the pitfalls of being a mother, she was denigrated as a coward or as insufficiently revolutionary.

The CCP's newly-established gender system did not work for the benefit of women. To Ding Ling, it was no less a form of strangulation of women than the traditional one. Ding Ling concluded that in Yan'an, women comrades were "Noras who have returned home," suggesting a regression from May Fourth feminism."

One might argue that the instances Ding Ling listed were merely defects in implementing the marriage law, and the

\^\textsuperscript{Ibid., pp. 317-318.}

\* Ibid., p. 319.

\" Ibid., p. 320. 

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behavior of a limited number of individuals. If this were the case, the CCP would have welcomed the criticism instead labeling her as a dissident. Her suggestions would have been regarded as constructive rather than destructive to the CCP's agenda. What Ding Ling had listed were demonstrative instances induced from the intrinsically paradoxical and contradictory nature of the marriage law as well as the male ideology beneath it: promising the liberation of women by forcing the yoke of marriage upon them; advocating emancipation through social participation, while keeping their traditional obligatory familial duty intact. Ding Ling concluded the essay with a revealing footnote in which she says that she has not written everything she had wanted to say. She went on: if the points she made had been made by a (male) leader at an important conference, they would be wholeheartedly accepted, but because they were made by her, a woman, she predicted the remarks would probably be readily dismissed.  

The ensuing attack on Ding Ling, largely because of this essay, greatly exceeded her apprehension. After the publication of "Thoughts on March 8," Tani Barlow's research tells us:

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many cadres took Ding Ling's lead and debated major issues of Party life. Subsequently, in a political coup of great acuity, Mao Zedong reframed all of these issues--proper balance between public persona and private practices among Party leaders, cultural politics versus stable structures of authority, the correct direction for marriage and divorce reform, separatist or integrationist policy on women's work--not as flexible debatable issues of cultural politics, but as inflexible matters of correct or incorrect literary representation.... Ding Ling was punished for having raised embarrassing questions of personal and daily life in a public forum.  

The rectification campaign against her totally ignored her concern for women, and saddled her with negative political labels that would haunt her for several decades. Ding Ling's criticism of sexism was viewed by the CCP as politically and ideologically disruptive and inimical to its policies. Much like the fear of women's absolute freedom in marriage and divorce, Ding Ling displayed excessive freedom of expression, and it was countered with political repression. The gendered concern expressed by Ding Ling has been generally downplayed or (mis)interpreted in Western criticism as that of a political or literary dissident. The significance of Ding Ling's feminist concern in terms of the CCP's women's liberation platform has never been directly recognized, and

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Tini Barlow, ed. *I Myself am a Woman, Selected Writings of Ding Ling*, pp. 39-40.
Tani Barlow’s exceptional study of Ding Ling recognizes Ding Ling’s feminist concerns in her works. For Barlow, Ding Ling addresses in “Thoughts on March 8” “a body of theory we may call, loosely, May Fourth feminism (nuquan zhuyi) and redefining yet again what being a woman should mean in a revolutionary world.” She also foregrounds Ding Ling’s writing against the dispute between the Party and women, most literate and educated, involving policy issues such as “whether to mobilize women outside the family or to retain the family as the basis of production.” In this sense, Ding Ling was first of all a gender dissident. She was among the first communist women to challenge the CCP women’s discourse and the social structure and law it established. She believed that women were penalized and stigmatized by their predetermined familial roles and duties as reinvented in the marriage law discourse. Ding Ling put up an overt challenge to the paternalistic, neo-familialist Party.

* Ibid., p. 15.
The marriage law as a gendering discourse dictates and ensures a specific and unequal gender arrangement, sexual pattern, and social model for moral behavior between sexes. It attempts to guarantee a heterosexual, monogamous social stability. In turn, social stability reinforces the established discursive patterns. If the CCP managed to secure the social stability through controlling family (and thereby restricting women) in its governing strategy for the first years of its rule, then the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (hereafter the Cultural Revolution) from 1966 to 1976 was anything but a synthesis of that social stability.

2.3. The Cultural Revolution as a Counter-Discourse

The Cultural Revolution is arguably one of, if not the most, complex and perplexing political/cultural events in the entire history of the CCP. Because of this complexity, interpretations of the Cultural Revolution, both in China and here in the West, differ widely. As summarized by Hong Yung Lee, most people dub it a great political purge arising from a power struggle between an aging Mao and other increasingly pragmatic party and state leadership. Some see it as an ideological struggle coupled with policy differences: a dispute over the right interpretations of Marxism within which a strict economic interpretation of Marxism justified the Party’s pragmatist position, whereas the Maoists
justified their view by stressing Marxist voluntarism and political consciousness. And there are also those who reduce it to a mere expression of Mao's personal idiosyncrasies." For all its complexity, most studies attempt to explain it as Mao’s initiative to mobilize the masses to attack the CCP, the party of which he was Chairman.

My approach to the Cultural Revolution here will take a different tack. I am not interested in trying to clarify what happened during the Cultural Revolution, nor in its initiator's motives. My concern is gender and I will attempt to explore the Cultural Revolution in terms of gender, that is, to show what impact the Cultural Revolution had on women's social images and on contemporaneous discursive representations of those images.

One of the most influential theoretical reflections on the Cultural Revolution that has helped shape my conceptualizing is the article "Politics, Scholarship, and Chinese Socialism," coauthored by Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner. This article calls into question the various historicist interpretations of the Cultural Revolution: "Implicitly or explicitly, the Cultural Revolution is now subjected to criticism from the very ideological perspectives..."
that were once the object of its ideological critique.\textsuperscript{14} The Cultural Revolution set out to solve a host of issues associated, for instance, with the bureaucratization of the postrevolutionary government and the traditional forces fostering elitism and hierarchy, though tragically these original goals were betrayed and distorted. Dirlik and Meisner suggest that "the Cultural Revolution is denounced today for precisely the same reason it was so widely admired in earlier years." Indeed, social elitism and hierarchy in China today grow ever steadier with China's acceptance of capitalism. When the very target of the Cultural Revolution has turned to evaluate the Cultural Revolution, this elitist force will regard it as nothing but "a historical aberration."\textsuperscript{15}

Moreover, theoretical inadequacy in interpreting the Cultural Revolution is also tied to a general lack of recognition of, or interest in, understanding the intrinsic nature of the social movement. As a large-scale mass movement unprecedented in Chinese history, the Cultural


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 12.
Revolution was a collective action. The salient feature of this movement is that its "participants refuse to accept the boundaries of established institutional rules and routinized roles." In fact, to be a social movement "refers to persistent, patterned, and widely distributed collective challenges to the status quo."\(^4\)

Confusion is a very important character of a mass movement. Since the Cultural Revolution involved participation of students and workers throughout the nation, it could not in anyway be a close-ended phenomenon. Official discourse splintered in the Cultural Revolution, as groups and factions used it for their own political ends. Over-politicization caused an influx of mass input into the interpretation of the Maoist lexicon. Most of the time, the interpretation served its user's convenience. It was not

\(^4\) Recently there is a very constructive and vigorous discussion and reflection on the Cultural Revolution among Chinese scholars on the internet. Two trends have been emerged. One is the orthodox view, echoing the post-Mao government stand: it was a disaster. Another view (more convincing to me) argues that while Mao's role as catalyst in the Cultural Revolution should be recognized, it was a mass movement. That so many people took part with so much enthusiasm cannot simply be explained by claiming they were fooled by the leader. Mao had to cater to the masses' disgust over the expanding CCP bureaucracy. This view takes the 1989 Tian'anmen Incident as evidence to back up its thesis. 1989 democratic movement started as a mass action against the privileged bureaucracy of the CCP and government.

uncommon for competing local factions with competing agendas to all cite Mao’s quotations for legitimacy." The different understanding of Mao discourse provided an opportunity for its subversion. This subversion, later we are going to see, was responsible for creating women’s heroic images in model theater.

With all the turmoil and disorder, the Cultural Revolution did successfully break the routinized pattern of life because of the internal dynamic of the movement. That is to say, turmoil and chaos are in every sense intrinsic to the movement at destabilizing and transforming every realm of society. The mass attack on the ruling Party in big character posters shattered the authoritarian bureaucratic structure of the Party. The red guard movement from its first appearance embodied an indispensable component of the Cultural Revolution: constant reversal of positions and constant movement. One famous example of this physical movement was the "dachuanlian," in which students engaged in exchange of revolutionary experience by means of free tours of China at the state’s expense." There was also the educated class’ experience of being "sent down," resulting in

"This reinforces my argument in the previous section that so-called Mao-style or Mao discourse is in no way a close-ended discourse, nor a unified ideology.

"To understand more about dachuanlian, see Gordon A. Bennett and Ronald N. Montaperto’s Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-ai (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972)."
an exodus of hundreds of thousands of educated urban youth to rural areas and in order to live a collective life. Many passed into adulthood in these rural communities."

The basic social unit, the family, was dismantled and reorganized during the Cultural Revolution. The concept of the family was challenged by re-assessing the gender roles that sustained the family and those defined by family. In the Cultural Revolution when everyone was asked to recite the same quotations, was gendered language and behavior disrupted, even destroyed? Gender difference and familial hierarchy were attacked in the interests of equality and sameness. A new language incorporating new names and titles aimed at establishing new androgynous categories inclusive of both female and male. Unisex modes of address were accompanied by the widespread adoption of unisex dress in the form of the blue or army trousers and jackets. "Male and female bodies were similarly clad with minimal stylistic modifications in an attempt to reduce or negate gender-specific difference," as Elisabeth Croll puts it." Those uniforms, along with women's short haircuts, were accompanied

"Some studies deal with the purpose of sending educated urban youth to the rural areas. One such study, from the Cultural Revolution era itself is The Editor, "Mao's Revolutionary Successors: Part II--Youth to the Countryside and Back Again," Current Scene, Vol. V, No.16, (October 2, 1967), pp.1-8.

"Croll, Elisabeth. Changing Identities of Chinese Women (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995), pp.70-71."
by new images or visual representations of women. As Croll observes, "a new female image replaced that of the traditional woman who, slight of build, reticent and restrained of body, had been characterized by an aura of feminine restraint and resignation....Now decorum and temperance were to be replaced by boldness of bodily gesture. The new female images appeared on billboards, on posters and in magazine or newspaper pictures portraying women central in space, large in size, and strong, assertive and heroic in stance. She stood singly within groups or alongside her male peers, with arms reaching out to an outside world, assertive in her embrace of the future."

The Cultural Revolution not only challenged political structures, economic arrangements, and institutional rules, it also confronted established cultural categories and social identities. But it was simultaneously unruly and unorganized. Its targets and attackers were frequently defined in discourse, but lost their focus in practice. This led to a breakdown of law and order and the destruction of the family. But was the borderline demarcating femininity and masculinity actually redrawn? In this whole-scale attempt to transform society, were there any actual gender implications?

*Ibid., p.71.*
The obvious but most neglected achievement of the Cultural Revolution was the reorganization of gender relations. There appeared in this period a greater visibility of women within a rapid modification of female images. Broader social roles for women were accepted. Naomi Neft and Ann D. Levine conclude that "(i)t was not until periods of more radical change, such as Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, with its complete upheaval of Chinese society, that women started becoming more actively involved in politics." The Cultural Revolution's atmosphere of mobility and change inadvertently provided a window for transgression of gender lines, also for Mao Zedong's new alliance with women.

The situation of Nie Yuanzi, an instructor and a member of the Party Committee of the Department of Philosophy in Beijing University, can be seen as a condensed version of the larger cultural conflict. Nie was one of those responsible for triggering the Cultural Revolution with a big-character poster on May 25, 1966. Under the heading of "What the Beijing University Party Committee Is Doing in the Cultural Revolution," Nie accused the school Party Committee of suppressing the student movement on the pretext of

“strengthening leadership.” The socially positive image of Nie Yuanzi as a revolutionary pioneer at the time set up a model for women’s success in politics, in opposition to the traditional demonization of women in politics. Nie’s social identity was recognized and valued, symbolized by Mao’s appreciation. This approval, together with Mao’s renaming of Song Binbin, a young female red guard, as Song Yaowu, marked a new age for women."

The Cultural Revolution provided a radical milieu in which it became possible to discursively and in reality abolish the gendered role of women in the family. First, there was the redefining of women’s identity, and, secondly, the reorganization of the basic unit of society, the family. Jiang Qing’s emergence to control the Party propaganda machine was the product of this Cultural Revolution gender reorganization, and she in turn simultaneously guided and solidified this gender reorganization.


"Binbin is a typical girl’s name meaning “refined and courteous.” Yaowu is a masculine name meaning “want to be valiant.” Song Binbin put an armband with “Red Guard” in it around Mao’s arm when he received and greeted red guards on Tian’anmen on August 18, 1966. Mao told Song that Binbin is not a good name. “You should be called ‘want to be valiant.’” After this famous episode, there emerged a nationwide fad of young red guards changing their old style given names. Girls picked up this trend, changing their names with feminine connotation into revolutionary ones.
It is not my intention to rectify, politically or personally, the popular evaluation of Jiang Qing. I am not concerned with what Jiang Qing actually did to whom or whether she abused the power she had in the Cultural Revolution. Rather, my interest lies primarily in how her actions, when they did cross over a certain gendered behavioral line, have been interpreted and judged by post-Mao society as well as scholars of modern China. My interest also lies in the relationship between perceived female roles and their exercise of power in the public sphere. There exists an obvious double standard in looking, judging, even conceptualizing men's and women's roles in the Cultural Revolution. In this regard, I would like to point out that the extremely negative evaluation of Jiang Qing to date epitomizes a misogynist tradition that the CCP's women's liberation rhetoric has not been able to face down. One reason among others has been not directly addressing that tradition. Jiang Qing becomes a linguistic equivalent for everything evil in the Cultural Revolution: disastrous moral conduct, personal pettiness, malevolence, irresponsibility, cruelty, and jealousy. We see the reduction of historical analysis to misogynist projection and contempt: Jiang Qing

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*That the Cultural Revolution was a history of mainly personal antagonisms is the theme in Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao’s *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. D. W. Y. Kwok (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).*

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becomes the signifier, the hated object in which we can freely invest our righteous contempt for all that was wrong during a whole decade. She is the Cultural Revolution; she is held responsible for the upheaval and disaster. The Cultural Revolution is Jiang Qing because of her role in it."

How do we understand this kind of scholarly and cultural scapegoating for actual historical analysis? Jane Garlick has undertaken a feminist-historicist project which may guide us through this scholarly impasse. In her edited Stereotypes of Women in Power, Historical Perspective and Revisionist Views, Garlick uses two terms, "public" and "private," as a conceptual prism through which to understand the cultural roots for the demonization of women in power. It examines the ubiquity of the public/private paradigm, with its all-important gender components, preserving the division between the public world of political life and the private world of the family and emphasizes the consequences of crossing the boundaries. She points out that "freedom of movement from one sphere to the other was the male's prerogative, he who fathered children within the family and participated in the

political sphere outside." For a woman, it is a totally different story. The women who "did not honor the sharp boundary between the public and the private realms, who crossed over into a realm where it was thought they did not belong," appear as "perversions of good women, as either domineering dowagers or scheming concubines."

The public/private paradigm sets a double standard in which the actions of women are not considered according to the same criteria as those of men. Writes Garlick, "(e)ven though women seen as exercising or attempting power are subject to the same criticisms as men in their position, they are more likely in addition to be attacked for compromising their essential femininity." Posterity tends to depoliticize women's role by reinterpreting their actions in feminine terms, as motivated by sexuality, maternity, or feminine jealousy."

Fei Xiaotong, director of the Institute of Sociology under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was a member of the panel of judges of the Special Court in the trial of Jiang Qing in 1980. In reflecting on the trial which convicted Jiang Qing for her criminal acts in the Cultural

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3 Ibid., pp.4-5.

4 Ibid., p.6.
Revolution, he takes pains in explaining "one salient feature of this major trial." That was "the clear separation of what was legally criminal from what was political." Since the case was closely tied to a major political event, the Cultural Revolution, in which both Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing played an important part, Fei’s job was to "identify and distinguish what were errors of the political line from what were criminal violations of the law." Mao’s initiating and leading role in the Cultural Revolution was of a political nature, Fei explains. He was "a navigator who made an error and the ship enters hazardous waters, where there are treacherous shoals." Jiang Qing and the rest of the Gang of Four, on the other hand, were criminal, because they tried to "exploit the navigator’s error for their own despicable ends." Jiang Qing utilized the Cultural Revolution to persecute as many people as she could to settle her personal accounts with enemies, says Fei. Fei’s treatment of Jiang

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56 Ibid., p.2.
57 Ibid., p.3.
58 Fei gives an example of how Jiang Qing’s criminal acts were conducted. "When she was clawing her way up to become a leading power, she remembered that evidence of her unsavory past as an actress in Shanghai during the 1930’s could hurt her image." So she sent people "masquerading as ‘red guards’ to search and sack homes" in order to destroy the imagined evidence. See ibid., p.4.
Qing is characteristic of the tendency of posterity to "depoliticize" women's action. The Man is the political; the Woman represents the personal.

Jiang Qing's image is clearly built on the traditional Chinese image of the usurping concubine. Even the most sympathetic biography of Jiang Qing is replete with opprobrium reflecting this representation. The traditional animosity for usurping concubines who misuse their sexual position, conjoined with a hatred for domineering dowagers who misuse their official position to draw an image of a power-crazed, dangerous woman. She used her position, according to this representation, to pay back old scores of a personal character not to realize political convictions. A particular example raised was Jiang's bringing about the downfall of Wang Guangmei, Liu Shaoqi's wife, whom she publicly humiliated during the Cultural Revolution. This was represented as an act motivated by feminine jealousy. Jiang Qing's access to political power, as popularly viewed and legally interpreted, was gained through sex, as well as by trivializing and personalizing political issues. These were treated as intrinsic traits rather than manufactured stereotypes.

Jiang Qing's pioneering role in operatic reform has been looked at in this light: another instance in Chinese history of a vile woman interfering with politics and ruining the
welfare of the state. The feminist nature of model theater has therefore been neglected from its inception. The conflict over operatic reform in the early sixties, between the radicals represented by Jiang Qing and the conservative Party bureaucrats, has always been regarded as a political struggle within the Party. As a result of this politicization, the gendered nature of the conflict has been suppressed and denied. When Mao Zedong’s master discourse was re-interpreted in model theater by a woman with a strong feminist consciousness, distortion and subversion of that discourse was inevitable.

As the praxis of the first wave of Chinese feminist reformation of culture, the texts of Cultural Revolution model theater distinguish themselves from their original (pre-Cultural Revolution) versions by their conscious extraction of details in plots, traces in characters, and gestures in choreography that are associated with the domain of female sexuality. Romantic love, happy marriages, and sexual confrontation are eliminated. This barren look may account for model theater’s unrealness, but it can also be perceived as an ideal situation for women’s liberation.

The most notable feature in model theater that challenges the social sex-gender system is its portrayal of women. Major women characters act as agents in the public sphere as absolute equals with men. Moreover, they are free from their
gender assignments as mothers, wives, or sexual subordinates to men. Model theater represents its women as having escaped from their sexualized/eroticized body, from the enforced divisions of gender, from obligatory heterosexuality, and from the burden of mothering. It also works out solutions to construct a gender-free society, which interestingly enough are very much in line with some American feminists' visions of gender equality, for instance Nancy Chodorow's "equal parenting." Chodorow believes that "both men and women are responsible for children's maturity," and this "would be a tremendous social advantage." Equal parenting finds its Chinese counterpart in model theater. A neat pattern of "single-child-and-single-parent" families exists in model theater. In these families, the physical and political maturation of girls usually has been taken care of by fathers and influential uncles, while boys have mothers to parent them. With only the opposite-gendered parents as models, these boys and girls turn out to be nongendered beings. Thus they have shaken off the obligation of heterosexual marriages and freed themselves from the confinement of gender division.

In the next two chapters, I present my close reading of eight model plays to show that the diminishing of traditional gender traces in model theater women's images is the salient

character of its feminism. Model theater depicts a utopia where cultural androgyny is predominant.
CHAPTER 3
REVOLUTIONARY DAUGHTERS
--DAUGHTERS’ IMAGES IN “WHITE-HAIRED GIRL,” “RED DETACHMET OF WOMEN,” “THE RED LANTERN” AND “TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN BY STRATEGY”

In building new images of women, there is one sub-category of women which model theater emphasizes and it is that of daughters. As feminist critic Elisabeth Croll points out in her study of Chinese women’s images, “(a)ll women begin life as daughters, and young girls, perhaps more than any other social category, are concentratedly socialized into and subjected to rhetorical imperatives in order that they become ‘women.’”¹ As Simone de Beauvoir so succinctly and memorably stated in the opening lines of The Second Sex, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.”² Indeed, daughters, as a social category, are in the process of constant becoming. Young girls are daughters because they are situated in a set of social relations, especially with their


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parents. Daughters become women traditionally in China, as Croll points out, through marriage.¹

In the following pages, I will center my discussion on the images of daughters constructed in the model theater. These daughters are nothing but extraordinary vis-a-vis the traditional Chinese concept. Experiencing a unique form of socialization, model theater daughters take a different route to their maturity. While redefining their daughterhood, they grow into a special kind of womanhood that traditional definitions cannot encompass.


The original opera "The White-Haired Girl" (hereafter WHG) that the Cultural Revolution model ballet is based upon, was first produced in 1945 by a group of CCP's wenyi gongzuozhe (workers of literature and art) after Mao Zedong's "Yan'an Talks" which set the tone for the official CCP's

¹Croll, p. 6.
policy on literature and art. In order to understand the revised model ballet's feminist nature, we have to discuss the original opera.

The opera is set in the latter half of the 1930s and relates the tragic story of a poor peasant girl, Xi'er. Her father, Yang Bailao, works for the vicious landlord Huang Shiren. Unable to pay his grain rent and an accumulated cash debt, Yang is forced in his confusion and bewilderment to sign a contract, promising to give his daughter to the Huang family as payment. Yang, in desperation, commits suicide, whereupon Xi'er is forcibly taken away by the Huang family. Wang Dachun, Xi'er's betrothed, runs away and joins the Eighth Route Army led by the Chinese Communist Party. Xi'er is cruelly treated in the Huang family and is raped by Huang Shiren. Seven months later, after Xi'er has become pregnant, Huang decides to sell her to a brothel to the surprise of Xi'er who expects that Huang will marry her. On learning Huang's scheme at his wedding, she escapes from the

"The popular legend, or dramatized reality, underlying WHG was explained by one of its original writers, He Jingzhi. He recalled that stories about a "white-haired goddess" were making the rounds in the northwestern part of Hebei province in the 1940s, then under the control of the Communist Eighth Route Army. For the history of the writing and revising of the legendary story into a literary production, see Meng Yue's insightful discussion on the CCP's appropriation of the story, making it an artistic representation of class struggle in her article "<Baimao nu> yu 'Yan'an wenxue' de lishi fuza xing ['The White-Haired Girl' and Historical Complexity of 'Yan'an Literature']" in Jintian, No. 1, (1993), 171-188."
landlord's household and flees to the wild mountains, where she gives birth to Huang's child who later dies. For more than two years, Xi'er exists like an animal in a mountain cave, hiding from human community. This hard life, and the lack of salt in her diet, turns her hair completely white. The villagers who encounter her take her to be an apparition. Finally a detachment of the Eighth Route Army led by Wang Dachun comes to her rescue. The village is liberated, the landlord Huang Shiren is executed. Liberated Xi'er will marry Dachun, and they will live happily ever after. Always considered a masterpiece of "socialist realism," the opera and the 1951 film version vividly bring out the CCP's didactic message: "The old society forced human beings to turn into ghosts; the new society changes ghosts back into human beings."

The first critique of WHG after the Cultural Revolution was by Meng Yue in her 1993 article "'The White-Haired Girl' and the Historical Complexity of 'Yan'an Literature.'" In her reading of the text and in her theorizing, Meng Yue goes beyond previous studies of WHG that have been trapped in narrow political frameworks. Building a three-stage historiography of WHG, Meng insightfully draws out the hidden cultural similarities between the CCP's class struggle rhetoric and traditional Chinese popular value systems. She

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5 Meng Yue, p. 177.
demonstrates how the CCP appropriates the popular tradition to attain popular legitimacy that serves its own political ends. In the CCP's literary discourse, class is less a socioeconomic concept than a moral one. Class struggle, as Meng looks at it, is a direct adaptation of the traditional popular discourse of the struggle between the moral and the immoral. The disturbance of the moral order causes injustice and is the reason for social conflicts—class struggle in the CCP rhetoric.

The popular ideal of social and familial harmony presented in WHG permeates, for example, the relationships between father Yang Bailao and daughter Xi'er, between betrothed Xi'er and Wang Dachun. The relations between father and daughter, and between betrothed are naturally moral for they represent the ideal familial relations. The landlord Huang Shiren, on the other hand, is mean and evil. An outsider to these harmonious relations, he breaks in, destroying the moral ideal. Thus, he is construed as a symbol of anti-order or disorder. A line demarcating classes is drawn and he becomes a class enemy. Meng Yue then goes on to conclude that the political discourse of class (she interprets it as the division between the moral and the immoral) and class struggle (which she interprets as the victimized fighting for justice) in the "Yan'an Talks," as
embodied in WHG is grounded in the traditional "popular moral order," "minjian lunli zhixu."  

However, Meng Yue's account of WHG stops short, or further still, is uncritical of the nature of the traditional popular moral order and social justice. If we dissect moral justice, this seemingly impartial concept, we will find out that its very impartiality lies in biased concepts of justice paraphrased as "adjustment of conflicting claims." I would argue, that essentially speaking, this "popular moral order" is built upon as well as reflects the traditional Chinese notion of value. The traditional value system is an ideological derivation of Chinese traditional sex-gender system.

William Galston makes very explicit the logic of a rightfully or justifiably distributive understanding of justice. Justice, he says, "involves an ensemble of possession." That means that justice is not a mere abstract concept. It has its material base, and in this sense, "justice concerns the proper pattern of the allocation of entities" among people in any given society. Every society has its own pattern of distributing properties. The violation of the pattern will be considered unjust. He

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*Ibid., p.177.*

'This is one of the definitions of "justice" in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.*

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further clarifies that "the domain of entities may include objects, qualities, positions within a system, or even human beings." 

Galston's explanation of the nature of justice is very much in line with Gayle Rubin's thesis that patriarchal society has been built upon the traffic in women. My synthesis of the two theses reveals that the concept of social moral justice built upon so-called "morally proper distribution of benefit and wealth among society's members" has been primarily constructed on the fair distribution of women by men. Women and their bodies are a part of social wealth. The justice system has a set of rules to guarantee the fair transaction and rightful possession of women. As Iris Marion Young points out, justice "presupposes family structure, without asking how social relations involving the legitimacy of authority, sexuality, intimacy...ought best to be organized." That is to say that people tend to presume that the units among which fair distribution take place are families. Thus by justifying the fairness in kinship and

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9 That women are a part of social wealth in a warped way sustains the CCP's concept of class. It is not much deviated from Marxist concept of class, the distinction between the haves and have-nots.


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marital relations, people "neglect issues of justice within families, neglect the issue of gender."\footnote{Young, p. 27.}

In WHG, Xi’er is the center of the plot, but she is not the acting agent. The story is structured not around her, but around the ownership of her. Yang Bailao, the father, is assumed to rightfully own the authority to distribute Xi’er. He is presented as being wrongly treated because his father’s authority in his daughter has been violated. Yang Bailao is hopelessly victimized not only because he has lost his daughter to the evil landlord, but also because his fatherhood has been dissolved. The ultimate guilt that drives him to suicide comes from his despair over his own failure as a father -- including his inability to give the daughter away in marriage in his own way. He fails to live up to the contract with Wang Dachun. Thus, Yang Bailao’s suicide does not only represent the social injustice, it is also a symbolic necessity in terms of his social-gender identity. As an actor in this dramatic conflict over the ownership of Xi’er, he is beaten, deprived of his father’s authority. Since his daughter has been taken away, his relational role as a father is no longer relevant. He has been deprived of his socially structured meaning of existence in the conflict.
Wang Dachun's loss of Xi'er has more significance to the structure of the narrative than Yang Bailao's loss of Xi'er. That his claim over Xi'er, blessed by Yang Bailao, is taken away not only means he has lost his love (possession), but more importantly, his manhood, a loss that nonetheless makes him a hero. His rancor toward Huang Shiren causes him to leave his native village to join the Communist Eighth Route Army in order to seek revenge. After years in the army, he returns home, settles his account with Huang Shiren, thus regaining possession of Xi'er. Wang Dachun gets back what is rightfully his and justice is restored. The morally sound class wins the class struggle. Huang Shiren's injustice in that he destabilizes the familial order; his destruction of the relations between father and daughter, between fiance and fiancee, his interference with the transaction, and his rape of Xi'er are the ultimate violation of moral justice.

So in this narrative structure, Xi'er, or rather Xi'er's body, becomes the carrier of social justice, the trigger of fierce social conflict, and a site on which the discourse of class struggle is constructed. Indeed, the fight over the control of a woman's body and sexuality is enacted in the drama as a fierce class struggle. With the loss and

"Boys's leaving their native land is an allegorically necessary step for them to construct their manhood. Propp's work *Morphology of Folklore* exerts great influence on my conceptualization of the action of leaving as a construction of social adulthood."
regaining of Xi’er, the CCP demarcates the old society from the new one: the old society destroys the rightful ownership of Xi’er who becomes a dirty, evasive ghost. The new society takes revenge restoring the popular social order symbolized by Wang Dachun’s return to his village and his marriage to Xi’er. It is not difficult to discern the underlying message: only when women and men are happily married, will social order prevail.

The Cultural Revolution ballet version of “The White-Haired Girl,” adapted from the opera, made its Beijing debut on April 30, 1966, for the May Day celebration. After more than two years of continuous revising and rehearsing under the direct guidance of Jiang Qing, this ballet was acclaimed a model for revolutionizing the foreign art form of ballet.\footnote{Guangming ribao, 4/30/66, p.3.}

The ballet WHG keeps close to the original story line, but the plot is much thinner and the characters more abstract. The most obvious change is that: Yang Bailao, the father, does not commit suicide, but in the spirit of revolt fights against his oppressors and is beaten to death. Similarly Xi’er is changed into an embodiment of hatred, the spirit of revenge. She is treated cruelly in the ballet version of the story but is not sexually assaulted by Huang Shiren. Wang Dachun’s significance fades and he becomes just another of Xi’er’s class brothers with no romantic relationship with
Xi’er. In the epilogue, Xi’er picks up a gun and joins the ranks of the Eighth Route Army to carry on the eternal revolution of the proletariat. As such, she becomes a symbol of that class.

The simplification of the story, the "over politicization" of the theme, and particularly the abstraction of characters reveal the most dynamic concept contained in the ballet WHG: class is the only social category within which people function. The class discourse overwhelms and replaces "non-politicized ethical concepts, moral principles," and consequently "the entertainment value." Class discourse coercively eliminates the authoritative status of the traditional popular culture of the original version." As we argued above, social, ethical, and moral values belong to the domain of the sex-gender system. Examining closely the original and ballet versions, we find that it is the traditional kinship relations that are eliminated in the latter. The relations between Yang Bailao and Xi’er and between Xi’er and Wang Dachun are given more of a class dynamic. What is more dynamic is that the class excludes the sexual. Huang Shiren's sexual oppression of Xi’er in the original version is deleted in the ballet. They are only class enemies. Xi’er’s previous vulnerability as a woman, a body, disappears. Her rape and pregnancy are

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"Meng Yue, p. 186."
excised. Sexual or simply romantic elements are eliminated. Xi’er is no longer a betrothed daughter to be raped, nor a mother giving birth to a dead child, nor a ghost waiting to be liberated. Structurally speaking, the deletion of the female body enables Xi’er to gain equality with the members of her class.

The simplification of the plot has been achieved, as we have already seen, from abstracting the characters, especially Xi’er. Abstracting involves two aspects: one is that she is disassociated from any specific instance of being an ordinary woman, and the other one is idealization. The definition adequately explains Xi’er’s scenario: when a woman is disassociated from her sexualized body and the gendered functions derived from her body, she can be an agent. She is not a daughter, not a wife, not a mother, not a sex object. The abstraction functions indispensably in making Xi’er an acting agent to carry on the class struggle, rather than an objectified interface between male desire and class struggle. The abstraction makes it possible for her to take up the gun to fight for her own class instead of posing alongside Wang Dachun as a subordinate wife.

Consequently, the abstraction of Xi’er “weakens the entertainment value.” The ballet pays more attention to the post-traumatic consciousness of Xi’er, instead of centering

\[\text{Meng, p.186.}\]
on the representation of her suffering as in the original. The vivid description of the cruelty and viciousness of the landlord in the original, has been changed, thanks partially to the dance form of ballet, to be but the pitiful, helpless and ridiculous gestures of defeated clowns. Because the description of her suffering has been reduced, Xi’er takes over the stage not as a victim, but as the omnipotent proletarian heroine in the class struggle. Woman as agent means the destruction of an active/passive heterosexual division of labor in the narrative structure of the play. Thus, it “disrupts the preexisting patterns of fascination of pleasure” which has been built upon the sexualizing and victimizing of women. And deconstruction of pleasure is a radical weapon for feminism.”

The ballet, “The Red Detachment of Women” (hereafter RDW) reiterates the basic theme of WHG: how a poor peasant’s daughter becomes a staunch communist. While the ballet version of WHG dissolves the familial relations allowing woman to be an acting agent, RDW endeavors to present the ideal situation for girl’s maturation into social adulthood. The most popular among the model plays, RDW sets up a perfect

model of experimentation in the combination of a foreign art form and the CCP's ideology.

The ballet RDW was revised from a 1960 film. As the title suggests, the ballet deals with two themes overlapping with each other, that of class struggle—the color red represents the proletarian class—and that of women's liberation. The plot involves a daughter of a poor peasant in the 1930s when China was under Nationalist rule. The girl, Wu Qinghua, is enslaved as a bond maid in the household of landlord Nan Batian. Viciously beaten by the evil landlord and his "running dogs" (his followers), she has tried several times to escape. Finally with the help of her friends, she succeeds in running away. On her way she encounters a man who turns out to be a political commissar in the CCP-led Red Army. The man shows great sympathy towards her and directs her to the camp of a Red Women's fighting force. Wu Qinghua's search for home and for liberation, for her utopian dreams, is fulfilled when she finally finds the red flag of the army. The climax scene of the play is very moving: "Red flag? Wu stares at the rippling banner with deep emotion." Dressed in red herself, "Wu staggers forward and presses it against her cheek. Tears roll down her face."
‘Red flag, oh, red flag, today I’ve found you!...’ *1 Joining the army marks a new life for her. Tempered by class struggle, full of fire and blood, Wu Qinghua finally becomes a conscious proletarian soldier; she becomes the Party representative with the women’s detachment.

For the most part, the characterization of the central heroine in the play, Wu Qinghua, resembles that of Xi’er in WHG. It reflects, I think, a high-level of feminist intervention in the artistic creation of a communist woman. Wu Qinghua is one of the laboring people who have suffered bitterly in the old society. Her sufferings caused by the landlord are portrayed as collective experience shared by other peasant women who are always at her side. Consequently, she has an instinctive drive to fight back. The ballet aims to “depict her resistance and struggles.” *2 From the very beginning, Wu Qinghua emits a fighting spirit. Chained to a post so that she won’t run away again from the landlord’s household, she “stood with chest and head high; her eyes blazing with hatred. If only she could smash the bloody shackles which bond her and wreck the lair of these man-eating beasts!” *3 Her strong class feeling often makes


*Ibid., p.126.

*Ibid., p.130.

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her forget her painful injuries, urging her to fight the tyrant to the end.

Unlike WHG, however, RDW does not let Wu's militancy and fighting spirit go unexamined. While in WHG, Xi'er's class hatred is treated as a liberating drive that prompts her to join the revolutionary army, here in RDW, Wu's rashness and impetuosity as a revolutionary soldier are criticized and repudiated. The play presents the twisted path a woman soldier takes to become mature socially and politically.

After Wu joins the red army, she is sent on a scouting mission into the landlord's headquarters, where she comes upon the hateful man. Unable to control herself, she shoots him, thus prematurely giving her comrades the signal to attack. Although victorious in the ensuing skirmish, the detachment fails to capture the landlord who, only wounded, makes his escape. To discipline her for her rashness, the heroine's pistol is taken away; she receives it back only when she realizes that making revolution is much more than just settling personal scores.

The development of the character of the heroine suggests that simple aggressiveness does not necessarily lead to liberation. Her hatred towards her class enemies, which causes her desire to fight, is instinctive and immature. Success in class struggle lies in personal and political maturity. Joining the revolutionary army does not
necessarily mean that Wu is already a mature revolutionary fighter; this is gained only after overcoming narrow individualism. After she is criticized for not being a conscious proletarian soldier, she comes to understand that "Only by emancipating all humankind can the proletariat achieve its own final emancipation." She vows that she will fight all her life for the liberation of humankind. From this point on she is redeemed and in future struggles and battles, she maintains proper discipline. The Red Army soon liberates all the oppressed peasants, and Wu personally kills the landlord and succeeds the dead hero, Hong Changqing, as party representative.

What seems to be a main theme of the play reveals itself through Wu's process of political maturation: women's true emancipation can only be achieved through taking part in the class struggle led by the Communist Party. Individuals should sacrifice themselves for the good of the communist course. With thousands and thousands of such self-sacrificing fighters, the communist cause will win in the end, benefiting both the working class and women. The male character Hong Changqing, the political commissar, is portrayed as politically perfect, in contrast to Wu's naivete. After he is captured by the enemy as the result of Wu's violation of discipline, he displays courage and heroism.

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18 Ibid., p. 141.
when he is burned to death by the class enemies. Something
of a Christ figure, he dies in order to arouse followers.

This part of the plot and presentation in the play is
most problematic for my feminist hermeneutics. The paradigm
of the Party liberating women is certainly dominant here. On
the surface it seems that RDW endorses the Party’s leadership
in women’s emancipation. My argument here is that since
ideology is socially and culturally determined, Chinese
feminism in the 70’s could not escape from the social
discourse it was enmeshed in. However, we can argue that for
women to become social adults, a prerequisite for women’s
liberation, they must enter into the political where social
power and agency lie. For women, the means of entering into
the political is degendering. Women have to be stripped off
their socialized pettiness, naivete and their narrow selves
to be recognized as politically mature. Only when those
socially constructed attributes of femininity are eliminated,
can women be treated as mature adults. The Party’s role in
women’s liberation is modified here. The Party directs women
into the public and the political, and women’s entry into the
political, in turn, enables them to be the representatives of
the Party. This image of the Party is an ideal one for
women, because it does not ask women to be revolutionaries
and wives at the same time as the CCP did in reality.
The text's subversive feminist nature can also be seen when the Party's liberation of women scene in the ballet is set against the original cinematic version of the play. The ballet omits an important story line and an important woman character from the original.

There are two story lines in the film. One is about the main character Wu Qionghua, a slave girl about to be sold to a brothel by her master.² Qionghua manages to escape from the cell where she is being held with the help of a handsome man who later turns out to be the Party representative. The romantic attraction between the two grows as the story progresses.

The second plot line follows Hong Lian, a woman clad in men's clothes whom Wu Qionghua meets on her way to the red base areas. Hong Lian dresses herself as a man because she is afraid of sexual assault. She relates to Wu that she is about to escape from her in-laws' to the red base areas. Because of a long-ago arranged marriage, Hong was forced to marry a wooden figure symbolizing the dead boy she was betrothed to. "This is my husband." She shows the wooden figure to Wu. "I got married when I was ten year old. Since then, I have been sleeping with this wooden corpse for ten

² In the original version, the given name of the main character is "Qionghua" meaning "beautiful jade flower," a very feminine name. It is changed, in the model ballet, into "Qinghua" a gender-neutral name with a lofty meaning, I think, of "purifying China."
years. Do I still count as a live women?" So both women, Wu suffering from physical and sexual oppression and Hong from an arranged marriage, have escaped and found the red base areas. It is there that Hong Lian unites with her lover of many years, Feng Ahgui, and happily marries him and eight months later gives birth to a girl. In the red base areas ruled by the CCP, Hong Lian becomes a woman. It is obvious that in the cinematic version, among various kinds of motivations that drive women to join the revolution, a happy marriage is one. So in this sense, as in the opera WHG, RDW depicts women's oppression as principally sexual. And it is this sexual oppression that is, in my view, the most problematic.

Gender theory tells us that female sexuality in its different forms is one of the reasons for women's social subordination. So when women are looked at primarily as sexual and sexually subordinate, they are not liberated. The question here is not that women should not be represented as claiming their sexual freedom, only that before they do it, they must first destroy the traditional concept of the sexual. They have to break the shackle of the sexual to free themselves. Hong Lian's liberation, as the film shows, is in the sexual realm in the form of choosing her own husband.

"Zhongguo dianying juben xuanji (Selected Scripts of Chinese Films) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chuban she, 1963), p. 104."
Hong Lian represents the ideal liberated woman the CCP's women's platform aims to construct: she is revolutionary and feminine. The CCP has saved her from inhuman treatment resulting from her arranged marriage. In return, she becomes the wife of a revolutionary and the mother of a future revolutionary. This revolutionary wife and mother Hong Lian disappears in the ballet. Jiang Qing was directly responsible for deleting this character on account of her "plainness of character," so she cannot represent revolutionary women.\textsuperscript{23} The omission of this character in the ballet more clearly delineates the relationship between the Party and women. In negotiating with the Party on the issue of the sphere for liberated women, RDW locates liberation in the public, in the political, not in reformed kinship or reformed marriage, which point to the redomestication of women, as in the film version.

In order to better understand the significance of the omission of Hong Lian, it is worthwhile to introduce Marxist literary theorist Pierre Macherey's "symptomatic" approach to the literary text, which seeks to disclose the "lack" in the work. Macherey sees a text as composed of two parts: the explicit, which is what the work says, and the implicit.

\textsuperscript{23} See "Jiang Qing's Directives on the Ballet Dance-drama 'The Red Detachment of Women,'" in Chung Hua-min. 	extit{Jiang Qing zhengzhuan} (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1967), p. 109.
which is what the work cannot say or does not like to say. "The explicit requires the implicit," Macherey says. That is "in order to say something, there are other things which must not be said." He continues to explain that "[s]peech eventually has nothing to tell us. We investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking."

"Meaning," continues Macherey, "is in the relation between the implicit and the explicit."

In the ballet version of RDW, Wu Qinghua’s maturation under the guidance of the Party can be said to be the explicit, while Hong Lian’s story is the implicit that is silenced. Thus, according to Macherey’s dialectic, the omitted, the unarticulated, becomes the valuable means of detecting that which threatens and undermines the text’s overt project. By omitting Hong Lian’s story, the ballet interrogates the CCP ideology of women’s liberation by avoiding a direct challenge to that ideology. While the Party’s role in the political emancipation of women is recognized and praised, its role to domesticate women, to reinforce women’s gender roles of being wives and mothers becomes an unsaid in the text.


Ibid., p. 86.

Ibid., p. 87.
The revelation of the "unsaid" in texts is one of the purposes of feminist readings. The unsaid might be thought of as an unspoken subtext, "which by its very telling silence, interrogates and undermines what is represented by the dominant message of the text."

To undo Hong Lian's story is to interrogate the social context of the CCP's women's liberation platform.

3.2. Growing up as Revolutionary Daughters: Model Operas "The Red Lantern" and "Taking the Tiger Mountain by Strategy"

The major theme of the maturation of the heroine in the ballet "The Red Detachment of Women" is repeated and elaborated in the model Beijing opera, "Red Lantern." The opera made its debut in March 1964, presented by the China

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Beijing Opera Academy, then went through a long process of revision before it was accepted as a model opera in 1970.¹⁸

The story takes place in an enemy-held city during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945). Li Yuhe, a railway switchman, is a member of the CCP and a seasoned underground worker. He and his "mother" Granny Li and "daughter" Li Tiemei are actually from three different families, thrown together during the February 7, 1923 railway strike, when the workers rose to oppose the northern warlords for their slaughter of striking workers. From his superiors in the Party, Li Yuhe receives a secret code which he must deliver to the guerrillas in the Cypress Mountains. Before he can fulfill his mission, however, he is betrayed to the chief of the Japanese gendarme, Hatoyama. Hatoyama invites him to a "feast," tries persuasion and threats and then arrests and tortures him to make him give up the code. But

¹⁸The model Beijing opera "The Red Lantern" is a revised version of the film "Ziyou houlairen" [Naturally There Will Be Successors], and a screen play "Sandairen" [Three Generations]. A composite version of these plays provided the basis for a Shanghai opera, "The Red Lantern," which would be adapted into a Beijing opera. A different Beijing opera version based on the movie "Ziyou houlairen" was also staged in 1964 at the National Festival of Beijing Opera on Contemporary Themes. This opera was presented by the Harbin Beijing Opera Troupe under the title "Naturally There Will Be Successors." See Guangming ribao, May 31, 1964, p.1. For a detailed discussion on the differences between "Naturally There Will Be Successors" and the model Beijing opera "The Red Lantern," see Keng Chien's article "Critique of the film "Naturally There Will Be Successors," in Chinese Literature, No.1 (1973), pp. 78-87.
Li Yuhe meets the enemy with unflinching courage. Both at the feast and on the execution ground, Li stands up to Hatoyama with righteous rage. At his wit's end, Hatoyama executes Li Yuhe and his mother, Granny Li. Li's daughter, Tiemei, takes over the mission from her martyred father. Led by the Party and helped by her neighbors, she succeeds in delivering the secret code to the guerrillas.

Colin Mackerras in his article "Chinese Opera after the Cultural Revolution" highlights the differences between the original opera version and the model version:

The original Peking opera version had watered down Li Yuhe's communist ideals, made him share prominence with Granny Li and Tiemei, and emphasized his family relationship with the two women. The new version stresses his heroism much more strongly, shows his warm feelings for the masses much more sharply and reduces the roles of Granny Li and Tiemei to those of giving play to the heroism of the central character. It is always Li Yuhe who holds the initiative and not the subordinate characters; certainly never Hatoyama, as was sometimes the case in the earlier version. The main point is to emphasize the heroism of the main character and to show his consciousness of class struggle and attachment to Chairman Mao and the Party.  

While Mackerras' evaluation is obviously influenced by

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the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, he is correct in pointing out that family relations are much less emphasized in the model version. But this de-emphasis of family relations does not manifest itself in Li Yuhe's relations with the two women. Actually, the play portrays a family where kinship and bloodline seem irrelevant to its meaning and harmony, which calls into question the traditional Chinese thought on familial relations. The three generations are tied together by class. Li Yuhe is not placed in the role of a son and so has no filial obligations. Before he is executed, he tells Tiemei that

People say that family love outweighs all else,
But class love is greater yet, I know.10

The central conflict between Li Yuhe and Hatoyama as demonstrated in Scene Six, "Struggling Against Hatoyama at the Feast," accentuates Li Yuhe's further departure from traditional Chinese culture. Hatoyama, portrayed both as an imperialist invader and an upholder of Chinese tradition, employs his learning in Chinese culture, particularly Buddhism and Taoism, to counter Li Yuhe's class concepts, but to no avail. Hatoyama later tries to blackmail Granny Li using familial love as a ruse. Pointing to the execution ground, he says to Granny Li:

—— Chinese Literature, No. 8 (1970), 45.
This is where your son will ascend to heaven! When a man has committed a crime and his mother refuses to save his life when she has it in her power, don’t you think she is cruel?"'

That it is not based on tradition or traditional familial values makes Li’s relation with his mother and daughter extraordinary. "Red Lantern" conveys the idea that family relationships are fundamentally a class relationship, the same theme we find in the ballet WHG.

Even though Li Yuhe’s pivotal role in highlighting the uncommon bond among the three generations is important, structurally speaking, he is not the opera’s central character. Li Yuhe may be the most heroic figure in the play, but he is more of a legend, a spectacle, since he dies midway through the play. As the title suggests, the play develops around the red lantern, around which has been built a complicated story. The significance of the red lantern which Li Yuhe carries, and the extraordinary composition of the family, are constructed as an enigma that the daughter Tiemei seeks to unravel. Throughout the play, contrary to what Mackerras writes, it is Tiemei with whom the audience most connects, and her perspective with which it most identifies.

"Ibid., p.42."
In her first appearance on stage, the seventeen year-old Tiemei is a naive but inquisitive investigator. The uncommon nature of her family baffles her when she is told that "an uncle [one of the communist liaison men] is coming." She wonders what this uncle looks like and why she has more uncles than she can count. When the uncle, the liaison man, finally comes, the red lantern becomes the means of identifying true comrades. "Tiemei takes the red lantern, becomes aware of its significance."^3

Scene Five, "Recounting the Family's Revolutionary History," contains two episodes that are vital to Tiemei. Before Li Yuhe's arrest, Granny Li tells Tiemei the story of the red lantern: "For many years this lantern has lighted the way for us poor people, for us workers.... We can't do without it at crucial moments. Remember, this red lantern is our family treasure." Upon learning the significance of the red lantern, Tiemei starts to mature:

Granny has told me the story of the red lantern,
The words are few, but meaning is deep.
Why are my father and uncle not afraid of danger?
Because they want to save China,
Save the poor, defeat the Japanese invaders.
I realize I should act as they do,
And be a person like them.
I am seventeen, no longer a child.

^3Ibid., p. 10.

^3Ibid., p. 13.
I should share my father's worries. 
If he's carrying a thousand-pound load, 
I should carry eight hundred." 

The second episode occurs after Li Yuhe's arrest. Granny reveals to Tiemei "everything about our family." The story recounts how seventeen years earlier Li Yuhe escaped the slaughter of strikers by coming to Granny Li, his master's wife. "In his left hand he held this very signal lantern," and "in his right arm he held a baby," none other than Tiemei, Li's murdered comrade's child. This child is destined to "carry on the revolution," that is to carry the red lantern in this newly formed family. After Granny discloses the true family history, Tiemei becomes mature:

Granny tells a heroic and stirring episode of the revolution. 
Now I know I was raised in wind and rain. 
Dear Granny, for all those seventeen years, 
Your kindness to me has been vast as the sea. 
Now with high aims I see my way clear. 
Blood must pay for our blood. 
Successors must carry forward the cause of our martyrs. 
Here I raise the red lantern, let its light shine far. 
Dad! 
My father is as steadfast as the pine, 
A Communist who fears nothing under the sun. 
Following in your footsteps I shall never waver. 
The red lantern we hold high, and it shines

" Ibid., pp. 21-2. 
" Ibid., p.29.
On my father fighting those wild beasts.
Generation after generation we shall fight on,
Never leaving the field until all the wolves are
ekilled."

It is clear here that Granny Li's revelation of the truth has
a double effect. First it links Tiemei to the red lantern:
as a future revolutionary, she has to keep the red lantern
burning. Secondly, Tiemei is the interpretive device that
makes the story accessible to the audience. Only when Tiemei
knows all these secrets, does the audience understand the
plot. In this sense, Tiemei is the central character who
does the narration and solves the riddles. Thus, this
narrative structure shows a reversed pattern of a split
between narrator and spectacle. If Laura Mulvey is correct
in pointing out that in general, "(a)ctive/passive
heterosexual division of labor has similarly controlled
narrative structure," and in this structure, "the man's role
as the active one of advancing the story, making things
happen," and the audience "identifies with the main male
protagonist," then Tiemei who acts as a narrator represents
a reversed heterosexual division of labor in the narrative
structure of "The Red Lantern." Tiemei's role in the story

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"Ibid., p. 30.
is an active one to advance the story. She is the protagonist in the play.

Tiemei’s instrumental role in the play is to highlight family relations, to sort out the family history, and to find the truth behind the facade. She serves not only as a link between the play and the audience, but also as a structural link within the story. It is Tiemei who first realizes the importance of the red lantern. She finds out that the red lantern is a talisman of the revolution; it represents the ideal of self-sacrifice and the spiritual bond between revolutionaries. The red lantern is also a touchstone for virtue and evil; it helps Tiemei distinguish the virtuous from the evil. The red lantern is used as a signal which only the true communist liaison men recognize. Bogus Liaison Man, the play shows, fails to recognize it so Tiemei knows what his true identity is. Tiemei gives the central meaning to the play which is in a sense about the passing of the red lantern from one generation to the next. In this narrative structure, Li Yuhe serves as the pretext which connects Tiemei and the red lantern, both of which he has saved from slaughter.

The play also shows that the revelation of her natal relation with the red lantern concomitantly marks Tiemei’s maturity. The denouement unfolds the central theme of the play: a revolutionary daughter’s rite of passage into
maturity, into adulthood, not as a wife through marriage, but as a staunch revolutionary.

Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, describes the archetypal journey of the hero towards his maturity. A human being’s inner development toward maturity, according to Campbell, occurs in three stages: the departure, the initiation and the return. Even though Campbell’s understanding of the basic spiritual and psychological archetype of human life has been limited by the assumption that the hero and central character of the myth or story is male, I find it useful to juxtapose the daughters’ development with the young men’s in order to see the making of women as heroes in model theater. The departure into adventure starts, according to Campbell, when “a blunder reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood.”

With regard to departing the innocence of childhood and facing a disastrous world, Tiemei shares an experience with Xi’er in WHG and Wu Qinghua in RDW, and Chang Bao in “Taking the Tiger Mountain by Strategy” which we will discuss below. All of these daughters are more or less located outside the protective environment of the home, be it a physical place or a psychological shelter.

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And since the sacred protectiveness of home is destroyed, they are left in the open, facing the dangerous world which in model theater lexicon is called "fierce class struggle." It offers these daughters the opportunity to develop qualities such as courage, skill, and independence, which would atrophy in a protected environment. "Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous form, where he must survive a succession of trials, tests and ordeals." This is the initiation or the road of trials. Model plays are careful to show that such qualities do not spring full blown from the protagonists' heads, but are developed as responses to the demands and challenges of experience. Tiemei maintains her courage and emotional control in the most trying and dangerous circumstances. "In a vocabulary of more modern turn: this is the process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past."^39

The last scenes of these plays usually celebrate the successful return of the heroines, back into their community, "where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation...."^40 "The Red Lantern" ends with the completion of Tiemei's heroic journey and a scene of ecstatic

^39 Ibid., p.97.

^40 Ibid., p.101.

^41 Ibid., p. 193.

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celebration of her return to the revolutionary family: "(s)olemnly, Tiemei hands the code to the guerrilla leader. Brandishing their rifles and swords, all rejoice in their victory. Tiemei holds aloft the red lantern while crimson light radiates. The curtain slowly falls."41

There is little question that "The Red Lantern" focuses more on Tiemei's growth than Li Yuhe's martyrdom. However in most other readings of this play, exemplified by Colin Mackerras's quoted above, the hegemonic ideology requires us to situate male—a socially, politically, and ideologically powerful subgroup of the people—as the central focus of representation. With this logic, women are seen as secondary characters, important only as aids of the male character. The unwillingness to recognize women as protagonists results not from the text itself, but from the widespread belief expressed by theater critics and also by audience approval that women characters are usually subordinated to male characters. The reception of these plays, not the intentions of the authors', becomes its own text. Tiemei does not qualify as the protagonist unless the gendered ideology of female images can be questioned by critics or by the audience. Tiemei seems unfitted to be the protagonist precisely because her depiction contradicts female images the gendered ideology has stereotyped.

A relatively recent study on Chinese women's life experiences by Elisabeth Croll shows that the heroic girls model theater portrays do exist in real life. Croll records "the events that were memorable precisely because they involved daughters in the crossing of gender boundaries to become 'boys of girls' (girls behave like boys). They entered male spaces normally or hitherto denied them and a few were even dressed and addressed as boys in their childhood. The accumulated effects of these categories of moments signified female difference, secondariness and defiance of conventional routes to womanhood."

A daughter's growth and maturity established upon the loss or the absence of the mother is another implicit theme in model theater. The model Beijing opera "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy" (hereafter TTMS) delineates this theme. The play was rewritten several times. Based on a 1957 novel by Qu Bo, Tracks in the Snowy Forest, this revolutionary

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"Croll, (1995), pp. 6-7."
opera took its final shape in 1969 after being "carefully revised, perfected and polished to the last detail." 

The plot of TTMS centers around the shrewdness, skill and nerve of Yang Zirong, a People's Liberation Army (PLA) scout. The "strategy" to which the new title refers is his infiltration of the bandit headquarters on Tiger Mountain. Disguised as a bandit and with a convincing cover story, Yang brings with him a much-coveted secret Contact Map and is accepted by "Vulture," the chief of the bandits. He persuades the commander that his mountain retreat is unassailable, and when the Nationalist soldiers celebrate their chief's fiftieth birthday Yang manages to get them all drunk. He has also persuaded them to light up the mountain with torches for the celebration of the "hundred chickens feast," a signal for the People's Liberation Army to overrun the headquarters, which they do, of course, successfully.

To this virtually all male play, the model theater version adds an important female character, Chang Bao. The revised story relates how while pursuing the bandits, Yang

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Zirong runs into Hunter Chang. The latter recognizes Yang, who has saved his child, and gets to know his true identity: a PLA soldier. Hunter Chang and his daughter, who bitterly hate the bandit chief Vulture, are unable to hold back their pent-up anger in front of their newly acquainted class "kith and kin." Chang Bao, who till then has pretended to be a mute and disguised herself as a boy, sobs as she denounces the bandit for his crimes.

Disaster struck one snowy night eight years ago,
Eagle killed my grandma and took off my ma and pa;
Uncle Dashan raised me in Jiapi Valley, my pa came back,
But my ma throw herself off a cliff and died;
Afraid I'd fall into those devils's hands,
Pa dressed me as a boy and said I was mute;
We hunted in the mountains during the day,
At night we thought of grandma and ma;
We looked at the stars and looked at the moon
And longed for the time when the sun would come,
When we would be able to speak out freely,
When I could dress as a girl again,
When we could collect our debt of blood,
If I only had wings I'd take my gun
And fly to the summit and slaughter those wolves."

Her grandmother and mother both killed by the Vulture, Chang Bao had for eight years been looking at the stars and the moon in the dark sky, longing for the sun to rise from behind

"Ebon, p. 170."
the mountains. After telling the family history, Chang Bao turns into a lively and brave militia girl.

One critic, Li Chih-shan, points out that in the ninth scene a new passage is added to show how Chang Bao asks to join the battle. "Amid shouts of 'Charge! Charge!' from the drilling ground, Chang enters militantly." It is in this scene, on the eve of the attack on Tiger Mountain to wipe out Vulture, that her heroism and militancy are stressed. Chang Bao, rifle in hand, eagerly asks to go into battle. She dances and sings robustly, manifesting her fighting will. "How I long for the day when the bandits are slain and a blood debt repaid...My resolve is to fight on the battlefield for I've pledged to kill them all." Li concludes that this is the point that "Chang Bao is no ordinary girl by now, she has grown into a militia girl with a high political consciousness and a strong revolutionary spirit."^6

Chang Bao is typical of what Croll calls "a boy of a girl." The cultural connotation of this boy of a girl phenomenon seems to be that the maturation of the daughter lies in the destruction of genderized daughterhood. In order to achieve this end, the model drama kills off the mother. The death of the mother fulfills two indispensable functions in terms of constructing nongendered daughters. I call

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daughters like Chang Bao, Tiemei and Xi’er nongendered not because they do not have gender traces—they could be easily looked at as more masculine than feminine—but because they do not have the opposite gender to measure against. In model theater, the generation of daughters is a unique group, because they do not have brothers to contrast with. Daughters are the sole successors to the revolution. Since gender is a construct of binary relation, the daughters without their binary opposites—sons—are nongendered. The first function of the death of mother is to situate daughters in an extraordinarily traumatic circumstance in which only one relationship counts: that of class. Class relation in terms of class exploitation, class oppression and class struggle, as model theater demonstrates, is of an all-embracing as well as all-excluding nature. It surpasses all other social and familial relations. Within this schema, daughters exist outside of the sphere of traditional kinship and family, and outside of the domain of sexuality. The second function of the absence of the mother is subtle but nevertheless more important. Nancy Chodorow argues in her work, The Reproduction of Mothering, that mother’s role in mothering is “a central and constituting element in the social organization and reproduction of gender.”

absence of the mother destroys the Oedipal symmetry between mother and daughter in genderizing the daughter.

Girls like Chang Bao, who has been raised by Uncle Dashan and her father, in not being "mothered," escape the gendered role of mother. "Mothers are mothers' daughters," Chodorow states. "Women come to mother because they have been mothered by women." In this regard, the model theater is very much in line with Chodorow's idea that women's liberation requires rupture of the bond between mother and daughter. While Chodorow reveals the feminizing nature of mothering, she privileges paternity: "(f)athers are supposed to help children to individuate and break their dependence on their mothers. But this dependence on her, and this primary identification, would not be created in the first place if men took primary parenting responsibilities." There is an obvious theoretical impasse in Chodorow's privileging of the father as parent. It appears in her claim that only when she is fathered can a woman claim public empowerment. In this sense, the creation of independent women is in the hands of men. Chodorow's ideal parenting is framed within a family of a binary nature.

We have to notice that model theater does not operate on the ground of the nuclear family upon which western feminisms

" Ibid., p.211.

" Ibid., p. 218.
have built their theories. In the ideology of model theater, a neat pattern of the “one daughter, one father family” is so constant that it becomes an archetype. As mentioned above, daughters are not real daughters in the traditional sense, because there are no sons. In the same vein, fathers are not true fathers because of the absence of mothers. The father is the only parent around. This epistemologically destroys the binary structure of parenthood. In the model theater, this father and daughter family is beyond the domain of the ordinary family. It serves to enable young girls to escape their feminine genderization, thus setting the stage for the formation of women’s agency.

Cultural Revolution model theater does not restrict itself to degendering daughters, but addresses the feminist ideals of womanhood. In the following chapter, four model plays are examined to reveal what constitutes communist women in contrast to traditionally gendered womanhood.
CHAPTER 4

DEGENDERED COMMUNIST WOMEN;

"SHAJIABANG," "AZALEA MOUNTAIN," "ON THE DOCKS" AND "SONG OF THE DRAGON RIVER"

Model theater is well-known for its leading heroic female characters. These women are heroes in the plays because they always represent political and ideological correctness. At the same time, these women are not women at all. They are stripped of all feminine traces, do not have families, are not wives and mothers, and more than anything else they are not sexual. The close readings of the texts that follow suggests that for model theater’s women heroes, their political identity and sexual identity are diametrically opposed. Their very self-defining heroism rests and depends on their nongendered status. So in this sense, there seems to exist a logical connection between women’s status as institutional and ideological agency and the erasure of their femininity and sexuality.

In its attempt to build positive women’s images, model theater plays with the fluidity of gender, deconstructs essential womanhood. In this chapter I shall define two
major themes in model theater. The first, masquerading, allows us to see the constructed nature of femininity. Gender becomes performance. Gendered identities, rather than innate, are determined by social forces. The second theme, androgyny and cultural lesbianism, is explored through two plays in which women are not portrayed as wives and mothers. Free from gender identities, this image of women is androgynous. This very androgynous position enables these women to assume full feminist agency within the dominant male political discourse of the CCP.

4.1. Masquerade of Femininity and Dubious Womanhood; "Shajiabang" and "Azalea Mountain"

The Beijing opera "Shajiabang" is adapted from a Shanghai opera "Ludang huzhong" (Sparks Amid the Reeds). This original version was said by the critic to have "its positive ideological content but it also had a very serious shortcoming." Even though this critic did not state specifically what was positive and what the shortcoming was, these aspects clarify themselves when we compare the original version with the model version which went through "repeated improvement and polishing."1 The model play inherits the major story line which was structured around a female

1 Yuan-shou Tan, “Create Heroic Images by Applying Mao Tse-tung’s Thought,” Chinese Literature, No.11 (1968), 99.
Communist Party member, and rebuilds her into an ideal communist woman. The Model opera "Shajiabang" made its debut on July 23, 1964 in Beijing with Mao Zedong himself in attendance. The story is set in Shajiabang, a small town in the communist controlled area south of the Yangtze River in the early days of the War of Resistance Against Japan. The New Fourth Army led by the Communist Party went out to open up new anti-Japanese bases, leaving eighteen sick and wounded soldiers in Shajiabang by Yangcheng Lake. The Japanese army has failed to find these New Fourth Army soldiers in their "mopping up" raid, for they are hiding in the marshes by the Lake. In order to find them, the Japanese aggressors collaborate with a puppet troop of the "Loyal and Just National Salvation Army" led by a bandit, Hu Chuankui, and Guomindang diehard Diao Deyi. Hu's troops are stationed in Shajiabang in order to capture the New Fourth Army soldiers.

The difficult task of protecting the wounded soldiers by providing them with food and medicine and fighting the enemy falls onto the shoulders of Sister Aqing, the Party branch

7 The title "Shajiabang" was suggested by Mao. For more background information on the revision, see "Strive to Portray Proletarian Heroes of People's War," Chinese Literature, No.11 (1970), 63-5.
secretary and liaison officer in the town of Shajiabang. A splendid, dynamic character, Sister Aqing carries on underground work under extremely complicated political circumstances in which the Japanese aggressors, puppet troops and Guomindang diehards conspire together against the villagers. The play focuses on her heroic deeds in facing the enemy at a time when the main forces of the CCP army temporarily withdraw and the enemy takes advantage to come into Shajiabang. Her heroism is tested in a trying situation when "the wind is howling, dark clouds hang low in the sky."

In her three major scenes, "A Battle of Wits," "A Rescue Plan" and "Denouncing the Enemy," Sister Aqing carries on a sharp, complicated struggle right under the nose and the close observation of the enemy. For instance, in "A Battle of Wits," she does her best to successfully shelter the wounded men of the New Fourth Army while Hu Chuankui and Diao Deyi try very hard to capture them; in the scene "Denouncing the Enemy," she collects military intelligence right in the lair of the puppet bandit troops, in the very heart of their

'Sister Aqing is not a good translation of the original Chinese meaning of the name. Aqing Sao should be better translated as Aqing’s Wife. By the way people address her, we gather that Sister Aqing is married. However, her supposed husband Aqing never appears on stage.

headquarters. Sister Aqing succeeds in keeping well informed of all that happens, coming and going as she pleases.

The struggle she engages in, as the article "Strive to Portray Proletarian Heroes of People's War" points out, is a particular kind of struggle. "Her function aims at completely annihilating the enemy through the process of beguiling him and benumbing his perception while preserving and developing her own strength." The article further analyzes that

the strategy she uses consists of two aspects: on the one hand she opposes the enemy's counter-revolutionary dual tactics with revolutionary dual tactics by pretending to befriend him, and on the other hand she employs every means to aggravate the contradictions within his ranks, win over the majority, isolate the few on top, and then defeat the whole lot one by one through the machination of the contradictions within his ranks. With great sagacity and boldness Sister Aqing expertly applies the tactics for struggle and makes use of the contradictions within the ranks of the enemy so that she can twist them round her finger and convert danger into safety, keeping the initiative in her own hands all the time.¹

The above elucidation of Sister Aqing's character points to her ability to "beguile" and "benumb" the enemy and to keep

"the initiative in her own hands all the time." But what are the dual tactics she utilizes to oppose the enemy’s counter-revolutionary dual tactics? What kinds of concrete means does she employ to twist the enemy around her finger? A careful reading of the play, especially of Scene Four, “The Battle of Wits,” will show that the struggle Sister Aqing engages in involves the role play of gender identity, and a masquerade of femininity.

Before I go on to discuss how Sister Aqing masquerades, and why she does it, it is necessary to examine briefly feminist notions of masquerade and the theory of gender as performance. In a general sense, masquerade refers to any action, appearance, bearing, or mode of life that is outward show, concealing true character.

As early as 1929, Joan Riviere, one of Freud’s women colleagues, discussed femininity as performance in her “Womanliness as a Masquerade.” A professional woman in a man’s world, Riviere attempted to find a way of looking at femininity as a psycho-social construction rather than a biological given. In the article, she describes the behavior of some professional women who flash their femininity (i.e., flirting with men) to signal that they are women, and not really so threatening. Femininity, Riviere argued, is nothing more than a mask or veil:
Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it - much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen the goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.∗

As Emily Apter points out, the fact that Riviere self-referentially pictured the career woman "behaving in a parodically 'feminine' manner" and "performing a pantomime of femininity so as to assuage male fear of so-called 'women with a masculinity complex,' may be disheartening for a feminism seeking to shed outmoded stereotypes of the feminine mystique, but it also offers a brilliantly performative rendering of the masquerade's circularity as a philosophical and psychoanalytical discourse." Even though the masquerade emphasizes the sartorial projection of a feminine superego, it offers "a liberatory avenue leading away from biological

essentialism: woman can play the woman or not as she so
pleases."

It is from this notion of gender play-acting that I have
drawn my analysis of the feminist nature of Sister Aqing's
characterization in "Shajiabang." When looked at closely the
dual tactics used by Sister Aqing are nothing but a
masquerade of femininity. Woman is what she acts out in
front of class enemies, all of whom, by the way, are male.
Her true identity is a Communist Party member which she
intends to hide from the knowledge of class enemies. Thus
Sister Aqing literally acts between her gender identity and
her political identity.

Sister Aqing's identity is clearly stated from the very
beginning of the play. From her first appearance on the
stage in Scene One, she reveals that her function is to
fulfill a task for the Party. She tells us:

Party Secretary Cheng has sent word:
The wounded will be brought to our town tonight,
We are here to help them cross the blockade line...."

In Scene Four, "A Battle of Wits," the dramatic conflict
between Diao Deyi and Sister Aqing, with Hu Chuankui in

"Elizabeth Wright, Feminism and Psychoanalysis, a Critical

between, centers around Diao's inspection of Sister Aqing's gender identity. While scheming to detect the whereabouts of the wounded soldiers, Diao at the same time has to ascertain that Sister Aqing is not an enemy of, but an ally to, his cause. With all his cunning, Diao tries desperately to figure out what Sister Aqing is, and he has to make sure that Sister Aqing is a woman. The play thus frames Diao's judgment within an interesting antithesis: Sister Aqing is either a communist or a woman.

Upon their first meeting, Diao is suspicious of Sister Aqing's womanhood. He is told by Hu Chuankui that Sister Aqing saved him in the early days when he was chased by the Japanese. This "treacherous and cunning" Diao Deyi immediately senses that Sister Aqing "is no simple creature." He notices at once that she does not have a husband at her side. "Where is your husband?" he asks. While she "deliberately humbles herself" to be feminine, he sees that "This woman is quite out of the ordinary, because she is neither humble nor pushy." Diao finds that Sister Aqing is a "shrewd, fearless, level-headed woman" which in turn deepens his suspicion that Sister Aqing is not what she

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'Ibid., p. 24.
"Ibid., p. 23.
"Ibid., p. 20.
appears to be. The attributes Diao sees in Sister Aqing are clearly not those he thinks an ordinary woman should possess.

While Diao Deyi tries to find out Sister Aqing’s true identity, she tries her best to perform “an ordinary woman.” Her name “sister,” sao, is just part of her disguise and indicates that she is a wife, though in fact she has no husband. She also gets some help from the “silly fool” Hu Chuankui, ensuring Diao that she saved Hu’s life from the hands of the Japanese invaders because she herself needed the protection from Hu. She further shows off her feminine apolitical pettiness by stating that in order to earn money, her teahouse will serve anyone, no matter what their political beliefs. Sister Aqing, the woman, is selfish, gossipy, and indifferent to others.

In the end, Sister Aqing succeeds in appeasing Diao’s suspicion and Hu’s frustration and winning their confidence. Her femininity is thus a disarming disguise: it is donned, like masquerade, to disguise Sister Aqing’s political identity. Unable to directly confront the (male) enemies, who possess an advantageous position at the time, Sister Aqing performs what she is not, constructing a very feminine, non-threatening image of herself. In this sense, her masquerade empowers her in the political struggle she engages in.

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Ibid., p. 27.
My interest in Sister Aqing’s gender crossdressing, however, does not lie in its effectiveness in the political struggle, but in its unveiling the inessential nature of gender. Sister Aqing’s double identity, and her manipulation of those identities assures her the position of agency. Understood here as a performative production, woman is an “appearing” that makes itself convincing as a “being.” The ontological woman as “being” does not exist. Sister Aqing as a woman in Shajiabang is an appearing, a performance through which she defeats the enemy.

Obviously, for feminism the most problematic aspect of Sister Aqing’s double identity is that while she appears to be a woman, she is a communist Party member. Whereas her gender identity is a mask, her political identity is relatively stable and socially fixed. The last scene of the play depicts the New Fourth Army’s triumphant reoccupation of Shajiabang and the capture of Diao Deyi and Hu Chuankui. When Sister Aqing enters, she declares to a befuddled Diao and Hu that “I am a member of the Chinese Communist Party!” These words end the play, leaving the image of Sister Aqing as an abstract ideal. Her institutional and ideological agency is actualized and visualized by performing the role of

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"A detailed discussion of this so-called slippery distinction between “appearing” and “being” can be found in Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.47.


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a woman she is not. Sister Aqing does not take womanhood as essential; rather she performs it. Sister Aqing articulates her true political identity, and at the same time, asserts her political authority.

What Sister Aqing does, denying one socially constructed identity and affirming another, is representative of model theater’s consistent vision of women’s liberation. Sister Aqing in "Shajiabang" parades as a woman shielding her political identity from the enemy, using a revolutionary doublehand to deal with the counter-revolutionary doublehand. The Beijing opera "Azalea Mountain" is also about the relationship between a gendered identity and a political identity. In this play, Ke Xiang, also a communist, has to prove that she is a nongendered woman, and that her being a biological woman has not hindered her from being a worthy political and military leader.

"Azalea Mountain" is an adaptation of a 1964 drama of the same name. It became a model opera in 1973. Compared with the original drama script, the opera "Azalea Mountain" has a narrower story line and a more concentrated concern. Wang Shuyuan, the writer of the original drama script and one of the writers of the revised Beijing opera, states that "the main purpose of this opera is not to depict the conflict between Ke Xiang (the major character) and the forces of
reaction but to show how she remolds a peasants' armed force with the Party's line and Party policy."

The story of "Azalea Mountain" starts with the repeated defeats of a peasant leader Lei Gang and his armed forces by an evil local despot, Viper, in the spring of 1928. At the same time, the CCP is sending Party representatives from the Jinggang base areas to remold the peasant force on Azalea Mountain. Lei Gang is informed by Li Zhijian, a cadre in the self-defense corps, that

The word's gone round in town
That two Communists came to Azalea Mountain;
They ran into the enemy,
Put up a fearless fight;
One was shot and killed,
The other wounded and captured.
Early tomorrow the prisoner will be paraded
Before the ancestral temple and executed.15

Lei Gang and his comrades, in dire need of leadership, decide to launch a surprise attack on the execution ground in order to rescue the communist to lead their way. When they make this decision, the gender identity of the communist is unknown and unquestioned. In the original drama script, the communist He Xiang's (the name is changed into Ke Xiang in model theater) sex identity is stated at the very beginning.


I think the change is instrumental for the later development of the play. It is a hint that foreshadows the struggle around Ke Xiang's gender identity.

However their presumption that this communist is a man soon meets the reality. As soon as they come to town in disguise to carry out their plan, Lei is told that the communist is a woman.

Lei: A woman? (He is staggered.)
Lo: Shall we still rescue her?
Lei: (decidedly) Yes, so long as she is a Communist."

This dialogue foreshadows the later development. Since the communist is a woman, her gender character and consequently her ability to lead are called into question. The play unfolds many conflicts, manufactures many dangerous situations, all of which test Ke Xiang's mettle. She has to ensure the others that her biological sex will not affect her political identity. She has to convince all those traditionally-minded peasant soldiers that she is a worthy Communist qualified to lead them in the complicated armed struggle. She has to make clear to them that her orders, though they may seem not to be in their immediate interest, serve a higher moral and political cause that will ultimately

benefit them as a class. She has to win the trust of the soldiers and Lei Gang.

It is around this central theme that the drama develops. As a Party representative, Ke starts to rectify and reorganize the undisciplined peasant army. According to the old rules, all confiscated property became the soldiers' personal belongings. Ke Xiang sets some new rules which follow the Party policy:

All silver dollars go to the organization;
Part of the grain is reserved for army use;
The rest of the grain, goods and clothing
All goes to the local people."

These new rules touch off some dissatisfaction and resentment. The soldiers vent their frustrations on Ke Xiang:

Lo (Snorts): We shed our blood, risk our necks.
Partisan D: But she gives everything away to others.
Partisan C: An outsider, after all, is less close to us.
Partisan B: With book learning but no taste of hardships.
How can she lead soldiers?"

The accusations of Ke Xiang being an outsider and having experienced no hardship are adequate to sabotage Ke Xiang's

**Ibid., p. 17.**

"Ibid., p. 17.
leadership. However, they do not have the same emotional effect on the soldiers when her gender is mentioned.

Qiu (resentfully): Bah! If women can lead troops
Men will lose their authority.
No, we won’t obey
Her orders.

To this clamor of shouts "we won’t obey her orders," Ke Xiang steps onto the stage, "a smile on her face, carrying two baskets of rice on a shoulder-pole." Her unwomanly physical strength and her all-smiling face quiets the disgruntled and hostile crowd. However, Qiu, who is drunk, challenges her directly:

(tipsily): Ha!
A woman...Communist
Lording it over us? (Draws his pistol.)
Know what’s this?
No needle for embroidery! 20

With these words, Qiu "rushes with his pistol at Ke Xiang." Facing this challenge when others are all dismayed, Ke Xiang "coolly steps forward and seizes Qiu’s wrist. He stands motionless for a second, then starts to struggle, but she expertly wrenches the pistol from his grasp. Qiu staggers back, deflated, and drops on a bench." She impresses the soldiers with her unwomanly military ability. As one of the

20 Ibid., p. 18.
soldiers says admiringly: "So in fighting and farming both, you have what it takes."\(^2\)

Qiu's logic that "woman" and "communist" are totally different categories echoes Diao Deyi's in "Shajiabang." The paradigm of the incompatibility of women's gender identity and political identity is symptomatic of Chinese society's view of women with political interests. The social connotation of being a woman with her gendered attributes is always in opposition to the political. The model theater has solved this conflict by privileging the political, discarding the feminine. Ke Xiang and Sister Aqing only have their political identity. Political identity is liberatory not only because it helps establish their authority, but also enables them to distance themselves from a derogatory female sexuality.

Ke Xiang's success in winning the peasant army's trust as a leader boils down to her ability to convince this cluster of male peasants that she is not a woman as they conceive woman to be. The play does not present directly what this woman is, except through Qiu's implication that women are good only for needlework and embroidery. What we see from the play is that Ke Xiang is everything but this woman. She is physically as strong as a man, since she can carry two baskets of rice easily; she is deft at military skills, and

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 19.
in this regard she is better than the men. And her ungendered identity wins her the admiration of the peasants and army leadership.

Ke Xiang is not a gendered woman because she has been molded by her tough life not because she was born as such. In an autobiographical aria, Ke Xiang tells us:

Roughing it all year long  
In wind and rain  
Has given me nothing but  
Iron shoulders and horny hands.

She then details her family history and what has brought her to become a communist. It is not difficult to discern in her account of her own life, the rites of passage the revolutionary daughters, Tiemei and Xi’er, have experienced.

My home was in Anyuan close to the River Ping  
Three generations of miners, like beasts of burden,  
My folk sweated out their guts but still went hungry  
In that hell on earth where all seasons are the same.  
My dad and big brother fought the bosses,  
Failed, were shot down, stained the wasteland with their blood.  
Then the black-hearted mine-owners  
Fired our hut and burned alive  
Mother, younger brother and little sister—  
My whole family wiped out, a heap of bones.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 19.
Here we revisit the familiar, recurring theme of model theater on the socializing of girls. They have survived the class struggle, surrounded by bloodshed and the death of their families. The gendering process through which they become women is disrupted. As a result, they are able to become communists.

While the soldiers are convinced of Ke's credentials to lead them, Lei Gang who is absent when Ke Xiang educates the soldiers, has to confront Ke with differences in military strategies and warfare tactics. Lei Gang serves as a foil to Ke Xiang. He has the courage to rise in arms and to persist in armed struggle despite suffering repeated defeats. At the same time, however, he embodies the narrow-mindedness of a peasant. He more often than not acts on impulse and this behavior results in his defeats. On top of all this, he is emotionally unstable and therefore easily manipulated.

The opera also depicts the renegade Wen Qijiu whose major role is to stir ill feelings between Ke Xiang and Lei Gang so as to undermine Ke's leadership and take over the armed force himself. This negative character helps to elucidate the complexity of Ke's task to remold the partisans, but also vividly brings out her great vision to identify and defeat the enemy.

Scene Four describes how the peasant army withdraws from their base area into the mountains on Ke's order as they are
outnumbered. Ke Xiang’s reason for retreating is that “Being so far outnumbered, We’d come off worst in a head-on confrontation.”

When the enemy attacks we’ll withdraw.
Our deep mountains and forests give us room to maneuver,
Guerrilla tactics will beat a strong enemy.

Reasonable and wise as Ke Xiang’s strategy is, Lei Gang is frustrated over Ke Xiang’s decision, especially when Grandma Du, Lei Gang’s adopted mother, is arrested by Viper. Lei Gang’s skepticism about a woman’s decision-making is accentuated when Wen Qijiu comes to report to him the rumors going around the defense corp.

Wen: They say:
“A cloud’s obstructing our chief’s vision;
A giant of a man’s come under the thumb of a woman.”

Wen Qijiu’s hatred toward Ke Xiang finds expression not only in his insistence that Ke is a scheming woman twisting men around her fingers, but also in his emphasis on kinship relations and parochial brotherhood. He tells Lei Gang that Ke Xiang is both a woman and an outsider. She has her own

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22 Ibid., p. 31.
24 Ibid., p. 32.
25 Ibid., p. 33.
agenda with no regard to the sufferings of the people in Azalea Mountain. Wen says to Lei:

That she remains unmoved I can understand
But how strange that a man
Born and bred here
Cares nothing now for our Azalea Mountain!  

A furious Lei Gang cannot resist Wen Qijiu’s instigation. He has to argue with Ke Xiang over military strategy. The play vividly portrays a gender reversal by sharply contrasting Ke Xiang and Lei Gang. The former, a biological female, behaves calmly and rationally in the face of calamity, whereas the latter, the giant of a man, shows all his narrow-mindedness. He is emotionally vulnerable to the enemy’s manipulation, irrational and impulsive in his judgment, and governed by his personal hatred. So in a sense, Lei Gang’s very masculinity is feminine in nature. Lei Gang resembles the early stage of character Wu Qinghua in the ballet RDW; both are immature politically. Finally he neglects Ke’s warning, setting out to rescue Grandma Du by himself only to be captured by the enemy.

Lei Gang’s wholehearted acceptance of Ke Xiang as a communist happens only when he is imprisoned with Grandma Du. Grandma Du tells Lei Gang that Ke Xiang also has personal

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Ibid., p. 34.
scores to settle with the Viper. The communist who accompanied Ke Xiang from the Jinggang Mountains and was killed by the Viper was no other than Ke Xiang's husband. Ke Xiang's strategic withdrawal, then, is not out of fear of the enemy nor indifference to the people's suffering, but a decision made of maturity and great vision. Lei Gang learns that he too must temper his personal hatred and channel it through reason and strategy. With Ke's political and military authority firmly established, the peasant army successfully rescues Lei Gang and Grandma Du, and defeats the Viper and Wen Qijiu.

Wang Shuyuan, one of the authors of the drama, summarizes the character Ke Xiang:

Taking Ke as the central figure, we introduced a number of interlinked dramatic conflicts, such as the contradictions between Ke and Lei Gang, between her and the renegade Wen Qijiu and the Viper. In each case Ke is placed in the forefront of a sharp conflict to reveal her heroic character from different angles. We depict her political maturity and acumen, her skill in changing the peasants' non-proletarian ideal and leading them to the proletarian revolutionary line, as well as her courage and staunchness and the brilliance with which she leads the armed force against opposing currents to defeat the enemy. We show her on the one hand as a fine revolutionary army cadre with broad vision and magnanimity; on the other hand as a simple, honest worker, unpretentious, approachable and experienced in both fighting and
farm work. We depict her fierce hatred for the evil landlords and local despots, as well as her devotion to her comrades and her concern for them.... Through these various facets of her character we show her as a fearless revolutionary with the daring and ability to oppose wrong trends, for this is her main characteristic, the crux of her heroism."

If we strip it of its political and ideological jargon popular in the early seventies, Wang Shuyuan is essentially correct in his evaluation of the hero Ke Xiang. Her heroism and her political legitimacy in a leadership position have been built upon two very important aspects of her characterization in the play. First she detaches herself successfully from the traditional image of woman: she is as physically and militarily capable as any man around. Secondly, she shows mental attributes that usually are regarded as unfeminine: she is broader-minded and visionary, not limited by personal interest and drives. The crux of her heroism comes from her defeminization.

The characterization of Ke Xiang in "Azalea Mountain" and Sister Aqing in "Shajiabang" shows that gender, the social construction of sex, is not simply biological, but rather a set of contingent meanings that sexes assume in the context of a given social situation. One's gender is a mask at one's


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disposal. Sister Aqing strategically uses it to defeat the enemy, whereas Ke Xiang refuses to identify with it in order to assert her political authority.

4.2. Women as Androgynes, as Social and Cultural Lesbians: “On the Docks” and “The Song of the Dragon River”

The most radical effort in building ungendered women’s images can be found in the twin-sister plays “On the Docks” (Haigang) and “The Song of the Dragon River” (Longjiang song; hereafter SDR). Different from the plays discussed above, these two are set against the background of the so-called period of socialist revolution and socialist construction, after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. “On the Docks” depicts the revolutionary, socialist construction in the urban area, “SDR” in the rural.

I have demonstrated in the previous discussion that class and class struggle are the discursive bearers of the feminist agenda of liberating women from their sex related gender roles. As a result, these women characters assume only one identity: that of the political. Even though some plays such as “Shajiabang” and “Azalea Mountain” indicate in one way or another that communist women can be wives, their status as wives is only nominal. Their husbands are either absent, as in Sister Aqing’s case, or dead, as Ke Xiang’s husband Zhao Xin. The absence of the husband is instrumental in two ways
to the building of communist women's image. One is that it destroys the binary construction of gender relations. When one part of the binary is absent, the other is no longer in the relationship. As such, she is freed to take a new identity, forming new relationships. That gender is relational leads to the second purpose of the absence of husbands in the overall design of the image of ungendered women. It clears the space for women to function not as wives, but as political agents.

Class struggle, which serves as the mainline of nearly all model theater stories, is of course a rather slippery concept. Its specific meaning adjusts to the needs of the particular plays and to the demands of idealizing female characters. I have discussed the intrinsic meaning of class and class struggle in my reading of "The White-Haired Girl." In that play, class is more of a discursive extension of a traditional moral order than Marxist materially-based, hierarchy. This principle applies to some other plays, such as "The Red Detachment of Women" and "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy." However, in "Azalea Mountain," the class struggle between Ke Xiang and Wen Qijiu is an essentially moral conflict between Ke Xiang’s unselfishness and Wen Qijiu’s extreme greediness in protecting his own interests. I also attempted to clarify my basic argument in the previous discussion that class and class struggle discourse function
as the only available means women can use to free themselves from the subordination that comes with gendered womanhood. In the next two plays to be discussed in this section, class and class struggle discourse help create an unchallengeable space where a totally new woman’s image, woman completely free of gendered, familial duties, is constructed.

The 1972 script of the Beijing model opera “On the Docks” is a revised version of a Huai opera, a form of regional opera from Jiangsu province, with the original name “The Morning on the Docks.” Through repeated careful revisions, the play comes to revolve around “a splendid, inspiring character,” communist heroine Fang Haizhen. Colin Mackerras offers a useful summary of the plot. The story is set on the docks of Shanghai in the summer of 1963. The workers are loading rice seeds for export to Africa and fiberglass for northern Europe. Owing to a predicted typhoon, the district government decides to speed up the departure of the rice seeds to beat the bad weather and get them to their destination in time for the sowing season. It puts the secretary of the Party Branch of the Dockers Brigade, Fang Haizhen, in charge of the operation. However, it quickly becomes obvious that she will encounter opposition because the class enemy, Qian Shouwei, the traffic control man,
gives higher priority to the fiberglass than to the seeds. Meanwhile a young docker, Han Xiaoqiang, spills a sack of seed in Qian's presence, and the class enemy deliberately mixes glass into it behind Han's back. Qian plays on Han's backward ideology and ambition to become a seaman and convinces him that the spilling of the seed is of no importance.

Fang Haizhen finds out what has happened. She succeeds in making Han realize his fault and persuades him to withdraw his application to become a seaman. Qian's plot is uncovered just as he is trying to flee abroad and he is captured. The dockers load the rice seeds quickly enough to ensure their departure in time to reach Africa for the sowing season.10

The story is framed in the official discourse of class struggle which is presented in a triangular relationship: the representative of the proletarian class, the Party secretary Fang Haizhen, the wavering middle character, young worker Han Xiaoqiang, and the evil class enemy, Qian Shouwei. As we look closer into these characters, we find that the lines drawn between classes are essentially moral. An article published in the same issue of Chinese Literature that carries the English translation of the play makes clear this point: "'On the Docks' features the heroine Fang Haizhen, a product of the period of socialist revolution and

construction. Such heroes and heroines exemplify the fine moral quality and heroism of the proletariat." The fine moral quality and heroism of the proletariat as represented by Fang Haizhen are China’s internationalist support of other Third World countries.

Diametrically opposed to Fang is Qian Shouwei, the class enemy, who is portrayed as extremely immoral. He utilizes all his evil tricks to damage China’s international reputation. The play does not adequately explain why Qian is so eager to be destructive. His presence, according to the playwrights, serves to set off Fang’s heroism.

The new script brings out the theme by portraying Qian Shouwei as a counter-revolutionary, making this contradiction between the enemy and ourselves the chief dramatic conflict and relegating the contradictions within the ranks of the people to a secondary position. This adds enormously to the stature of the heroine.

Fang Haizhen’s moral heroism lies in her unselfishness (internationalism) and her great vision in seeing through the nature of those who pretend to support the revolution but actually oppose it. She, like women characters I have

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12 Chinese Literature, No.6 (1972), 105.
discussed above, has been tempered by her miserable past. As a child coal shoveler, scarcely taller than the handle of her shovel, she suffered miseries untold in the “old society” at the hands of the dock bosses. As she grew up she took part in many strikes. After liberation in 1949, she helped the People’s Liberation Army take over the Shanghai docks from the imperialist aggressors and Guomindang reactionaries who fled to Taiwan. Her experiences and political development equip her with a quality of loving the country and the people of the world.

Fang Haizhen, as female Party secretary, is not a gendered woman. Her actions take place solely in the political arena. Fang is in control and she is politically hyperopic, always vigilant, outwitting everyone else. She cannot be fooled. On the other hand, most of the positive male characters in the play are flawed in one way or another. Zhao Zhenshan, a CCP cadre, and the young docker, Han Xiaoqiang, are utilized by the enemy who knows their ideological and personal weaknesses. Even though both have a deep and genuine love for the Party and socialism, Zhao is politically shortsighted and careless and is taken in by the enemy’s machinations, and Han, a naive and simple-minded lad, is driven by his own selfish ambition and is thus vulnerable to the manipulations of the class enemy.
The theme that the woman is the politically correct agency to represent the Party in helping politically backward men and in successfully fighting the class enemy is repeated in Beijing opera "The Song of the Dragon River" (hereafter SDR). Originally a spoken drama, SDR was made into a Beijing opera in 1964. Like all other model plays, SDR went through many revisions. The final version was approved in January 1972. One of the drastic changes from the original spoken drama to the model opera is the change of the sex of the main character. The Party secretary in earlier versions is Zheng Qiang, an armyman transferred to work in the village of Dragon River. In the model opera, the Party secretary becomes a woman. Here is a summary of the story.

It is set in a commune in southeastern China in 1963. Jiang Shuiying, Party secretary of Dragon River production brigade is prepared to sacrifice the interests of her own collective by encouraging the construction of a dam to divert the waters of the Dragon River. This action will save a nearby and much larger drought-stricken area, even though it will also destroy her own. The brigade leader, Li Zhitian, agrees with her plan, but the class enemy Huang Guozhong, a former landlord, influences him to allow the dam to be breached at the critical moment, placing the drought-stricken area in grave risk, but ostensibly preventing further damage to Dragon River Brigade. The entry of Jiang Shuiying saves the situation. She gives orders to open the

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China Quarterly, No. 55, p. 489.
gate and exposes the dark scheme of Huang Guozhong."

The key ideological dispute brought out in SDR is very similar to that in "On the Docks." SDR deals with the issue of whether to cater to the interests of one's own small collective or a much larger one. The struggle between the classes centers around Huang Guozhong’s utilizing Li Zhitian’s "departmentalism" to reach his evil end, and Jiang Shuiying’s true proletarian spirit of sacrificing her self interests for a larger public. Selfishness implies, in both plays, not merely personal profit against the collective, but the smaller collective against much wider and general interests.

Mackerras calls SDR "a sister drama to 'On the Docks,'" for a good reason." The two plays are similar in many ways. In theme, both dramas present ideological disputes between two contradictory classes. The nature of the class struggle is less about economical divisions than moral conflicts. In their characterization, the proletarian class, represented by women, is dedicated to serving the public without any thought of self. On the other hand, the class enemy of the proletariat seeks nothing but to destroy the great cause of

"Ibid., p. 489.
"Ibid., p. 489.
communism and internationalism. In between the two polarized positions is a more human-like group composed mostly of mem; they are susceptible to the class enemy because they always put their own interest or their small group’s interest before that of the larger public. When they fall into the enemy’s scheme, the proletarian women come to their rescue, rectifying their ideological positions and exposing the evil intentions of the class enemies (also usually male). To put it simply, these women are idealized because they solve the problems ideally in an ideal situation.

Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying not only exhibit independence, maturity, and deference to other’s interest, but an equal degree of rationality usually not associated with femininity and women. This special nature and the courageous acts of the female heroes transform not only their immediate world on stage, but the larger social order. These women may attain heroism through their wisdom or through their commitment to a truth beyond that recognized by social convention. What is more, these female heroes are in tune with lofty values that society advocates but does not practice. Their association with the ideal qualities society lacks makes them better able to survive than more conventional characters.

In both plays, as in “Azalea Mountain,” each female hero has two male counterparts. One serves to problematize the
macho ideal of heroism. We learn the folly of the masculine heroic ideal by observing the behavior of men like Lei Gang in "Azalea Mountain," Li Zhitian in SDR, and Zhao Zhenshan in "On the Docks." Lei Gang's rashness, his arrogance and self-destructive behavior set off Ke Xiang's ultimate triumph. Li and Zhao are the tragic male heroes who are prone to the class enemy's manipulation when their inflated male egos encounter living experience. They need women to mediate and to save them from their narrow-mindedness to become mature. The other male is the negative character who is traditionally selfish and extremely evil.

In short, in order for model theater to build an ideal women's image, it follows a structural pattern. There has to be a heroic woman as the main character; to highlight her heroism, there must be a good male supporting character who is usually immature politically or narrow-minded morally and who is desperately in need of the woman's help to get out of a difficult situation. Usually a helpless character in critical situations, these men lack wit and sagacity. As for the class enemies in these plays, they are more of a structural necessity than realistically portrayed characters. Their indispensable function in the plays is to help form a site of conflict where the women characters can fully display their heroism. It is easy to discern that in this dramatic arrangement, there exists an interesting move towards the
redefinition of gender. Women, conventionally represented in culture and on stage as subordinates, now are taking over the central stage to epitomize a new cultural ideal. And there is no doubt that their achievement rests on their fundamental rejection of their gendered womanhood.

The feminist nature of these two plays more often than not eludes critical attention. Since model theater is framed discursively in terms of class and class struggle, it is always interpreted in terms of proletarian struggle. With this line of reasoning, the Party secretaries Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying are nothing more than mouthpieces for the Party's class struggle discourse. They serve as mediators to convey the dominant ideology; their discourse is borrowed, consequently they do not have subjectivity. It seems that Gail Hershatter's logic in her criticism of the 1984 documentary film "Small Happiness" would work here. "Small Happiness" records the drastic changes in the lives of three generations of Chinese women of a rural village in Northern China in the early eighties. The oldest generation of women with bound feet suffered arranged marriages before 1949. Comparing their lives with those of the youngest generation of women, the older women conclude that the younger women are liberated: they, the older generation, now enjoy a happier life thanks to the Chinese Communist Party, and the younger ones live a life in heaven.
However, Hershatter refuses to accept these women's own words because of their use of an "official language," i.e., the Maoist discourse. In her rather harsh critique of the ways in which Maoist rhetoric has asserted total control over all subaltern Chinese voices, in its "articulation and glorious defense of subaltern interests," her seemingly feminist approach with which she forcefully denies the validity of living subaltern peasant women's expressions is disturbing." For Hershatter, since the old Chinese women speak a language of "homogenizing, unilinear, flattening in its inattentiveness to any categories other than those of the official class structure," then they are not the speaking subjects." But at the same time, Hershatter is able to hear the "trace" of courtesan speech through a 1917 male-written guidebook about long-since deceased Shanghai prostitutes. Indeed, when one looks at this double standard in judging what women's voice is, one finds an irony. If recovering the courtesan's voices is an important feminist task for the rewriting of Chinese elitist-dominated history, then why should the voices of living subalterns be delegitimized? Does Hershatter's logic hold that one patriarchal culture is better than another? Even if we accept this logic, in terms

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"Ibid., p. 107."
of women’s liberation platform the Chinese Communist Party’s ideology is definitely better than those of traditional Chinese society which created and took as socially normal the existence of prostitutes and courtesans."

Avoiding the epistemological impasse of the question of subaltern voices in a culturally and politically repressive regime (which one is not?), I will argue that the feminism in model theater does not lie in whether women have their own voices, but in their complete subversion of the gender role prescribed by the patriarchal culture. Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying’s voice is unmistakably borrowed; it is full of the communist jargon of class struggle. This political rhetoric, however, in a very interesting way secures these women a place in the realm of the political. With their political identity, these communist women have abandoned their gender identity. They are not sexual beings, not wives, nor mothers. They do not possess any trace of female sexuality. In this way, Fang and Jiang’s image creates an antithesis to the patriarchal reality as described by Monique Wittig: “Although women are very visible as sexual beings, as social beings they are totally invisible.”

Ibid., pp. 120-121. The discussion of Hershatter’s article has been conceptualized through a very thought-provoking discussion with Nick Kaldis.

sexual beings, Fang and Jiang gain their social visibility, and by utilizing social and political discourse they occupy leading positions in society. With only political identities as Party members, the characters Fang Haizhen in “On the Docks” and Jiang Shuiying in SDR raise another interpretative problem. What are they? Is there a social category to accommodate them?

It is tempting to locate them in the category of androgyny, not only because they cannot be defined as men nor women in their general senses, but also because they show the ideal combination of femininity and masculinity. Scene Two, “Lose a Pawn to Save a Castle,” in SDR highlights Jiang Shuiying as a caring person and a Party secretary with principle. Seeing that Li Zhitian does not eat well because of the frustration over his brigade’s loss of crops, Jiang shows great sympathy and offers him supper. Ideologically, she is firm and strong. She points out Li’s problem.

Jiang: The trouble is all you think is us, us.
Li: I am talking about the collective “us."
Jiang: True, it’s collective land, but it is a very small collective, a speck.

Li: A speck?
Jiang: On the chess board of the fight against the drought it is only a pawn.

Li: A pretty big pawn!
Jiang: We have to view the situation as a whole. Suppose you were playing chess. To gain the initiative, to win, sometimes you have to deliberately sacrifice a piece. "Lose a pawn to save a castle," isn’t that what you often say?^6

In this dialogue, Jiang’s communist ideal is articulated through Li Zhitian’s language in chess playing. Li Zhitian can only play this predominantly male game; Jiang is able to apply the principle of winning through the principle of deference of immediate gratification in chess play to the greater cause. For her, "A spot of red is a single flower, hundreds in blossom show spring’s glorious power."^7 The qualities of sharing, giving, sacrificing and vision, all these help to construct her morally perfect image which transcends the boundary between femininity and masculinity.

The term “androgyne” is probably the most confusing term associated with feminist ideas. Feminist critic Elaine Showalter, in her harsh criticism of Virginia Woolf, defines androgyne as “full balance and command of an emotional range that includes male and female elements." Because Showalter looks at androgyne as a simple blending of masculine and feminine qualities, it is only natural for her to see Woolf’s

^6 Chinese Literature, No. 7 (1972), 12.

^7 Ibid., p. 13.

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insistence on androgyny as an escape from feminism. I also see an inherent problem embedded in this notion of androgyny, for this seemingly ideal union of the two polarized gender identities allows the socially constructed masculinity and femininity to go unexamined. If androgyny is used to refer to a combination of gender qualities, its meaning is as unstable and its nature as oppressive as that of "feminine" or "masculine." It does not challenge gender, but simply embraces gender construction and treats it as if its meaning were given and absolute. By combining two genders together, the gender continuum is left intact, while men and women all move to its center.

In locating Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying in the realm of feminist androgyny, I follow Toril Moi's notion of androgyny. For Toril Moi, androgyny is "not a flight from fixed gender identities, but a recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature." In her defense of the feminist nature of Virginia Woolf's androgyny, Moi reads the artist Lily Briscoe in Woolf's novel To the Lighthouse as an ideal androgyne. While Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are trapped in "strong, immutably fixed gender identities" mainly as husband/father and wife/mother, Lily "represents the subject who deconstructs this opposition, without regard for the

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crippling definitions of sexual identity to which society would have her conform. Lily's denial of being sexualized and genderized as a woman destroys the logical foundation of the patriarchal binary. Masculinity is built upon the enslavement of femininity. If femininity is destroyed, its relative counterpart will no longer exist. Then far from fleeing or combining such gender identities in order to escape from them, androgyny, as Moi argues, rejects them because the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity.  

It is in this sense I call Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying androgynes. Both represent the destruction and subversion of gender. Their image is disruptive in demystifying the myth of womanhood as a natural given and in its challenge to the gender categories we use to prescribe appropriate behavior for men and women. They are outside the realm of female sexuality which leads to heterosexual marriage and motherhood. This very position destroys the private and public dichotomy. By achieving this, Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying transcend and obliterate gender.

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"Ibid., p. 13.
Another concept that might help us conceptually understand Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying is to read them as lesbians, not only as androgynes. Lesbian appears more promising here, especially in light of Monique Wittig’s “The Straight Mind” and “One is Not Born A Woman:”

Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation (“forced residence,” domestic corvee, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual...For us this is an absolute necessity; our survival demands that we contribute all our strength to the destruction of the class of women within which men appropriate women. This can be accomplished only by the destruction of heterosexuality as a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men and which produces the doctrine of the difference between the sexes to justify this oppression."

For Wittig, the root of women’s oppression is that which also oppresses gays and lesbians: the institution of heterosexuality, as manifested in “those discourses which

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4" Ibid., p. 20.
take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality." According to Wittig, this institution, which marks the heterosexual relationship as "the obligatory social relationship between 'man' and 'woman,'" produces not only the categories of sexual identity, but the very categories of sex [read gender] as well and the "differences" on which they are based."

Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying qualify culturally or socially as lesbians, as each is a "woman...not in a relation of personal dependency with a man," since "sexuality is not for women an individual and subjective expression, but a social institution of violence." However, the contemporary usage of the term lesbianism is all but synonymous with homosexuality. Being instead asexual, Fang and Jiang might rather be more appropriately labelled ci in the sense that Qiu Jin used that term--woman freed from gendered womanhood. Fang and Jiang's sexual independence destroys their identity as women as a sociological reality. With all the problems arising from the dubious nature of their political identity, the communist women in model theater have achieved one thing: they transcend gender by becoming ci, and their awomanhood is

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" Ibid., p. 107.

" Ibid., p. 19.
a route to their liberation from a (hetero)sexist system.
CONCLUSION

The grand finale of model theater was staged in the Trial of the Lin Biao and Jiang Qing Counter-Revolutionary Cliques (Nov. 1980-Jan. 1981). Since Lin Biao had died in 1971, the trial centered on the so-called "Gang of Four"—Jiang Qing and her associates. Facing a predominantly male Special Procuratorate (twenty-three male prosecutors and one female) and Special Court (two female judges out of a thirty-three member panel), Jiang Qing acted and enacted out what she had preached in the model theater: a heroic woman. To make sure that her own voice was heard, according to the court records, Jiang Qing chose to defend herself instead of "entrusting lawyers with her defence and spoke for nearly two hours on her own behalf." Most of her defence is unavailable. Among the few words of Jiang Qing's argument given to the public are the following: "During the war I was the only woman comrade who stayed beside Chairman Mao at the front; where were you hiding yourselves then?" She tried very seriously to argue for her own position in the political arena, a position she helped to give to women heroes in the model


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dramas. However, after making this statement, it was “difficult for those in the public gallery to suppress their laughter.” The charges the state brought against her and the mocking response she received from the audience point to one fact: she was a woman. She was tried for being an evil woman, who in order to “claw her way up to become a leading power...took advantage of various opportunities to frame large numbers of Party, government and army cadres and civilians, smeared people with fabricated labels....” The trial itself was a show, a spectacular testimony to how the Chinese public viewed a woman in politics and how the Party/state scapegoated a woman as totally responsible for the social disorder created by an aging leader. The accusations of her wrongdoings in the Cultural Revolution were always linked with her “dirty past” of being a sexy film actress, of a history of several divorces, of her womanly jealousy of and hatred for women more beautiful and more talented, of her seduction of Mao Zedong....

As Fei Xiaotong clearly stated, Jiang Qing was tried and convicted because she committed crimes out of personal interest. Mao Zedong, who was the initiator and leader of the Cultural Revolution, was behaving politically. Fei Xiaotong’s logic, reflecting the commonsensical Chinese logic, is that Mao Zedong, a man, was incapable of personal,

\^Ibid., p. 103.
thus criminal actions; whereas Jiang Qing was criminal because a woman cannot be political. Desperate because the public ignored her remarks and her demonization, Jiang Qing declared her final defiance: “Like a monk under an umbrella, I am without law and without heaven.”

Indeed, in this drama of scapegoating woman, Jiang Qing created her own model theater. Undoubtedly the central character of the trial, she was also the most dramatically heroic. Throughout the trial, Jiang held her head high, thrust her chest outward, the usual pose for her women characters in the model plays. She was Ke Xiang and Sister Aqing, arguing that she was a revolutionary first. She was also Fang Haizhen and Jiang Shuiying, full of communist rhetoric, out of date, but still true. When found guilty of all counts and sentenced to death, she became Ke Xiang,

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*Ibid., pp. 102-103. Since the Buddhist monk is bald and, being under an umbrella, can’t see the sky, he is “hairless and skyless,” a pun in Chinese meaning “without law and without heaven.”

Jiang Qing always addressed herself in public as “Chairman Mao’s student.”
shouting revolutionary slogans, ready to die a martyr. "The theater, politics—for Jiang, the two realms were not very different," says one of Jiang Qing’s biographers Ross Terrill.

Jiang Qing's heroism was drastically amplified by her supporting cast. The three male members of the "Gang of Four" were subdued throughout the trial. Zhang Chunqiao, a quick-witted Marxist literary critic, "had kept silent and shown a defiant attitude throughout the trial." By not speaking, he surrendered to his fate. Yao Wenyuan, the talented Marxist theorist, admitted "mistakes." And Wang Hongwen "declared during the court debate that he was guilty of all charges against him, and he requested a chance to reform."^10

* Jiang Qing was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve and permanent deprivation of political rights. Why the court decided to grant her a two-year reprieve is an interesting question. Obviously, Jiang Qing did not show any sign of regret. In this case, according to the law, her death sentence should be carried out immediately. My explanation is that either her crime was not as serious as charged and convicted, or that the predominantly male court did not want her to be a martyr to her cause.


' Ibid., p. 111.

^ Ibid., p. 114.
If life is a drama, and drama reflects life, the trial of the "Gang of Four" was both dramatic and chillingly realistic. It reproduced in real life an exemplary model theater. A heroic woman as primary character was set off by two types of males. Her enemies demonized her according to her gender; her male comrades were politically weak and morally unsound. The only difference between reality and theater was that the heroic woman Jiang Qing could not save the situation as women heroes do in the model plays. She was defeated, deprived of political rights and identity, the very medium her women characters in model theater have appropriated to escape the gender confinement.

The cultural significance of the trial of Jiang Qing in terms of gender relations in China, as I look at it, is its success in sexualizing, regendering and therefore, depoliticizing the image of communist women.11 It pronounced the end of an era for "iron girls" and "strong women" in literary representation in China, and staged, sadly, the come back of male redefinitions of womanhood.

In this regard, Tonglin Lu points out that "the Chinese women's representational power in the discourse of the Communist Party, instead of helping them make a radical break away from traditional gender discrimination, is currently

11 See my discussion in the Introduction about an obvious social tendency of women returning to their traditional gender roles in the Post-Mao era.
used as an excuse by some intellectuals in China or in the
field of Chinese studies overseas to formulate a misogynistic
discourse in the post-Mao era.”¹² This misogynistic discourse
requires women to follow their gender roles--wifedom and
motherhood. Women with public or political identities are
virtually discriminated against. A woman director of a
factory in Shanghai shares her view of what a woman means in
China today: "China is a male-centered society. Women,
except for the roles of daughters, lovers, wives, mothers,
and mothers-in-law that they successively play, can never
enter the male-centered society. Once you rush in, you are
no longer considered a complete woman."¹³

Throughout Chinese history, what a complete woman is and
what a real woman should be, has always been determined by
men. One of best elucidations of this cultural phenomenon is
Lu Xun’s 1925 essay “On Photography.” In this sarcastic
piece recording some of his random thoughts from the impact
of introducing Western technology to China and Chinese
xenophobia, Lu Xun first questions the nature of photography
in terms of its relation to the reality it tries to capture.
One can “take two pictures of oneself,” Lu Xun discovers,
“each with a different costume and expression, then put them


¹³ Ibid., p. 5.
together into a single photograph: two selves, like a guest and host, or a master and slave." What shows in a photograph, as in all cultural products, is the human production, manipulation and distortion of reality. The picture refers to superficiality of culture, or human life recorded superficially. The artificial smiles, the unnatural pose in certain positions, and hierarchical arrangement of the seating of a family photo reveal the falsified nature of culture. This artificiality is what one usually regards as the real, as the memory of the real, and then "hang(s) it up in one's library." And the most artificially-made reality in Chinese culture, according to Lu Xun, is represented by Mei Lanfang, a male Beijing opera star whose performance of female roles made him widely known. Beijing opera developed as a hybrid theatrical from in the 18th and 19th centuries and became wildly popular during the late Qing and early Republic periods. Until 1911, women were not allowed to


" Women were not allowed to act in Beijing opera till the turn of this century. This male playing female tradition lasted till the begining of the Cultural Revolution. This locus classicus for crossdressing, Chinese culture may well have influenced Jiang Qing's interest in using the form of traditional Beijing opera to be the site of feminist crossdressing. See Ma Shaopo et al eds. Zhongguo jingju fazhan shi (The History of the Development of Beijing Opera) 2 Vols. (Taipei: Shangding wenhua chuban she, 1992).
perform on the stage. Men played women’s roles. Later, when allowed to act in Beijing opera, actresses had “to imitate a male technique for symbolizing feminine qualities.” It was always the male who defined what was the most feminine. This tradition continued well into the 1960s. Indeed, Chinese femininity literally and symbolically is the product of male acting and male fantasy. Men do not act as women, rather, they act out what they fantasized to be the ideal woman, and make that fantasy the cultural norm and commonsense. Gender is made up; it is a social artifact. Lu Xun concludes his salient observation with the comment that “the art that is the most noble and eternal in China is the art of men acting as women.”

Within this cultural context where men eternally act women, define femininity, woman’s agency (read as the disruption of male confinement) and woman’s subjectivity (as regaining the sense of self-definition) promoted by model theater and its cultural predecessors are of cultural importance. As a direct reaction against this sexist tradition, model theater gave women actors many of the leading roles, and allowed its women characters to break the shackles of gender.

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16 A. C. Scott, Mei Lan-fang, the Life and Times of a Peking [Beijing] Actor (Hong Kong University Press, 1969), p. 3.

17 Lu Xun, p.203.
Model theater represents women's appropriation of the political and historical moments when the overarching class discourse provided a window for them to get out of the social constructs of womanhood. Class struggle discourse, like the nationalist and individual salvation discourses in the early modern era, opens a venue for women to their long-desired liberation from socially derogative categories of femininity. In a sense, class struggle is a shelter that buttresses women's escape from their designated home and hearth. As a result, women are freed from their gendered obligations as daughters, wives, mothers and widows. They become heroes in the public arena where all social values reside.

However, model theater, like all artistic works, is an idealized fantasy. The Chinese feminism represented by model theater visualizes an ideal world where women's images can be reshaped and to reclaim women's social space of representation is only a possibility. Model theater courageously inserts a Chinese feminist version of lesbianism and androgyny into a male chauvinist literary tradition. Model theater is a feminist utopia. It suggests at once "the grandeur of striving to reach 'the good place' [euphoria in Greek] and the futility of searching for 'no place' [outopia]."12 Despite its somewhat cultural and political

ambiguity, its impact on Chinese women's liberation will always be felt.
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B. Other Sources:


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