

Source: de Bary, W. M., Neo-Confucianism and Richard Lufrano, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 2, New York: Columbia, 2000. *The New Culture Movement* 389

advocated accepting the good and rejecting the bad and selecting what is best. This is the most fashionable tune of compromise. . . .

The fundamental error of Professors Sa, He, and others lies in their failure to understand the nature of cultural change. . . . Culture itself is conservative. . . . When two different cultures come into contact, the force of competition and comparison can partially destroy the resistance and conservatism of a certain culture. . . . In this process of survival of the fittest, there is no absolutely reliable standard by which to direct the selection from the various aspects of a culture. In this gigantic cultural movement, the "scientific method" the ten professors dream of does not work. . . . There is always a limit to violent change in the various spheres of culture, namely, that it can never completely wipe out the conservative nature of an indigenous culture. This is the "Chinese basis" the destruction of which has been feared by numerous cautious people of the past as well as the present. This indigenous basis is found in the life and habits produced by a certain indigenous environment and history. Simply stated, it is the people—all the people. This is the "basis." There is no danger that this basis will be destroyed. No matter how radically the material existence has changed, how much intellectual systems have altered, and how much political systems have been transformed, the Japanese are still Japanese and the Chinese are still Chinese. . . . The ten professors need not worry about the "Chinese basis." . . . Those of us who are forward-looking should humbly accept the scientific and technological world culture and the spiritual civilization behind it. . . . There is no doubt that in the future the crystallization of this great change will, of course, be a culture on the "Chinese basis."

[Hu, *Hu Shi wencun*, collection 4, ch. 4, pp. 535-540 - WTC]

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RADICAL CRITIQUES OF TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

The radical critique of traditional culture led directly to the spawning of new political movements, often inspired by trends in the West and Japan, to remedy what were seen as social injustices and oppressive institutions in China. These were essentially intellectual movements, without popular support, but they had a profound influence on members of the educated elite who became leaders of revolutionary parties. Among these, anarchist, egalitarian, and feminist movements in the early decades of the twentieth century contributed to the ferment and discontent that stirred the founders of the Chinese Communist Party. In the essays that follow, the close association of feminism and liberationist ideals with anarchism and communism is evident.

HE ZHEN: "WHAT WOMEN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMUNISM"

The early anarchist movement in China produced a rigorous critique of the family system and the place of women in traditional society. Chinese feminism had been a

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CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

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distinct current since at least the 1880s, when Kang Youwei had organized a society against foot binding, and again in the 1890s, when Liang Qichao argued that women should become productive members of society and that as the first educators of China's children, they needed to become educated themselves. The woman revolutionary Qiu Jin also eloquently spoke of the plight of women.

The essay below is by He Zhen, of whom little is known beyond the fact that she was the wife of Liu Shipei (1884–1917), a leader of the anarchist movement. The essay, probably originally a speech or lecture, was published in the journal *Natural Justice* (*Tianyi bao*), founded by He and Liu after they fled to Tokyo in 1907. Circulated for the most part on a monthly basis among the growing exile and student community in Tokyo, copies of the journal were also smuggled back to the mainland. Along with *New Century* (*Xin shiji*), published by Chinese exiles in Paris, it propagated anarcho-communism while advocating revolutionary action; it may be said to represent the most radical wing of the growing revolutionary movement. In this essay, He Zhen refused to justify feminism on grounds of its subserving the nationalist movement, instead demanding “women’s liberation” as an absolute right. Further, she argued that the state and society oppressed both men and women and that both would continue to be oppressed as long as capitalism survived. Revolutionary change was thus needed to create a new society on truly egalitarian principles; for a few women to join ruling-class men at the top of society would still leave the majority of women mired in misery at the very bottom.

What is the most important thing in the world? Eating is the most important. You who are women: what is it that makes one suffer mistreatment? It is relying on others in order to eat. Let us look at the most pitiable of women. There are three sorts. There are those who end up as servants. If their master wants to hit them, he hits them. If he wants to curse them, he curses them. They do not dare to offer the slightest resistance, but slave for him from morning to night. They get up at four o'clock and do not go to bed until midnight. What is the reason for this? It is simply that the master has money and you depend on him in order to eat.

There are also women workers. Everywhere in Shanghai there are silk factories, cotton mills, weaving factories, and laundries. I don't know how many women have been hired by these places. They too work all day into the evening, and they too lack even a moment for themselves. They work blindly, unable to stand straight. What is the reason for this? It is simply that the factory owner has money and you depend on him in order to eat.

There are also prostitutes. Every day they are beaten by their pimps. Whatever the customer is like, they must service him if he wants to be serviced, or they must gamble with him if he wants to gamble. People despise them. The “wild chickens” of Shanghai have to stand in the streets waiting for customers at midnight in the wind and snow. What is the reason for this? It is simply that since your family is poor you must sell yourself in this way in order to eat.

Aside from these three kinds of people, there are also concubines. They must swallow their resentment no matter how the first wife mistreats them. This too is because they depend on men in order to eat. As for widows, a very few who are from rich families will die to protect their virtue. Very many who are from poor families will die because they have no children [to support them] and cannot remarry. This too is because they have nothing to eat. But even if they survive, their lives are still bitter and so they actively seek to die. As for women who farm the fields or raise silkworms, their lives are also very bitter. The things they have to do are just enough to let them scrape by. Moreover, women who marry are beaten and cursed by their husbands or else ignored, and they dare not make trouble. [This is] not because they want to gaze upon their husband's face but because they want to gaze upon a bowl of rice.

Thus those of us who are women suffer untold bitterness and untold wrongs in order to get hold of this rice bowl. My fellow women: do not hate men! Hate that you do not have food to eat. Why don't you have any food? It is because you don't have any money to buy food. Why don't you have any money? It is because the rich have stolen our property. They have forced the majority of people into poverty and starvation. Look at the wives and daughters in the government offices and mansions. They live extravagantly with no worries about having enough to eat. Why are you worried every day about starving to death? The poor are people just as the rich are. Think about it for yourselves; this ought to produce some disquieting feelings.

There is now a kind of person who says that if women only had a profession, they would not fear starvation. Middle-class families, for example, are sending their daughters to school, either to study a general course or to learn a little of handicrafts. Then if they get married they can become teachers. They won't need to rely on men in order to survive. Likewise, families that are very poor are sending their daughters and daughters-in-law to work in factories. As long as they stay there day after day, they will have a way of making a living. They won't have to become maids or prostitutes. This point of view has some truth in it. However, as I see it, schools too are owned and operated by certain people, and if you teach in a school, then you are depending on those people in order to eat. Factories too are built by investors, and if you work in a factory, you are depending on its owners in order to eat.

As long as you depend on others, you cannot be free. This is not much different from those who depended on others in previous ages and thus were subject to oppression. How could they be called independent? Moreover, when you depend on a school or a factory for your living, won't you end up jobless if they close down or if your boss decides he has too many workers or if no one wants your skills? Therefore, in the final analysis depending on others is dangerous and not at all a good idea. . . .

I have a good idea that will exempt you from relying on others while still finding food naturally. How? By practicing communism. Think of all the things

in the world. They were either produced by nature or by individual labor. Why can rich people buy them but poor people cannot? It is because the world trades with money. It is because people seize the things they have bought with money for their exclusive use. If every single woman understands that nothing is more evil than money, and they all unite together to cooperate with men to utterly overthrow the rich and powerful and then abolish money, then absolutely nothing will be allowed for individuals to own privately. Everything from food to clothes and tools will be put in a place where people — men and women alike, as long as they perform a little labor — can take however much of whatever they want just like taking water from the ocean. This is called communism.

At this time, not only will we be free of depending on others for food to eat, but also the food will all be good to eat. It will be possible to have good things to wear, good things to use, and good things to play with. Think about it: will this be a better future or not? I am not lying to you. If we only unite together, with this method [communism] we can naturally have a good future. There is no doubt about it. As we say colloquially, "the good times are coming." This is what I have to say today.

[He, "Lun nūzi dangzhi gongchan zhuyi," pp. 229-232 — PZ]

WOMEN'S REVENGE

The learning of Confucianism has tended to be oppressive and to promote male selfishness. Therefore, Confucianism marks the beginning of justifications for polygamy and chastity. People of the Han dynasty studied Confucianism and felt free to twist the meaning of the ancient writings as they pertained to women in order to extend their own views. The *Discourses in the White Tiger Hall* is a good example of this. The people who proposed these doctrines were simply pursuing their selfish interests. For example, from Wang Mang, who dressed up the *Rites of Zhou* to have more imperial concubines, ordinary wives, and empresses, down to the likes of Zhang You and Ma Rong, everyone increased the number of their wives and concubines.

Song dynasty Confucians continued [these doctrines]. They further supported this system of oppression and denigrated women, placing them outside of the "human way." Ever since, every single man of learning has praised the theories of the Han and the Song as priceless beyond jade and gold. These attitudes have reinforced each other, and the faults of the theory have never been understood. Cunning people have dressed up these theories to their own advantage. Stupid people believe in these theories with a superstitious force impregnable to skepticism. I don't know how many of us women have died as a result. Therefore, the entire learning of Confucianism is a murderous learning. . . .

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was like that of the minister and his ruler, and so men took precedence over women and men were honorable while women were contemptible. From this, every evil theory designed to keep women from having freedom followed; for example, the theories that the yang force leads while the yin force follows and that men take action while women follow. Precisely because of the theory that men were honorable while women were contemptible, every evil theory making men into Heaven followed: men were to Heaven as women were to earth and men were yang while women were yin. An absolute inequality was accordingly formed between men and women. Alas! . . .

Since men practiced polygamy and feared that women would want more than one husband, they therefore made women's morality a matter of diligence, chastity, and purity. They also feared that women would not be able to control themselves and so guided them with doctrines of prudence and staying at home, treating women like prisoners. Men also feared that after they died, their women would no longer be theirs. So "honoring chastity" is simply a euphemism [for preventing remarriage]. This is like an autocrat encouraging loyalty and constancy to himself because he wants his ministers to be willing to die for him. The subtlety of these phrases is magnificent. However, the women of ancient times did not regard remarriage as taboo. The *Rites* therefore spoke of the mourning required after the death of a father, and the prohibition against remarriage after the death of a husband arose. Later, the Confucians of the Song dynasty all in a great wave agreed that starving to death was but a small matter compared to the loss of a woman's virtue [through remarriage]. Is this not treating women like private property?

Aside from "virtuous wives" they spoke also of "chaste women." Virtuous wives have to protect their virtue for their husbands. Chaste women have to protect their chastity for their fiancés, once they are betrothed. . . . Jiao Xun also advocated virtue in women. He said a virtuous woman did not change her name (remarry), just as men loyal to a fallen dynasty went into hiding. Women should die faithful to their deceased husbands, like a loyalist giving his life to his dynasty. . . . Thus are women driven to their deaths with this empty talk of virtue. We can see that the Confucian insistence on ritual decorum is nothing more than a tool for murdering women. . . .

This proves that women have duties but no rights. Because household responsibilities cannot be assumed by men, all the tasks of managing the household are given to women. Out of fear that women might interfere with their concerns, men made up the theory that women had no business outside of the home. By doing so, they deprived women of their natural rights. Giving women duties without rights allowed men to live in idleness while condemning women to work. Keeping women at home allowed men to pursue education while women were trapped in ignorance. Isn't this the greatest of injustices? . . .

This proves that the right of a woman to leave her husband resides with men.

A husband can leave his wife, but a wife cannot leave her husband. Therefore, no matter how badly a husband treats his wife, there is nothing she can do about it. But if a wife behaves badly toward her husband, she becomes subject to the seven grounds for divorce. Isn't this how the ancients augmented the rights of males? . . .

How did this poison fill the entire world? It can be traced to the doctrines of Ban Zhao of the Eastern Han. These have been taken as the last word on the subject ever since then, though they are completely ridiculous. An examination of her *Admonitions for Women* [chapter 23] shows that first of all she emphasizes the ignoble and weak nature of women. She says women are inferiors and should be humble and yielding as well as respectful and deferential. They should place others before themselves and must accept all insults and hardships, as if ever kneeling in fear.

Ban Zhao also said that if a wife did not serve her husband proper order would collapse and that the female principle of yin found its function in gentleness while women found their beauty in weakness. Women were prohibited from insulting their husbands, while virtue lay in their being pure and quiet. Alas! Once this doctrine was propagated women were subjected to men by a set of rules. This was called the doctrine of propriety, but it is nothing but humiliation! It was called "proper order" but is nothing but shamelessness! Isn't this [actually] the Way of the concubine? . . .

This traitor Ban was herself a woman, but she was deluded by the false notions of Confucianism. . . . The reason why women's rights never developed lay in the fact that everybody was reciting the books of the traitor Ban. People followed what was already written and the writings of the traitor Ban closely followed the Confucian books, also following what was already written. Thus the crime of the traitor Ban in fact originated in Confucianism.

Therefore, since this doctrine has been propagated by the Confucians, not only have men enjoyed and followed it but also women have sincerely believed in it. Not only has it harmed scholarship but it has also harmed the law. Look at recent laws. If a woman kills her husband, she is put to death by slow torture. If a woman is promised in marriage and betrothal gifts are received, but later the family changes its mind, they are flogged fifty times. The laws are based on the doctrine that men are superior while women are base. The law was thus based on scholarship while scholarship was based on Confucian writings. If we do not utterly abolish the false doctrines of the Confucian writings, the truth will never again be heard.

[He, "Nüzi fuzhou lun," pp. 7-23 — PZ]

HAN YI: "DESTROYING THE FAMILY"

This essay, published in 1907 under the pseudonym Han Yi ("a member of the Han race"), was possibly written by Liu Shipai, who favored a Han Chinese revolution

against the Manchu oppressors. It reflects a view radical for the time, but one already anticipated by Kang Youwei's as yet unpublished *Grand Commonality* (*Datong shu*), which was equally critical of the family system, proposed one-year marriage contracts, and advocated public nurseries for the raising of children. Liu here attacks the family as the source of partiality, which he implicitly contrasts to the ideal of the public good.

All of society's accomplishments depend on people to achieve, while the multiplication of the human race depends on men and women. Thus if we want to pursue a social revolution, we must start with a sexual revolution — just as if we want to reestablish the Chinese nation, expelling the Manchus is the first step to the accomplishment of other tasks. . . . Yet, whenever we speak of the sexual revolution, the masses doubt and obstruct us, which gives rise to problems. In bringing up this matter then we absolutely must make a plan that gets to the root of the problem. What is this plan? It is to destroy the family.

The family is the origin of all evil. Because of the family, people become selfish. Because of the family, women are increasingly controlled by men. Because of the family, everything useless and harmful occurs (people now often say they are embroiled in family responsibilities while in fact they are all just making trouble for themselves, and so if there were no families, these trivial matters would instantly disappear). Because of the family, children — who belong to the world as a whole — are made the responsibility of a single woman (children should be raised publicly since they belong to the whole society, but with families the men always force the women to raise their children and use them to continue the ancestral sacrifices). These examples constitute irrefutable proof of the evils of the family. . . .

Moreover, from now on in a universal commonwealth, everyone will act freely, never again will they live and die without contact with one another as in olden times. The doctrine of human equality allows for neither forcing women to maintain the family nor having servants to maintain it. The difficulties of life are rooted in the family. When land belongs to everyone and the borders between here and there are eradicated, then there will be no doubt that the "family" itself definitely should be abolished. As long as the family exists, then debauched men will imprison women in cages and force them to become their concubines and service their lust, or they will take the sons of others to be their own successors. If we abolish the family now, then such men will disappear. The destruction of the family will thus lead to the creation of public-minded people in place of selfish people, and men will have no way to oppress women. Therefore, to open the curtain on the social revolution, we must start with the destruction of the family.

[Han Yi [pseud.], "Huajia lun" — PZ]

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Source: Atwill, David G. and Yurong Y. Atwill, eds.

Sources in Chinese History, Upper Saddle River:

140 PART ONE ♦ Late Imperial China (1644–1911)

Prentice Hall, 2010.

Yun came to me all smiles and said, “now that I have found a beauty for you, how are you going to reward the go-between?” I asked her for the details.

“I had to broach the topic delicately to her,” she said “because I was afraid that she might have someone else in mind. Now I have learnt that there isn’t anyone, and I asked her, ‘Do you understand why we have this pledge today?’ ‘I should feel greatly honored if I could come to your home, but my mother is expecting a lot of me and I can’t decide myself. We will watch and see,’ she replied. As I was putting on the bracelet, I told her again, ‘The jade is chosen for its hardness as a token of fidelity and the bracelet’s roundness is a symbol of

everlasting faithfulness. Meanwhile, please put it on as a token of our pledge.’ She replied that everything depends on me. So it seems that she is willing herself. The only difficulty is her mother, Lengxiang. We will wait and see how it turns out.”

“Are you going to enact the comedy *Lian Xiangban* of Li Liweng right in our home?”

“Yes!” Yun replied.

From that time on, not a day passed without her mentioning Hanyuan’s name. Eventually Hanyuan was married by force to some influential person, and our arrangements did not come off. And Yun actually died of grief on this account.

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6.11 QIU JIN’S ADDRESS TO TWO HUNDRED MILLION FELLOW COUNTRYWOMEN (1904)

A famous poet and revolutionary, Qiu Jin (1875–1907), typified the earliest generation of revolutionary women. Born into a family of moderately wealthy means and liberal sentiments, her family made certain Qiu Jin received a modern education and socialized in progressive social circles. Leaving a short-lived marriage in 1903, she traveled to Japan which had pioneered women’s education within Asia. Three years later she returned to China advocating Westernization and a democratic (non-monarchical) government. Her activities, illegal at the time, were discovered, and she was arrested and executed by decapitation on July 12, 1907. Today she remains a potent symbol of China’s women’s liberation movement. The following document is her most famous appeal for women’s rights.

Questions

1. Why would having daughters be considered undesirable in late imperial China?
2. Why do you think that Qiu Jin believes education is key for the liberation of women?

Alas, the most unfairly treated things on this earth are the two hundred million who are born as Chinese women. We consider ourselves lucky to be born to a kind father. If we are unlucky, our father will be an ill-tempered and unreasonable person who repeatedly says, “How unlucky I am, yet another useless one,” as if at any instant he could pick us up and throw us to our death. He will resent us and say things like “she’s eventually going to someone else’s family” and give us cold and contemptuous looks. When we grow a few

years older, without bothering to ask us our thoughts, they will bind our tender, white and natural feet with a strip of cloth never loosening them even when we sleep. In the end, the flesh is mangled and the bones broken, all so that relatives, friends and neighbors can say, “the girl from so and so’s family has tiny feet.”

When the time comes [for the parents] to select a husband, everything is based on the promises of two shameless matchmakers. The daughter’s parents will go along with any proposal as long as his family is rich

PITYING THE FRAGRANT COMPANION (LIAN XIANGBAN)—Li Liweng’s play *Lian Xiangban* (Pitying the Fragrant Companion) is a story of a same-sex love affair between a wife and a girl whom the wife has convinced her husband to take on as a maid.

and powerful. Her parents do not bother to ask if the man's family is respectable, or inquire about the groom's temperament and level of education. On the wedding day, one will sit in the brightly decorated bridal sedan chair barely able to breathe. When we arrive at the new home, if the husband is found to be unambitious but even-tempered, her family will say we are blessed with good fortune from a previous life. If he is no good, her family will blame it "on our wrong conduct in a previous life," or simply "bad luck." If we dare complain, or otherwise try to counsel our husbands, then a scolding and beating will befall us. Others who hear of the abuse will say: "She is a woman of no virtue. She does not act as a wife should!" Can you believe such words! These aspersions are cast without the chance for an appeal? Further inequities will follow if the husband dies. The wife will have to wear a mourning dress for three years and will not be allowed to remarry. Yet, if the wife dies, the husband only needs to wear a blue [mourning] braid. Some men find even that unbecoming and do not bother to wear it at all. Even when the wife has only been dead for three days, he can go out and cavort and indulge himself. A new wife is allowed to enter the household even before the official seven weeks of mourning is over. In the beginning, Heaven created all people with no differences between men and women. Ask yourselves this, how could these people have been born without women? Why are things so unjust? Everyday these men say, "We ought to be equal and treat people kindly." Then why do they treat women so unfairly and unequally as if they were African slaves?

A woman has to learn not to depend on others, but to rely on herself instead. In the beginning, those rotten Confucianists said things like "men are superior while women are inferior," "a woman without talent is a woman with virtue," and "a wife should submit to her husband" and other such rubbish. If women have any ambition, we should call upon our comrades to oppose them. Chen Houzhu, the ruler of Chen Dynasty, started the practice of foot binding. If we, as women, feel any shame, then we should condemn the practice. It is not like our legs were tied while they bound our feet. Why can't we reject footbinding? Are they afraid of women being educated, knowledgeable, and perhaps surpassing them, men do not allow us to study. We must not simply go along with their decision without even challenging them. We cannot surrender

our own responsibilities and be content with a lazy and undemanding life while men control the important matters.

If men call us useless, we become useless. So why are we not bothered when we are called inept? Why do we not even question them when we are turned into slaves, all in exchange for our comfort? Are we to enjoy life while contributing nothing? Perhaps we are worried that our comforts may not last. As soon as we hear that men crave for 'small feet,' we rush to bind our feet to please them. For this sacrifice we earn the right to live a life in which we contribute nothing. And being forbidden to read and write, is precisely what we, as women, desire. Why do we disagree? Remember, there is no such fortune in the world that is just there for the taking! Power belongs to the learned and knowledgeable men who contribute to society, and we become their slaves. Since we are the slaves, how can we not be oppressed? We have brought this upon ourselves. How can we blame others? It is depressing to talk about this. We all have experienced this type of life, so there is no need for me to go further into details.

However, from now on I hope we can leave the past behind us and focus on our future. Assuming we have died in the past and are reincarnated into our next life the elders should not say "too old to be of any use." If you have a decent husband who wants to establish a school, do not stop him. If you have a fine son who wishes to study abroad, do not stop him. The middle-aged wife should not hinder her husband down causing him to have no ambition and achieve nothing. If you have a son, send him to school. Do the same for your daughter and never bind her feet. If you have a young girl, the best choice would be for her to attend school, but even if she is unable to attend schools, you should teach her to read and write at home. If you come from a family of officials that has money, you should persuade your husband to establish schools and factories and do good deeds that will help common people. If your family is poor, you should work hard to help your husband. Do not be lazy and do nothing. These are my hopes. All of you are aware that we are about to lose our country. Men can barely protect themselves. How can we rely on them? We must revitalize ourselves. Otherwise all will be too late when the country is lost. Everybody! Everybody! Please keep my hopes alive!

CHEN DYNASTY (557-589)—The last of the Southern dynasties during China's period of disunion just prior to the Sui dynasty.

Shaanxi, and a crusade of propaganda was being conducted among inhabitants of newer areas to spread the same elementary reforms there. As an outstanding achievement, opium had been completely eliminated in north Shaanxi, and in fact I did not see any sign of poppies after I entered the Soviet district. Official corruption was almost unheard-of. Beggary and unemployment did seem to have been, as the Reds claimed, "liquidated." I did not see a beggar during all my travels in the Red areas. Foot-binding and infanticide were criminal offences, child slavery and prostitution had disappeared, and polyandry and polygamy were prohibited.

The myths of "communized wives" or "nationalization of women" are too patently absurd to be denied, but changes in marriage, divorce, and inheritance were in themselves extremely radical against the background of semi-feudal law and practice elsewhere in China. Marriage regulations included interesting provisions against mother-in-law tyranny, the buying and selling of women as wives and concubines, and the custom of "arranged matches." Marriage was by mutual consent, the legal age had been moved up sharply to twenty for men and eighteen for women; dowries were prohibited, and any couple registering as man and wife before a county, municipal, or village Soviet was given a marriage certificate without cost. Men and women actually cohabiting were considered legally married, whether registered or not—which

seems to rule out "free love" —and their offspring were legitimate. No illegitimacy of children was recognized.

Divorce could also be secured from the registration bureau of the Soviet, free of charge, on the "insistent demand" of either party to the marriage contract, but wives of Red Army men were required to have their husband's consent before a divorce was granted. Property was divided equally between the divorcees, and both were legally obliged to care for their children, but responsibility for debts was shouldered by the man alone(!), who was also obliged to supply two-thirds of the children's living expenses.

Education, in theory, was "free and universal," but parents had of course to supply their children with food and clothing. In practice, nothing like "free and universal education had yet been achieved, although old Xu Teli, the commissioner of education, boasted to me that if they were given a few years of peace in the Northwest they would astound the rest of China with the educational progress they would make. Farther on I shall discuss more in detail what the Communists had done and hoped to do to liquidate the appalling illiteracy of this region, but first it is interesting to know how the government was financing not only the educational program, such as it was, but this whole seemingly simple and yet in its way vastly complex organism which I have called Soviet society.

Start here

10.6 DING LING'S THOUGHTS ON MARCH 8, WOMEN'S DAY (1942)

Ding Ling's early success as a leftist feminist writer in the 1920s and 1930s (8.12) had made her one of the darlings of the May Fourth Era writers. Yet the traits that might have been admired among the Beijing and Shanghai elite did not have the same effect in Yan'an. Her caustic portrayal of women at the hands of communist **cadres** in Yan'an reflects her tendency to offer an unsparing (if accurate) analysis of life under the CCP. The following column, published by her in 1942, highlights the most common abuses women faced in Yan'an. The column obliquely indicts a pattern among top CCP leaders (including Mao Zedong) to divorce their aging wives in favor of younger women available in Yan'an. The following article originally appeared on March 9, 1942 in the literary section of the *Liberation Daily*, Yan'an's main newspaper. Soon after its publication Ding Ling was accused of taking an overly feminist line in her writing. She (and many other writers) immediately offered self-criticisms and she accepted the party's reproach of her writing as "divisive" in order to be rehabilitated by the party.

CADRE—In the Chinese Communist context, a term meaning functionaries or administrators, often used as shorthand for essential or particularly revolutionary "backbone" members of the CCP.

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Questions

1. What does Ding Ling suggest are the primary problems women face in Yan'an?
2. In what ways does she suggest there is a double standard for woman revolutionaries that does not exist for men in Yan'an?

When will it no longer be necessary to attach special weight to the word “woman” and to raise it specially?

Each year this day comes round. Every year on this day meetings are held all over the world where women muster their forces. Even though things have not been as lively these last two years in Yan'an as they were in previous years, it appears that at least a few people are busy at work here. And there will certainly be a congress, speeches, circular telegrams, and articles.

Women in Yan'an are happier than women elsewhere in China. So much so that many people ask enviously: “How come the women comrades get so rosy and fat on millet?” It doesn't seem to surprise anyone that women make up a big proportion of the staff in hospitals, sanatoria, and clinics, but they are inevitably the subject of conversation, as a fascinating problem, on every conceivable occasion. What's more, all kinds of women comrades are often the target of deserved criticism. In my view these reproaches are serious and justifiable.

People are always interested when women comrades get married, but that is not enough for them. It is impossible for women comrades to get onto friendly terms with a man comrade, even more so with more than one. Cartoonists ridicule them: “A departmental head getting married too?” The poets say: “All the leaders in Yan'an are horsemen, and none of them are artists. In Yan'an it's impossible for an artist to find a pretty sweetheart.” In other situations they are lectured at: “Damn it, you look down on us old cadres and say we're country bumpkins. But if it wasn't for us country bumpkins, you wouldn't be coming to Yan'an to eat millet!” Yet women invariably want to get married. (It's even more of a sin not to marry, and single women are even more of a target for rumors and slanderous gossip.) So they can't afford to be choosy, anyone will do: whether he rides horses or wears straw

sandals, whether he's an artist or a supervisor. After marriage, they inevitably have children. The fate of such children is various. Some are wrapped in soft baby wool and patterned felt and looked after by governesses. Others are wrapped in soiled cloth and left crying in their parents' beds, while their parents consume much of the child's allowance. But for this allowance (25 yuan a month, equivalent to just over three pounds of pork), many would never get a taste of meat. Whoever they marry, those women who are compelled to bear children will probably be publicly derided as “**Noras** who have returned home.” Those women comrades in a position to employ governesses can go out once a week to a prim get-together and dance. Behind their backs there will also be the most incredible gossip and whispering campaigns, but wherever they go they cause a great stir and all eyes are glued to them. This has nothing to do with our theories, our doctrines, and the speeches we make at meetings. We all know this to be a fact, a fact that is right before our eyes, but it is never mentioned.

It is same with divorce. In general there are three conditions to observe when getting married. These are (1) political purity; (2) similar age and comparable looks; and (3) mutual help. Even though everyone is said to fulfill these conditions—as for (1), there are no open traitors in Yan'an; as for (3), you can call anything “mutual help,” including darning socks, patching shoes, and even feminine comfort—everyone nevertheless makes a great show of giving thoughtful attention to them. And yet the pretext for divorce is invariably the wife's political backwardness. I am the first to admit that it is a shame when a man's wife is not progressive and retards his progress. But let us consider how backward they really are. Before marrying, they were inspired by the desire to soar in the heavenly heights and lead a life of bitter struggle. They got married partly through physiological necessity and partly as a

A DOLL'S HOUSE—An 1879 play by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. It traces Nora's realization of her limited role in society and her determination to fight against patriarchal constraints. The play's feminist themes made it popular in May Fourth era China, with Hu Shi praising the play as “nothing but realism.”

response to sweet talk about “mutual help.” After that they are forced to toil away and become “Noras returned home.” Afraid of being thought “backward,” those who are a bit more daring rush round begging nurseries to take their children. They ask for abortions and risk punishment and even death by secretly swallowing potions to induce them. But the answer comes back: “Isn’t giving birth to children also work? You’re just after an easy life, you want to be in the limelight. After all, what indispensable political work have you performed? Since you are so frightened of having children and so unwilling to take responsibility once you have had them, why did you get married in the first place? No one forced you to.” Under these conditions how can women escape the destiny of “backwardness”? When women capable of working sacrifice their career for the joys of motherhood, people always sing their praises. But after ten years or so, they inevitably pay the tragic price (i.e., divorce) of “backwardness.” Even from my point of view, as a woman, there is nothing attractive about such “backward” elements. Their skin is beginning to wrinkle, their hair is growing thin, and fatigue is robbing them of their last traces of attractiveness. It should be self-evident that they are caught up in a tragedy. But whereas in the old society they would probably have been pitied and considered unfortunate, nowadays their tragedy is seen as something self-inflicted, as their just desserts. Is there not a discussion going on in legal circles about whether divorce should be granted simply on the petition of one party or on the basis of mutual agreement? In the great majority of cases it is the husband who petitions for divorce. If the wife does so, she must be leading an immoral life, so of course she deserves to be cursed!

I myself am a woman, so I understand the failings of women better than others. But I also have a deeper understanding of what they suffer. Women are incapable of transcending the age they live in, of being perfect, or of being hard as steel. They are incapable of resisting all the temptations of society or all the silent oppression they suffer here in Yan’an. They each have their own past written blood and tears, they have experienced great emotions—in elation as in depression, in the lone battle of life or in the humdrum stream of life. This is even truer of the women comrades who come to Yan’an, so I have much sympathy for those fallen and classed as criminal. What’s more, I hope that men, especially those in top positions, and women themselves will consider women’s mistakes in their social context. It would be better if there were less empty theorizing and more talk about real problems, so that theory and practice are not divorced,

and if each Communist Party member were more responsible for his own moral conduct.

But we must also hope for a little more from our women comrades, especially those in Yan’an. We must urge ourselves on and develop our comradely feeling.

People without ability have never been in a position to seize all. So if women want equality, they must first strengthen themselves. There is no need to stress this, we all know it. Today there are certain to be people who make fine speeches about the need first to acquire political power. I would simply mention a few things that any front liner, whether a proletarian, a fighter in the war of resistance, or a woman, should pay attention to in his or her everyday life:

1. Don’t allow yourself to fall ill. A wild life can at times appear romantic, poetic, and attractive, but in today’s conditions it is inappropriate. You are the best keeper of your life. There is nothing more unfortunate nowadays than to lose your health. It is nearest to your heart. Keep a close watch on it, pay careful attention to it, cherish it.
2. Make sure that you are happy. Only when you are happy can you be youthful, active, fulfilled in your life, and steadfast in the face of every difficulty; only then will you see a future ahead of you and know how to enjoy yourself. This sort of happiness is not a life of contentment, but a life of struggle and of advance. All of us should every day do some meaningful work and some reading, so that each of us is in a position to give something to others. Loafing about simply encourages the feeling that life is hollow, feeble, and in decay.
3. Use your brain, and make a habit of doing so. Correct any tendency not to think and ponder, or to swim with the tide. Before you say or do anything, think whether what you are saying is right, whether that is the most suitable way of dealing with the problem, whether it goes against your own principles, whether you feel you can take responsibility for it. Then you will have no cause to regret your actions later. This is what is known as acting rationally. It is the best way of avoiding the pitfalls of sweet words and honeyed phrases, of being side-tracked by petty gains, of wasting our emotions and wasting our lives.
4. Resolution in hardship, perseverance to the end. Aware, modern women should identify and cast off all their rosy, compliant illusions. Happiness is to take up the struggle in the midst of the raging storm and not to pluck the lute in the moonlight or to recite poetry among the blossoms. In the absence of the greatest resolution, it is all too easy to falter

in mid-path. Not to suffer is to become degenerate. The strength to carry on should be nurtured through the quality of “perseverance.” People without great aims and ambitions rarely have the firmness of purpose that scorns petty advantages and a comfortable existence. Only those who have aims and ambitions for the benefit not of the individual but of humanity as a whole can persevere to the end.

Dawn, August 3, 1942

Postscript

On rereading this article, it seems to me there is much room for improvement in the passage about what we should expect from women, but because I have to meet a deadline, I have no time to revise it. Yet I also feel that there are some things that, said by a leader before a big audience, would probably evoke satisfaction. But when written by a woman, they are more than likely to be demolished. However, since I have written it, I offer it as I always intended, for the perusal of those with similar views.

Stop here.

10.7 WANG SHIWEI'S “WILD LILY” (1942)

Wang Shiwei (1907–1947) attended Beijing University in 1925 and joined the CCP the following year. By the 1930s he had gained a reputation as a talented translator of world literature and as a fiction writer in his own right. With the outbreak of the war against Japan in 1937, he fled to Yan’an. There he translated a large number of philosophical and political works, including works by Marx and Lenin. In the spring of 1942, he published several articles painting life in Yan’an in an unfavorable light. The most famous of these, “Wild Lily” (*Ye Baihehua*), was featured in the literature section of the *Liberation Daily* on March 13th and 23rd, 1942. In response to Wang Shiwei's, Ding Ling's, and others' criticisms, the CCP leaders initiated a political rectification campaign in the spring of 1942. It quickly became clear that he was a main target. He was publicly criticized, then arrested, and finally (some say mistakenly) executed for his views.

Questions

1. What is Wang Shiwei's primary criticism of life in Yan'an?
2. Why would CCP officials be upset by Wang Shiwei's description of Yan'an (and the comparison it made with areas outside of Yan'an)?

While I was walking alone along the riverbank, I saw a comrade wearing a pair of old-style padded cotton shoes. I immediately fell to thinking of Comrade Li Fen, who also wore such shoes. Li Fen, my dearest and very first friend. As usual my blood began to race. Li Fen was a student in 1926 on the preparatory course in literature at Beijing University. In the same year she joined the Party. In the spring of 1928 she sacrificed her life in her home district of Baoqing in Hunan province. Her own uncle tied her up and sent her to the local garrison—a good illustration of the barbarity of the old China. Before going to her death, she put on all her three sets of underclothes and sewed them tightly together at the top and the bottom. This was because the troops in Baoqing often incited riff-raff to defile the corpses of the young women

Communists they had shot—yet another example of the brutality, the evil, the filth and the darkness of the old society. When I got news of her death, I was consumed with feelings of deep love and hatred. Whenever I think of her, I have a vision of her pure, sacred martyrdom, with her three layers of underclothes sewn tightly together, tied up and sent by her very own uncle to meet her death with dignity. (It seems rather out of place to talk of such things in tranquil Yan'an, against the warbled background of [the Beijing Opera] “Yutang Chun” and the swirling steps of the golden lotus dance; but the whole atmosphere in Yan'an does not seem particularly appropriate to the conditions of the day—close your eyes and think for a moment of our dear comrades dying every minute in a sea of carnage.)