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Journal of Women's History, Volume 8, Number 4, Winter 1997, pp. 126-152
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0239>



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MAOISM, FEMINISM, AND THE UN CONFERENCE ON WOMEN:

Women's Studies Research in Contemporary China

Wang Zheng

On a September morning at Huairou, the site of the 1995 Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Forum, over three hundred women from all over the world gathered in an auditorium to listen to the presentations of a group of Chinese women scholars on the topic "Women's Studies in China." This was one of forty-seven panels presented by Chinese women at the NGO Forum. Many participants in the Forum from outside of China, observing Chinese women's activities for the first time, were impressed by what seemed to be an extraordinary amount of women's studies scholarship and activism. Although one of the most significant social phenomena in contemporary China is the development of research on women, the history of women's studies is in fact relatively short and began only with the economic reforms of the early 1980s. Moreover, while the term "women's studies" might have conveyed to participants at the NGO Forum a sense of a common academic enterprise, in fact, women's studies in China has a very different history and content than it does in the United States. Rather than emerging from a feminist movement, women's studies, or research on women (*funü yanjiu*) in China, has constituted a nation-wide women's movement that is creating new discourses on Chinese women. This essay examines the social and political context of the rise of research on women in contemporary China, attempts to delineate the contours of this movement, and discusses the relationship between the Chinese women's movement and Western feminism.

Having played the dual role of participant/observer in the development of research on women in China in the past several years, I will present my observations based on interviews with women scholars and activists in China and participation in some projects carried out in China, in addition to my survey of related literature about and documents of the movement. However, I do not claim that this paper represents an "inside view." Although I was born and educated in the People's Republic (PRC), I have spent the last decade engaged in studying U.S. women's history and Western feminism. I therefore view the current women's movement in China from multiple perspectives.

Establishing a Chinese Women's Studies—the Initial Stage

Women Become an Issue

Although many Western feminist scholars have criticized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for abandoning gender equality in the course of revolution, for many Chinese women who grew up in the People's Republic, especially urban women who were beneficiaries of equal educational and employment policies of the Maoist era, the CCP presumption that "Chinese women were liberated" was a fact beyond questioning. However, this presumption was seriously challenged, for the first time, by the inadvertent effects of the one-child policy. In the early 1980s, cases of female infanticide and abuse of women who gave birth to female infants in the countryside were reported in newspapers nationwide. This was shocking to the Women's Federation (*fulian*) as well as to most urban educated women, since for them these were tales supposedly relegated to the pre-1949 past—the era prior to Chinese women's liberation. The national Women's Federation immediately launched a campaign to "protect the legal rights of women and children," which suggested that women's liberation was an unfinished cause that needed more public attention.¹

Soon after that, other problems related to urban women attracted more public attention and media coverage. These included divorce (associated with long-term separation or social and spacial mobility of groups of men and women during and after the Cultural Revolution), marriage (a large number of urban educated women were reaching their thirties with dim prospects of marriage, an issue that even caught the attention of the Central Committee of the CCP), women's employment (the urban economic reforms quickly threatened gender equality in the sector of public ownership), femininity (as a critique of the ultra-leftist line that supposedly masculinized Chinese women), prostitution (increasingly prominent with the development of a market economy), and so on.²

Facing all kinds of women's problems in the new political era, and granted the task of solving those problems by the Central Committee, the revived Women's Federation (which had been disbanded during the Cultural Revolution) decided that theoretical research on women should be one of its priorities. In September 1984 the national Women's Federation held the First National Conference on Theoretical Research on Women, which emphasized the importance of and urgent need for research on women and asked local Women's Federations to organize women researchers as well as to improve the theoretical quality and analytical ability of Women's Federation cadres. One of the national Women's

Federation's leaders, Zhang Guoying, insisted at the Conference, "We must realize the urgency of social investigation and theoretical research on women's problems. We should guide the practice of the women's movement with theory. Otherwise, the Women's Federation will not be an authoritative mass organization."³

The official push from the national Women's Federation provided legitimacy for research on women, and the power of the Women's Federation's organizational network stimulated research on women nationwide within a couple of years. Local Women's Federations everywhere established research departments to begin investigations of women's problems and formed associations for research on women, which recruited scholars from research institutes and universities, including male scholars interested in women's issues.⁴ These associations were a new form of organization, providing a space for scholars and Women's Federation cadres to meet and discuss subjects of interest. The Women's Federation was undoubtedly the major force behind the surge of research on women.

What made the 1980s a remarkable age for women's research is not just the Women's Federation cadres' efforts but also the spontaneous activities of many women scholars. In 1985, Li Xiaojiang formed the Association of Women's Studies in Henan. That same year, another Association of Women's Studies was formed at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute by some Chinese and Western teachers in the English department. And in Changsha, local women scholars formed a women's society to meet and discuss their concern with women's issues. In 1987, the Center for Women's Studies was established at Zhengzhou University, an outgrowth of Li Xiaojiang's Association of Women's Studies. In 1988, Qi Wenying, a professor of U.S. history at Beijing University, formed a Women's Salon⁵; an Association of Women's Research was established in the Central Party School by some graduate students and faculty; at Tianjin Normal University, Du Fangqin, Ming Dongchao and other women faculty formed a "Women's History and Current State" research group; at Fudan University in Shanghai, some women teachers in the English department formed a women's studies group; Xu Anqi and Cheng Huifen from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, along with some female journalists, formed a women's salon; and in Beijing, the non-government-run Chinese Institute of Management established a Women's Studies Institute headed by Wang Xingjuan, a free-lance researcher who in 1992 opened the first national women's hot line.⁶

China had seen a wave of research on women in the 1920s and 1930s, spurred by May Fourth feminism and carried out predominantly by male intellectuals.⁷ In contrast, this new wave of research on women in the late

twentieth century has been conducted primarily by women. Since the mid-1980s, research on women has proliferated. The political chill that followed the violent government repression of protest in Tiananmen Square of 1989 affected some non-official organizational activities, but it did not stop the development of research on women. Why has research on women become such a widespread form of women's activism in the post-Mao era? What are its theoretical underpinnings? What is its relationship to the state? What are women's goals and strategies? And who are the women who have played a major role in creating and sustaining this movement?

The Marxist Theory of Women and the Women's Federation

From the very beginning, many scholars and Women's Federation cadres claimed that Chinese women's studies was guided by a Marxist theory of women (*Makesizhuyi funüguan*). In order to understand the variety of meanings attached to this claim, we need to look briefly at the historical development of the CCP's theory of women's liberation.

The CCP's official discourse on women's liberation has its origins in the May Fourth feminist movement, Marxist theories of communist revolution and the history of private ownership, European socialist views on women's liberation, the Soviet Russian model of women's liberation, and nationalism of the early twentieth century when the Party was first founded (1921). Since May Fourth feminism made women's liberation a badge of modernity in China's political discourse, all political forces in China that claimed to be progressive had to uphold the banner of women's liberation. The CCP, founded by a group of cultural and political radicals who regarded women's emancipation as one of their commitments, began to institutionalize ideas of women's liberation first in the National Revolution (1924-1927), then in the Red Base Areas (1929-1949), and later in the PRC (1949-). In this long and complicated process, the CCP's discursive practices have reflected a range of ideological and political origins, leading to the development of the coherent theory of women's liberation. Except for a few texts translated from Western originals (some were translations from Japanese versions), the main body of theory of women's liberation consists of works of women's liberation theorists in the Party and the Party's documents addressing women's issues in different historical periods.⁸

In the reform era, when the Party's priority of developing a market economy conflicted with its former policies upholding gender equality, the theory of women's liberation became the most important site for the Women's Federation's negotiation with the state in the interests of women. The Women's Federation actively engaged in reformulating, reit-

erating, and promoting the theory of women's liberation. In this process, a new term—the Marxist theory of women—was created to denote the theories that had been formulated in the long process of the Chinese revolution. The content of the Marxist theory of women, however, was not at all fixed. By shifting emphasis in their exposition, advocates of the Marxist theory of women were able to use it flexibly for their political purposes. The Women's Federation's propaganda on the Marxist theory of women served to remind the Party of its commitment to gender equality as well as to consolidate the power of the official women's organization. One of the most successful maneuvers of the Women's Federation in this period occurred on March 8, 1990 when the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CCP, Jiang Zemin, publicly read a speech drafted by cadres of the Women's Federation entitled "The Entire Party and the Entire Society Should Establish the Marxist Theory of Women." The speech was quickly invoked by the Women's Federation as a message to officials of different administrative levels that women's liberation was still on the agenda of the Central Committee of the Party.⁹

Different generations of women holding responsible positions in the Women's Federation system or in different branches of the government in charge of women's affairs have consciously used the Marxist theory of women to defend women's interests during the reform era. For example, when surplus labor became a major problem in the early 1980s, some sociologists and economists (predominantly male) openly proposed that the high rate of women's employment was "unsuitable" for the Chinese economy at that stage and suggested that women should return home to make room for men. It was Women's Federation cadres and women scholars who opposed this, deploying the Marxist theory of women as their weapon. They contended that women's participation in social production is the precondition of women's liberation, that without women's economic independence equality between men and women would have no material base, and that a socialism with Chinese characteristics has to guarantee women's equality in employment. A high-ranking Women's Federation official, Guan Tao, insists that the studies and public debates conducted by the Women's Federation cadres and women scholars on women's employment created a powerful consensus that influenced not only public opinion but state policy makers as well. "In the early 1990s," she argues, "when some people made a proposal to the State Council suggesting that in order to reduce employment pressure China should practice periodical employment for women, Premier Li Peng vetoed it right away."¹⁰ In other words, Women's Federation cadres and women scholars in the reform age have consciously embraced the Marxist theory of women to empower women.

There are two obvious reasons why Chinese women have adopted this strategy at this historical moment. First, these women are all products of the Maoist theory and practice of gender equality. Second, the Marxist theory of women was the only political weapon available that gave women some leverage in negotiating with the state on behalf of women's interests. It should be noted here that the term "Marxist theory of women" does not simply refer to the several Marxist principles summarized in Jiang Zemin's speech. Rather it signifies the entire discourse of women's liberation of the Maoist era.¹¹ It is this discourse, which includes the legitimacy of the Women's Federation and legislation that guarantees gender equality and which has created the legitimacy of the Party's rule by describing the Party as the savior of Chinese women, that exerts its power over the new state leaders who are far less committed to gender equality than the early CCP founders. The discursive power of women's liberation over the state and Chinese women's conscious deployment of that power are what I see as distinctive "Chinese characteristics" relating to research on women.

The Women's Federation's active role in promoting the Marxist theory of women and research on women indicates that the Women's Federation is no longer simply an organ of the government that only serves to make Chinese women statist subjects, as many believe it was in the Maoist era. Rather, the Women's Federation consciously explores strategies to work for women's interests. To be sure, carrying out state policies and demands is still a major part of "women work" (*funü gongzuo*) of the Women's Federation. Nevertheless, the new dimension of the Women's Federation's "women work," that is, studying and solving women's problems, helps place the Women's Federation in a mediator position between women and the state in the reform era.

When we assess the changing role of the Women's Federation, it is also necessary to highlight certain continuities. Although in the reform era the government has "semi-abandoned" the Women's Federation financially (the Women's Federation has to self-subsidize some of its projects and activities, and part of its employees' bonuses), the Women's Federation cadres are still government employees and its top officials are still appointed by their superiors in the government. This means that if the head of a local Women's Federation feels that her first priority is to satisfy her boss in order to secure her job, she could make the whole institution focus on government directives rather than anything else. This factor largely determines the different performances of Women's Federations in different locales.

The other important continuity is ideological: the primacy of the Marxist theory of women. As suggested above, the Women's Federation

cadres' insistence on the Marxist theory of women can help them argue for social justice for women. But in the language of the Marxist theory of women, many Women's Federation cadres also maintain the "truth" that a successful Chinese women's movement can only be led by the CCP, with the Women's Federation as its leading body.¹² Actually, the Women's Federation's publications on the history of the Chinese national and local women's movements, a major effort of the Women's Federation in the field of research on women in the mid-1980s, reinforced that "truth," or rather myth, created in the Maoist discourse of women's liberation. Reclaiming that "truth" reflects the Women's Federation cadres' desire to consolidate the power of the Women's Federation after 10 years of impotence. But it also means that the core of the Maoist discourse of women's liberation is not challenged by the Women's Federation. The Women's Federation is still supposed to be *the* legitimate organization that represents Chinese women.¹³ Mobilizing women to achieve Party goals is still its main objective. The Women's Federation's attempt to identify with both women and the party-state is consistent with the Marxist theory of women, for a socialist state supposedly represents the fundamental interest of women (although it is more accurate to say that the Chinese socialist state *defines* the fundamental interest of women). However, while the tenets of social justice and gender equality in the Marxist theory of women have been challenged by the forces of the market economy, the statist core in the Maoist discourse on women has been seriously challenged by Chinese women since the beginning of the reform era and particularly in the 1990s. In fact, the latter challenge explains most of the dynamics in the development of Chinese women's studies.

The Role of Women Scholars

The promotion of research on women by the Women's Federation was originally an effort that aimed at simultaneously promoting women's interests and consolidating the Women's Federation's official leading position in the Chinese women's movement. But for women scholars in academia, excited by the on-going political and intellectual efforts of deconstructing Maoism in the early 1980s as well as by newly received scattered information on Western feminism, research on women pointed to a new means of political participation and opened up a new social space for women's spontaneous activism. In essence, in the post-Mao era, intellectual women began to reject the making of women by the party-state. In this respect, Li Xiaojiang played the most prominent role in the 1980s.

While many women rejected the Women's Federation's monopoly by engaging in scholarly or activist projects for women on their own, Li Xiaojiang did more. She openly questioned the necessity of the Women's Federation's existence, claiming that there would be no effect on society if the Women's Federation disappeared overnight. She predicted that if it failed to reform, "it would be difficult for the Women's Federation to find its space of development in the social development."¹⁴ Li's criticism was very threatening to top officials of the Women's Federation. Since the founding of the All-China Women's Federation, they had never been confronted by any challenge to their leading position in the Party-controlled women's movement. Moreover, Li's critique drew on the language of reform: the socialist big iron pot was being broken up, she contended, and any institution without practical utility would be eliminated in the process. The theme of reform justified Li's audacious criticism, and the Women's Federation officials found themselves on the defensive.¹⁵ They now had to *prove* the utility of the Women's Federation in the reform era before they could claim a leading position. Seen in this light, the Women's Federation's increasing efforts to work for women's interests have not only grown from within but have also been stimulated by pressure from outside.

Li's rejection of the Women's Federation was not only due to the Women's Federation's previous ineptitude in representing women's interests. More importantly, she believed that "awakened" Chinese women now had the ability to organize by themselves and no longer needed an authority to control all women's affairs.¹⁶ Historically, the All-China Women's Federation was established not because Chinese women were incapable of self-organization. Rather, it was because there were too many "awakened" women and too many women's organizations for the CCP to control or "lead directly." The founding of the Women's Federation in 1949 marked the closing of the social space for Chinese women's spontaneous activism that had been created and developed since the May Fourth era. With the end of the Maoist era, Chinese women intellectuals demanded reopening that space.¹⁷

Interestingly, Li's challenge to the Women's Federation did not result in two separate camps of research on women, one consisting of women scholars and the other of Women's Federation cadres. As a matter of fact, from the very beginning the two groups worked closely to establish Chinese women's studies. Many research projects are conducted jointly by women in academia and women in the Women's Federation. Even Li herself has relied heavily on the help of women in local Women's Federations to carry out many projects and activities. This happy unity can be explained in several ways. First, conferences on women and publications

sponsored by the Women's Federation have been important forums for women scholars whose home institutions usually give little support to their research on women. In other words, women scholars do not have the resources to engage in activism on their own, while Women's Federation cadres are paid and equipped to do research on women. There is no reason for scholars to reject Women's Federation's resources because of their shared interest in promoting research on women.

Second, women scholars have been treated either as equal partners or specialists by Women's Federation cadres. In the new field of research on women, the Women's Federation cadres do not claim superiority or leadership over women scholars. Moreover, women scholars have the freedom to choose whether or not to participate in a project. Instead of compromising their independent positions, women scholars have found a means of participation in policy-making through working with the official Women's Federation.

Third, women within and outside of the Women's Federation who are engaged in research on women are mostly from the same generational cohort and share a similar educational background. They are almost all in their forties and experienced the Cultural Revolution as *the* formative experience of their lives. Many of them had been sent to live in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution and entered college only after it ended in 1976. As college graduates, some of them were assigned to academic institutions and others to the Women's Federation. Differences based on their current working environment do not easily override the common goals and views they formed through their similar past experiences. In fact, women of the same cohort within and outside the Women's Federation have more in common than women of different generations within the Women's Federation. Some women in the Women's Federation are very conscious of their historical role in transforming the Women's Federation (if we avoid the piquant phrase "subversion from within"). In any respect, it is this younger generation of Women's Federation cadres that has made possible the active role the Women's Federation has played in research on women in the past decade.

Finally, theoretical conflicts in the field of research on women have not transpired along a clear-cut line between women in the academy and in the Women's Federation. In the early days, Li Xiaojiang's challenge to the Women's Federation's legitimacy was criticized as "bourgeois feminism" by the Women's Federation's old-liners such as Luo Qiong. But the Women's Federation's very engagement in studying women's problems in the reform era implied a recognition of the inadequacy of Maoist class theory. In fact, after the Cultural Revolution the whole nation, including Deng Xiaoping, seemed eager to abandon class as the

only category of social analysis. It was precisely against this political and intellectual background that the rising attention to women's problems in post-Mao China emerged. Gender issues did not have to be covered, or diverted, by a class analysis any more, even though a clear conceptualization of gender had not yet emerged in this period. In this context, the old-liners' charge of "bourgeois feminism" was very weak and unconvincing. It failed to grip the younger generation of Women's Federation cadres who were also abandoning the Maoist class analysis and exploring new ways of conceptualizing women's issues.

Instead of drawing a line between the Marxist theory of women and "bourgeois feminism," some women researchers in the Women's Federation began a conscious effort to merge the two. In *An Introduction to the Marxist theory of women* (1991), a book praised by the Women's Federation officials as the first theoretical work on the Marxist theory of women in contemporary China and compiled jointly by the national Women's Federation and the Shanxi Women's Federation, an entire chapter is devoted to the relationship between the Marxist theory of women and feminism. Although the analytical framework of the authors is still the Marxist theory of women, they nevertheless criticize the "extreme view" of entirely rejecting Western feminist theory. The authors contend that people holding this view "overlook the fact that women have always been in the oppressed position in class societies, and that their struggle is beneficial to the liberation of humankind. They neglect the fact that feminist pursuit of an ideal society without gender oppression but with gender equality is consistent with the Marxist ideal of eliminating all exploitation and oppression."¹⁸ The authors think it is "unscientific" to refuse to recognize the merits of feminist theory and practice. The correct attitude, they advocate, is to absorb the useful examples of feminist struggle in the development of the Marxist theory of women, including the feminist critique of traditional culture, feminist strategies in fighting for equal rights, and feminist efforts to raise women's consciousness. These statements signify an important departure of the Women's Federation from its former position of opposing Western feminism.

If the changing attitude of Women's Federation officials toward Western feminism prevented a direct collision between the Marxist theory of women and emerging feminist activities in the 1980s, it is also important to recognize that women scholars in academia did not entirely abandon the Marxist theory of women nor did they immediately embrace a feminist gender critique. In the process of theoretical development, there is no distinct line between women scholars and Women's Federation cadres, although women in academia were the first to be exposed to Western feminism in the 1980s (through contacts with Western feminist scholars in

their institutions, or reading about feminism in academic journals or in English-language works). Largely due to the fact that there was very little translation of contemporary feminist texts in the 1980s and that most scholars in China do not read English, Chinese women who were interested in Western feminism had some information about Western feminist movements but very limited knowledge of feminist theoretical development.¹⁹ Their perceptions of Western feminism were often shaped by their personal contacts with Western feminists whom they happened to encounter, or by critiques of Western feminism made in the Maoist discourse of women.²⁰ Little wonder that in this early stage women scholars were promoting women's studies in China without grasping a feminist analytical framework.²¹

An Essentialized Woman and the Discourse of Femininity

What were the specific intellectual trends that shaped or stimulated Chinese women scholars' search for a new direction in the 1980s? In its initial stage, Chinese women's studies received more impetus from contemporary political and intellectual ideologies in China than from Western feminism. The late 1970s and early 1980s were characterized by a surge of interest in gender differentiation. This was in part a rejection of the desexed, politically turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution. Women's resentment of a legalized gender equality that held men as the standard also played a large role in this burst of enthusiasm to be women. But for theorists, the issue of gender differentiation was also closely connected with the neo-Marxist critique of the Party. This critique, represented by the renowned theorist Wang Ruoshui's "alienation" theory, ushered in an age of reappraisal of the Communist regime. According to Wang's theory, the 30 years of the CCP's proletariat dictatorship alienated both the Chinese people and the Party itself, it distorted the human nature of the people, and it corrupted the Party. When this challenging critique was suppressed by the Party, the terms "alienation" and "human nature" had already entered the Chinese intellectual and literary discourse. The essentialism implicit in the concept of a distorted "human nature" lingered in succeeding years.

Following the logic of alienation theory, others began to argue that the ultra-left egalitarian policy on women had distorted women's nature. Masculinization of Chinese women was soon added to the list of ultra-left crimes. Feminization of Chinese women therefore became a progressive stance, suggesting a negation of Maoist politics as well as a recovery of human nature. The Cultural Revolution "iron girl" was ridiculed in both academia and popular culture. Women of the generation brought up with Maoist gender equality found themselves pitied by women of the youn-

ger generation for not having a feminine life and, in some cases, for having become repulsively masculinized. Many female writers gained popularity by depicting that generation's agonizing process of retrieving femininity or rediscovering a feminine self. As a matter of fact, an emphasis on gender differentiation (achieved through the feminization of women) in dress, social roles, behavior, and occupations become the hallmark of the 1980s and marked the birth of a discourse of femininity in post-Mao China.²²

This process of gender differentiation went hand in hand with the rise of women's studies. When many Chinese women rejected a desexed Maoist era and a Maoist gender equality by adopting feminine dress and social roles, some women scholars went further. They wanted to differentiate not only women from men in appearance, but also gender from class in theory. After all, a desexed age had been achieved mainly through the power of the singular, overbearing analytical category—class. Moreover, in both the Marxist theory of women and the Maoist practice of long-term class struggle, women's interests were either subordinated to or neglected by class. Without separating women from class, there would be no theoretical basis for women's studies in China.

In retrospect, it is not accidental that the Western term "women's studies" would catch Chinese women's attention. "Women's studies," a term reflecting the Western ontological tradition, came at a time when Chinese women were looking for something to support their struggle to break away from the grip of class theory. "Women's studies" suggested to Chinese women that in modernized countries women were regarded as a separate independent category deserving scientific and scholarly research. What could announce the distinctiveness of women more loudly than "women's studies"? What could more effectively separate gender from class than scientific theories and methods? Understandably, women's studies quickly became the major vehicle that enabled Chinese women to open a women's field and move away from the dominance of class theory. Li Xiaojiang's works in the 1980s provide the best illustration of this process.

In *The Exploration of Eve* (1988), Li strives to provide a theoretical basis for women's studies in China by separating gender from class. Li contends that the configuration and evolution of female precedes and transcends class. "The two belong to different categories (women belong to a human ontological category, and class belongs to a social historical category)."²³ Li argues that a conceptual abstraction of women is the only correct starting point for constructing the Marxist theory of women. "The precondition of a Marxist theory of women is to abstract entire women, that is, to abandon women's state, nation, historical time, class, and age in

order to obtain a conceptual generalization." She further contends that the Marxist theory of women "belongs to science." As such, "it should not only examine women's class qualification in social historical category, but should also study sex differences based on biology and psychology; and it should also attempt to understand women's existence in the essential movement of human society."²⁴

Li's frequent use of words such as "science," "nature," and "essence" reveals a clear affinity to the Chinese intellectual debate over the alienation theory. Her appeal to science and scientific knowledge is also a frequently used strategy by Chinese intellectuals in their efforts to deconstruct Maoist political discourse. In fact, in this process Chinese intellectuals created a discourse of scientific modernization. Li's effort to establish a scientific women's studies is certainly shaped by this discourse. In the political and intellectual context of 1980s' China, a scientific understanding of women required the language of hard science or pseudo-science (mostly early twentieth century imports from the West) to present an essentialized woman. This essentialized woman is neither to be controlled by Marxist class theory nor to be regulated by proletarian women's liberation theory.

Li's theory of female consciousness is based on a critique of the Maoist discourse of women's liberation. She argues that Mao's gender equality was still male-centered in that women were measured and judged according to men's standards, as illustrated by the slogan "women can do whatever men can do." She also suggests that women's participation in social production does not equal women's liberation, as the "double burden" weighs heavily on women. These critiques of Maoist discourse were certainly very significant in the 1980s. But rather than criticizing socialist women's liberation for its failure in changing patriarchal culture and institutions, Li blames it for its disregard of women's unique femaleness and for its "distortion of the original features of the two sexes."²⁵

Li Xiaojiang and other women scholars were advocating an essential femaleness for political purposes. At exactly the same time, commercial interests found in femininity a lucrative commodity. In the market economy the Chinese media has seen an explosion of images of "modern femininity." Various images of modern feminine women are created with the basic elements of traditional feminine virtue and consumerism. The power to define women has been shifted from the state to market forces. With the power of mass media, commercialized modern femininity has overshadowed the consciousness of female subjectivity while the latter lacks conceptual power to deal with the new challenge. In the changed political and social milieu of the 1990s, many Chinese women scholars began to be keenly aware of the need for new conceptual frameworks in

order to create counter discourses against the discourse of femininity and to move beyond the limits of the Marxist theory of women.

Women's Studies in the Context of the Fourth World Conference on Women

As the 1990s began, research on women in China experienced significant changes. New concepts from Western and global feminisms first trickled and then gushed into China with the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum of 1995. The flow of contemporary feminist theories and practices into China has become a major source of new analytical tools that Chinese researchers on women are eager to grasp. As a result, research on women is not only expanding in scope but also changing in quality with new interrogations of dominant discourses.

International Feminist Communications of the Early 1990s

In the past few years, feminist scholars in the West, especially those who study Chinese women, have conducted many projects involving women scholars in China. These projects include trips to China to present lectures to Chinese women scholars and conferences and programs in their home institutions that invite scholars from China to participate. One of the most influential of these activities was the conference "Engendering China" held at Harvard University in 1992. This was the first time that a group of women's studies scholars from China participated in an academic conference abroad. As Chinese historian of women Du Fangqin remarked, it was "the first formal dialogue between Chinese and Western scholars on research on women in China."²⁶ Critiques of ethnocentrism, orientalism, and cultural imperialism in Western feminist scholarship helped create an academic environment that women scholars from China found congenial.²⁷

Although the Harvard conference was designed to bring together Chinese and Western scholars of Chinese women, one of its most significant results was providing an opportunity for dialogue between two groups of Chinese women: those engaged in women's studies research in the PRC, and Chinese women scholars living in the U.S. who had formed the Chinese Society for Women's Studies in the U.S. (CSWS). One of the main goals of this organization was the promotion of women's studies in China, and the Harvard conference proved crucial for this project. One direct result was that the two groups of Chinese women decided to organize a joint seminar: in the summer of 1993, the CSWS and the Center for Women's Studies in Tianjin Normal University held a two-week seminar

on "Chinese Women and Development—Status, Health, Employment" at the Tianjin Normal University. Five members from the CSWS (the author among them) presented feminist perspectives on gender issues, and over ten scholars in China delivered reports on their research projects on domestic women's problems. Over one hundred women (from both academia and the Women's Federation) from all over China attended the seminar.

The Tianjin seminar enabled Chinese women scholars in diaspora to raise a feminist voice directly in China for the first time. This group of women had become involved in women's studies while receiving their graduate education in the United States. Most of them belong to the same cohort as the majority of women's studies scholars in China: they, too, were products of a Maoist gender discourse. Studying in the U.S., many of them went through a similar intellectual experience: demythologizing Maoist women's liberation with a feminist critique. In fact, they have become the first group of Chinese feminists in the post-Mao era who are intellectually conscious of their position and do not shun the label "feminist." The diasporic position has marginalized this group of women but at the same time strengthened their potential to be a source of counter-discourses in China. The Tianjin project was one of their efforts to open a channel for the flow of feminism to China.

Members of the CSWS were surprised by the eagerness expressed by women researchers at home to learn about feminist theories and methodologies. Even a high-ranking national Women's Federation cadre member said candidly, "Marxism is not enough to analyze women's problems in today's China. We need new theories and we should learn anything that can help explain Chinese women's problems." She asked me straightforwardly, "Now, tell me, what do you think is the most useful thing for Chinese women in your study of the Western theories?" The open-mindedness demonstrated in the seminar indicates women researchers' keen awareness of the limit of the Marxist theory of women and their strong desire for new conceptual frameworks.

For most of the participants, the Tianjin seminar was the first introduction to a gender perspective. Heated discussions followed lectures, and Chinese women's issues were examined in a new light. The questions raised at the seminar include: Has the state always represented women's interests? Was women's participation in social production a state policy to promote women's liberation or a state expedient to use women's labor? What policies of the state had a liberating effect on Chinese women? On which group of women? What should women do when facing gender discrimination in the job market, sexual harassment in the workplace, and violence in the family besides looking for individual help from counseling

services and hot lines? Not all the questions were analyzed carefully and thoughtfully, but the questions themselves suggest a significant step away from the myth that the socialist state automatically represents the fundamental interest of women. Women researchers in China later regarded the Tianjin seminar as the beginning of the "large scale landing of Western feminism in China" that introduced to Chinese researchers the key feminist concept—gender.²⁸

Besides the Western scholars and Chinese women scholars in diaspora, there is a third force that has played an important role in helping the flow of feminism to China: international organizations or private Western foundations, of which the Ford Foundation has played the most prominent role in the first half of the 1990s. It funded both the Harvard conference and the Tianjin seminar. In June 1995, it also funded another major exchange between Chinese and Western scholars, a conference on "Chinese Women and Feminist Thought" in Beijing. The Ford Foundation, with its program on reproductive health in China, has helped send Chinese women scholars to attend conferences abroad as well as bringing Western scholars to China to attend conferences or work on specific research projects. In this sense, the Ford Foundation has enabled increasing intellectual exchanges and communications between women scholars in China and the West. What is more, with the Ford Foundation's funding, many Chinese women scholars and activists have been able to engage in the projects that would be unlikely to be funded by either their home institutions or the government. In addition to its major research projects on reproductive health, the Ford Foundation has funded projects on rural women's development, women's education, the mobility of the female population, and women's legislation. Those projects have functioned to spread feminist perspectives and approaches to women's problems. And this process does not end with the completion of a specific research project. Women involved have often continued their examination of Chinese women's issues with their newly acquired feminist knowledge. For example, a group of women were funded by the Ford Foundation to translate *Our Bodies, Our Selves* into Chinese. In the process, they formed an organization on women's health and engaged in further research on Chinese women's health issues. Such cases indicate that in the past few years intellectual and material resources from abroad have served as a strong stimulus for the growth of a feminist movement in China.²⁹

The Impact of the Fourth World Conference on Women³⁰

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) is certainly the most significant event in the development of the movement of research on women in the 1990s. As China was the host country, the FWCW began to

influence research on women in China long before it was in session. But before examining Chinese women's role in the process, we need to first look into the Chinese government's role in this event. The paranoia expressed by the government at the time of the conference puzzled many people. Why did the Chinese government bid for hosting the FWCW in the first place? The top Chinese leaders made the decision in early 1991 when they were desperately looking for some means to change the international image created by the Tiananmen Incident of 1989. Their assumption that hosting a women's conference would help change their image, interestingly, reflects the power of the Maoist gender discourse, particularly its invocation of the Marxist assertion that "the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation."³¹ The leaders also believe that the degree of liberation among women in China is higher than that of women in the West. Therefore, displaying the achievements of women's liberation in socialist China would demonstrate to the world the high degree of general liberation in China. Seen in this light, the FWCW was an ideal showcase.³²

Although the decision of Chinese leaders to host the FWCW was primarily one of political expedience, it had some immediate positive effects on women. In its effort to present the best face at the FWCW, the government began to give ad hoc support to some projects in women's interests. For example, a project called "Welcoming the FWCW, Millions of Loving Hearts Devoted to Spring Buds" coordinated resources from both the government and the public to help thousands of girls in poor regions begin schooling.³³ To be sure, projects of this kind directly benefit only a small percentage of women. Nevertheless, with much propaganda, they sent a message that the central government was making a special effort to improve women's status as a present to the forthcoming FWCW. Officials at different administrative levels understood that they had to do something special to "welcome the FWCW." As a result, the national Women's Federation was moved to a huge new office building in downtown Beijing; publishers began to look for monographs on women's issues; editors of different journals and newspapers organized special issues either to display women's achievements or discuss issues related to women; special TV programs were produced to spread information about the FWCW and NGO Forum; and the number of women's studies centers in universities jumped from four in mid-1993 to over twenty in 1995. The official line of welcoming the FWCW in the period preceding the conference greatly heightened public interest in women, a sharp contrast to the state's withdrawal from women's causes in previous years.

However, not all women found the government's new attention to women desirable. Many women scholars and activists found that the

state's interest in presenting a glorified image of Chinese women interfered with their effort to identify and study women's problems in contemporary society. Some women's studies associations affiliated with local Women's Federations shifted their focus from research on women's problems to displaying women's achievements. The problem was not simply that energy and resources were diverted from solving women's problems to praising women's achievements. More seriously, exposing women's problems politically subverted the move to display an advanced state of Chinese women's liberation. Some women researchers began to worry about a possible negative consequence of the FWCW: drawing state attention to the movement of research on women that had been largely overlooked previously. If women's issues, or representation of women's issues, became connected with the political interest of the government, then research on women could be defined as political and therefore subject to government regulation or surveillance. Politicizing research on women, therefore, could lead to the end of women's activism that had been relatively ignored in the reform era. This chilling prospect, as we shall see, almost became a reality in 1995.

In spite of such uneasiness, up to the end of 1994 many women activists were still hopeful that the FWCW, especially the NGO Forum, would provide an impetus to the growth of non-government-controlled women's activism in China. The preparation for the conference, which involved the efforts of many Chinese women inside and outside of the government, served as a process of consciousness-raising. For many Chinese, men and women, this was the first time they had ever heard of "NGO." For those women involved in the preparations, especially those who had the opportunity to attend international preparatory meetings, seeing how NGOs functioned and what issues they raised was an eye-opening and empowering experience. Inspired by global feminism, many women quickly began to popularize the idea of NGO, the concepts of women empowering women, sustainable human-centered development, and other major issues raised by women all over the world. By presenting global feminist activities to a Chinese audience, many women scholars and Women's Federation cadres changed their formerly reserved view of feminism. The new slogan became to "connect the rails" [*jiegui*] (merge) with international women's movements. The word "feminism" not only appeared frequently in official women's journals and newspapers but also became a positive word.³⁴

The preparations for the FWCW and NGO Forum both circulated global feminism and generated much more women's activism in China. Women working in the Chinese official preparatory committee, local Women's Federation cadres, and women activists made concerted efforts

to increase Chinese women's participation in the NGO Forum. Originally, the Chinese government had decided to organize thirty panels by government branches and the Women's Federation. With the increasing knowledge of what the NGO Forum was about, women in the Chinese preparatory committee maneuvered to expand the number of panels and to include the participation of non-governmental organizations. In the end, there were forty-seven panels presented by Chinese women. Moreover, in order to "connect the rails" with the global women's movement, the organizers of Chinese panels also included topics that had not been previously discussed in public. Women and human rights, women and the environment, and violence against women were among the topics inspired by global feminism. As a result, the final list of topics presented by the Chinese panels closely resembled the major issues raised in the *Platform for Action*. Many women participants saw the FWCW and the NGO Forum as the greatest opportunity of the century for them to break China's intellectual isolation and to push the boundaries of women's activism in China.³⁵ They were also excited by what they perceived as the new openness expressed by the government.

Unfortunately, government openness ended abruptly in early 1995. Chinese government leaders, encountering challenges and protests by human rights organizations at international meetings, began to see the risks lying ahead. What if those organizations held a demonstration right in the middle of Tiananmen Square? The site of the NGO Forum, the Chinese government decided, had to be moved far away from Beijing. Chinese women activists at home and abroad were stunned when they heard this decision. The implication was clear: an international honor to China had now become an international threat to China's political stability or, rather, to state control of power, in the eyes of the nation's top leaders. The decision to isolate the NGO Forum expressed not only the leaders' determination not to let this event disturb China's political status quo but also the state's suspicion and hostility towards women's spontaneous activities. The ramifications of this decision quickly and adversely affected Chinese women activists.

The government wasted no time in tightening control over every aspect related to the women's conference. The forty-seven panels presented by Chinese women were closely screened through "rehearsals." Talks were geared more to displaying Chinese women's achievements rather than discussing problems. All the delegates to the NGO Forum had to go through official training sessions that warned them against international hostility toward China. Nationalism was fanned up so that each delegate would consciously defend China's honor in front of foreigners even without the presence of security personnel. Disparaging rumors

were spread out through official channels to taint the image of the NGO Forum, to create a psychological gap between Chinese and foreign women, and to justify the tight security measures.³⁶ Local newspapers were not allowed to send their journalists to report on the conference. Western scholars who wanted to do research on Chinese women were not welcomed. Meetings held jointly by women in China and women from abroad on the topic of Chinese women could no longer get official approval. And those women who had attended conferences abroad were visited and questioned by public security personnel. In short, the situation in China was ironic: the country was about to host the largest international conference in world history, while the state, was taking the most severe security measures in the reform era to keep Chinese people isolated from the outside world.

To many Chinese women scholars and activists, the drastically changed political situation threatened to close up the social space for women's spontaneous activism that they had created in the past decade. To serve the best interest of their cause, they had to keep a low profile so as not to attract unwanted attention from the security system. Their strategy was to further "depoliticize" research on women. This included consciously keeping research on women away from politically sensitive issues such as human rights and engaging in some seemingly "non-political" projects for the time being.³⁷ The strategy had its costs as it meant that women researchers could not expect to have an open exchange with foreign women at the NGO Forum on all the issues. Instead, in this historic event they had to perform within the political boundary drawn by the government. In other words, they had to treat the NGO Forum like a showcase, as the government stipulated.

Moving from the initial stage of empowerment in 1993-1994 to this later stage of repression, many women activists were filled with frustration, disappointment, anger, and sadness. It was heartbreaking for them to see that state power was able to straitjacket an international event that was meant to empower women. Yet they were not hopeless. When I met my friends at the NGO Forum, everyone said, "Just keep a low profile and wait for the paranoia to pass." They sounded like seasoned farmers who knew all too well how to contend with bad weather: in this kind of unfavorable political climate, one should just do some fixing and repair work, preparing for a warmer, more productive season.

The political weather has always changed suddenly in China. Even before the adjournment of the official conference, Chinese government leaders' paranoia had already faded. First of all, the NGO Forum ended without incident. There was no demonstration against the Chinese government; instead, there were some demonstrations against American

imperialists! The Chinese government realized that most women from abroad were not coming to discuss China's problems at all. Among Chinese participants, no one acted as a troublemaker. Everyone in the forty-seven panels read their lines according to the script that had been rehearsed many times. With their skillful performance, Chinese participants showed the state that women were not an oppositional force against the government. The end of the NGO Forum brought tremendous relief to the government leaders. They were further thrilled by the gratitude and praise of foreign government officials at the UN conference. It seemed to government leaders that hosting the conference had gained them honor after all. Their nervousness was thus suddenly replaced by a smugness when the FWCW adjourned. Quickly, officials at different government branches staged celebrations. All of them, in their different capacity of working for the conference, had contributed a lot to winning honor for China. The Chinese preparatory committee also had a grand celebration, issuing award certificates to each participant in the NGO Forum (there were five thousand of them nationwide) to acknowledge their great contribution to the nation.

This national farce amused many women participants. They understood that the celebrations signified a switch of official views of the conference. The official return to a positive assessment of the conference meant Chinese women could move toward merging with the global women's movement. After the *Platform for Action* was solemnly signed by government officials all over the world, the national Women's Federation was quick to use the pledge of the Chinese government. It launched a nationwide campaign to implement the *Platform for Action* and the *Beijing Declaration*, the two documents that "voice the aspirations of women all over the world" as the Chinese media proclaimed. This campaign, though only heeded by the Women's Federation system, is creating legitimacy for expanding Chinese women's activism under the guidance of the two official documents. In other words, the two documents will serve as the measure of Chinese women's achievements from now on. And this shift to global feminism in the discourse of Chinese women's liberation is sanctioned by the government with its official boast of China's great contribution to the birth of the two great documents.³⁸

Conclusion

Research on women in China has been carried on for over a decade. It is one of the most significant developments in contemporary China because it represents the first time in Chinese history that women have initiated a national movement. This is a movement for women that is aim-

ing at both theory and social practice. Institutes and associations of women's studies everywhere are holding conferences on women. Women researchers, including both Women's Federation cadres and female scholars, meet frequently to discuss current women's situations, problems, and solutions. Through their activities, women have demonstrated their intention of carving out a social space for women and participating in the process of decision making, at least when it directly relates to women's lives.

In contrast to contemporary feminism in the West, the contemporary Chinese women's movement began with research on women. It emerged from Chinese intellectuals' concerted efforts at deconstructing Maoism. As such, it has absorbed much of the language and ideologies of the post-Mao political and intellectual discourses. While the movement was successful in making gender a conspicuous social category that had long been subordinated to and overshadowed by class in the Marxist theory of women, ironically it accomplished this with an essentialized concept of woman. It therefore also contributed to the formation of a discourse of femininity which expressed Chinese women's revolt against Maoist statist control in the 1980s. However, coming into the 1990s when the market economy has drastically changed women's social and economic environment, the discourse of femininity has lost its original political edge as a resisting force. Instead, it has been co-opted by increasingly powerful commercial forces. The mass media-promoted modern femininity, a mix of traditional female virtues and consumerism, has become a dominant norm that regulates women's behavior and restricts women's choices. It is against this background that an increasing number of women researchers have turned to Western feminism as a source of resistance.

Chinese women researchers do not need to cross a very large gap in order to embrace feminism, if we define feminism as a commitment to gender justice. Although feminism was treated in a derogatory way by the CCP after it assumed power in 1949, the Maoist discourse on women's liberation traces its origins to May Fourth feminism. It was precisely this influence that led the Maoist state to guarantee equal educational and employment opportunities, at least to urban women. Contemporary Chinese feminists, who came of age when these policies were in effect, are increasingly nostalgic about the gender justice they enjoyed (and took for granted) under Maoist socialism. At the same time, however, they object to two elements of that version of gender justice: the state control of its terms and deployment, and the male standard by which equality was measured. Research on women expresses these Chinese women's firm commitment to gender justice, as well as their desire to take control of women's issues in their own hands.

Early in this century, Chinese male intellectuals found in Western liberal feminism a weapon to attack the dominant Confucian culture. With the core concept "women are human beings, too," they promoted a women's emancipation movement in China. Toward the end of the century, Chinese female intellectuals are discovering in contemporary Western feminism a new conceptual framework, gender. It has become a pattern in this century that Chinese intellectuals always turn to the West to look for intellectual inspiration in order to form their own resistance to the dominant discourse in China. It has proved an effective strategy. So, conceivably, they will continue to do so regardless of the qualms of Western theorists of post-colonialism and post-structuralism. In fact, in post-FWCW China, learning about Western feminism and merging with global women's movements are becoming clear goals for many involved in the movement of research on women. Their interaction with feminists from outside of China has taught them that Chinese women will not lose their own cultural identity by learning from others, but, rather, they will be empowered politically and intellectually in their pursuit of gender justice. This new level of openness, facilitated with a state-sanctioned campaign to merge with global feminism, promises continued growth for a women's movement with a feminist gender consciousness and a feminist agenda in the PRC at the end of the twentieth century.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank Emily Honig and Susan Greenhalgh for comments on early drafts of this article.

¹ See Li Xiaojiang, "Funü yanjiu zai Zhongguo de fazhan jiqi qianjing zhanwang" [The development of women's studies in China and its prospects], in *Funü yanjiu zai Zhongguo* [Women's Studies in China], ed. Li Xiaojiang and Tan Shen (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 1991); Tan Shen, "Dui jinian funü yanjiu xianxiang de shehuixue kaocha" [A sociological survey of women's studies in recent years, *Ibid.*]

² For more information on public discussion of women's problems in the 1980s, see Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988).

³ Xi Xingfang, "Woguo funü lilun yanjiu de fazhan yu xianzhuang" [The development and current state of theoretical research on women in our country], Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Women's Federation of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, October 1989. Introducing the content of the First Conference, Xi gives an account of an "important talk" by the director of the Rural Policy Institute of the Central Secretariat, Du Runsheng. The talk, which represents the Party's guidelines to the Women's Federation, emphasizes that the Women's Federation should both encourage women to work for the Party's goals

in the new era and grasp women's special problems and provide services for women.

⁴ Li Jingzhi, "Fulian xitong lilun yanjiu jigou" [An overview of the research institutes of Fulian system], in *Zhongguo funü lilun yanjiu shinian* [A decade of women's theoretical research], ed. Beijing Fulian [Beijing Women's Federation] (Beijing: China Women's Press, 1992).

⁵ A salon is regarded as an informal gathering whose organizer does not have to go through the troublesome procedure of registration for a formal organization.

⁶ See Liu Jinxiu, "Minjian funü xueshu tuanti yilan" [An overview of non-governmental women's academic organizations], in *Zhongguo funü lilun yanjiu shinian*, ed. Beijing Fulian.

⁷ "May Fourth feminism" refers to Chinese male intellectuals' promotion of feminism and the emergence of a women's emancipation movement in the decade between 1915 and 1925. The decade is named after the May Fourth Incident of 1919 in which Chinese students began a nationwide protest movement against both the warlord government and the imperialist powers. For a discussion of May Fourth feminism, see Wang Zheng, "Feminism and China's New Women of the May Fourth Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1995). For an analysis of the CCP's early gender politics, see Christina K. Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). The author argues convincingly that the May Fourth feminist influence on the CCP was much greater than what Western scholars have previously estimated.

⁸ The classics include: August Bebel, *Funü yu shehuizhuyi* [Women and Socialism] (Shanghai: Shanghai kaiming shudian, 1928); Du Junhui, *Zhongguo funü wenti* [Chinese women's problems] (Shanghai: Shenghui shudian, 1936); and Luo Qiong, *Funü jiefang wenti jiben zhishi* [The basic knowledge of women's liberation] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1986).

⁹ After Jiang's speech, the Women's Federation began a concentrated propaganda campaign on the Marxist theory of women. A textbook introduction to this subject was published for teaching in women's cadres' schools. Na Ren and Sun Xiaomei, eds., *funüguan* [The Marxist theory of women] (Huhehaote: University of Inner Mongolia Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Guan Tao, "Zhongguo xianjieduan de funü yanjiu yu funü juece" [China's women's studies and policy making at the present stage], in *Funü yanjiu zai Zhongguo zhuanti taolunhui lunwenji* [A collection of theses on women's studies in China] (Beijing: Institute of Women's Studies, 1995), 8.

¹¹ Significantly, in 1991 women researchers in the national Women's Federation and Shanxi Women's Federation jointly compiled *An Introduction to the Marxist Theory of Women*. The authors reviewed the entire history of Chinese women's liberation under the CCP and discussed policies, legislation, and organizations relating to women's liberation. Apparently, the Marxist theory of women is treated not simply as some ideas about women's liberation, but also practices of Chinese women's liberation. Shanxi Fulian [Shanxi Women's Federation], ed., *Makesizhuyi funüguan gailun* [An introduction to the Marxist theory of women] (Beijing: China Women's Press, 1991).

¹² See Luo Qiong, "Funüguan zai Zhongguo chengong de shijian" [The successful practice of the Marxist theory of women in China], *Qiushi*, no. 5 (1990), reprinted in *Funü yanjiu luncong* [Collection of essays on women's studies] no. 1 (1992): 8-12; and Shanxi Fulian, ed., *Makesizhuayi funüguan*, 136.

¹³ See Tani Barlow, "Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating," in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). In this article, Barlow argues that the Women's Federation has monopolized the representation of Chinese women ever since its establishment.

¹⁴ Li Xiaojiang, *Nüren de chulu* [Women's way out] (Shenyang: Liaoning People's Press, 1989), 37.

¹⁵ Luo Qiong's article mentioned above was an explicit reply to Li Xiaojiang's charge. She was incensed by Li's claim that "it would be difficult for the Women's Federation to find its space of development in the social development" if it did not change. Luo in the article cited many "historical facts" to demonstrate the Women's Federation's achievements in the Maoist era and called for Women's Federation cadres to make continuous efforts for women's liberation, 12.

¹⁶ Li Xiaojiang, *Nürende de chulu*, 43.

¹⁷ For a discussion of Chinese women's activism pre-1949, see Wang Zheng's interviews with women activists of the May Fourth generation in her dissertation.

¹⁸ Shanxi Fulian, ed., 272.

¹⁹ Li Xiaojiang names *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan as the representative works of contemporary Western feminist theory. In fact, these two were the only major works translated into Chinese in the 1980s. It is obvious from Li's book that by 1988 when she was already a prominent advocate of women's studies in China, the most recent major feminist work she had read was *The Feminine Mystique*. See Li Xiaojiang, *Xiawa de tansuo* [An exploration of Eve] (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press), 21, 29.

²⁰ For some concrete examples on this point, see Wang Zheng, "Three Interviews," in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 159-208.

²¹ Li Xiaojiang's works in the late 1980s can best illustrate this point. In *The Exploration of Eve* (1988), she presents a history of the Chinese women's movement that is configured in the Maoist discourse of women. In *Women's Way Out* (1989), she argues that excluding female labor is necessary for economic reform as it seeks high efficiency, however, an open economic system will provide more opportunities for women than before; what individual women should do is to discard the mentality of dependency in order to grab the opportunities and to find a way out of women's predicament.

²² See Honig and Hershatler, *Personal Voices*, 42-51. They accurately recorded the fad of femininity in China and discussed its political implications. Feminine dress and feminine roles advocated in the media in the early 1980s also suggested a call for freedom of choice of personal lifestyles and a rejection of the state control

of private life. The individualistic message had its liberating effect on many women who had not dared to do anything different from what the government required.

²³ Li Xiaojiang, *Xiawa de tansuo*, 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

²⁵ Li Xiaojiang, *Nüren de chulu*, 70, 140.

²⁶ Du Fangqin, "Shinian huigu, Zhongguo funü yanjiu de duiwai jiaoliu" [A review of the past ten years, exchange with foreign scholars in the field of research on women in China], in *Funü yanjiu zai Zhongguo zhuanti taolunhui lunwenji*, 69.

²⁷ The papers presented at the conference are compiled into two books: Christina K. Gilmartin et al., eds., *Engendering China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Li Xiaojiang et al., eds., *Xingbie yu Zhongguo* [Gender and China] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1994).

²⁸ Liu Bohong and Jin Yihong, "Zhongguo funü yanjiu de fazhan" [The development of research on women in China], unpublished manuscript; and Du Fangqin, "Shinian huigu," 70. Both the Harvard conference and the Tianjin seminar have reached a much larger audience than their participants by publishing the papers presented at the conference and the lectures and discussions at the seminar.

²⁹ For more information on projects funded by the Ford Foundation and other international organizations, see Tan Shen, "Funü yanjiu de xin jinzhan" [The new development of research on women], *Shehuixue yanjiu* [Sociological research], no. 5 (1995): 71-73.

³⁰ A portion of this section has been published in *Signs* 22 (Autumn 1996).

³¹ This sentence is one of the most frequently cited Marxist tenets in Chinese texts on women in the PRC. It originally appears in the Chinese translation of Friedrich Engels' article "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific." Engels mentions that Fourier was "the first to declare that in any given society the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation." See Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 690.

³² In the summer of 1995, when the rising paranoia overshadowed the desire to display, the decision to host the conference became controversial within the Party. Then those who were responsible for making the decision began to explain their original motivations and the political context in which they made the decision. The June 4 incident was explicitly mentioned in the explanation that was passed to local party branches and participants in the NGO Forum.

³³ *People's Daily* (overseas version, April 13, 1994). Prior to this project, the government had a "Hope Project" to help children (both male and female) in poor regions begin schooling. Not only the state-owned enterprises but also individuals from all over the country donated money to the "Hope Project."

³⁴ *Funü yanjiu luncong* [Collection of women's studies research] published by the Women's Studies Institute of the national Women's Federation is the major medium promulgating global feminism. In the issues in 1994, articles introducing international preparatory meetings and discussing global feminism almost

entirely replaced discussion of the Marxist theory of women. Contributors of those articles were all participants at international meetings. The articles exhibit an enthusiasm to merge into the global women's movement.

³⁵ For more information on Chinese women's participation in the preparation for the conference, see Wong Yuen Ling, ed., *Reflections and Resonance: Stories of Chinese Women Involved in International Preparatory Activities for the 1995 NGO Forum on Women* (Beijing: Ford Foundation, 1995). In the book, over fifty women write about their own experiences of involvement in international activities.

³⁶ The most widespread rumor was that many foreign prostitutes would come to the conference and foreign women were planning to parade naked in Tiananmen Square.

³⁷ When global feminists demanded that women's rights be treated as human rights, Chinese women researchers were very cautious. They would rather deploy the officially approved phrases such as "improving women's status" and "protecting women's rights and interests" than use the language of human rights. For in the tremendous political tension around the human rights issue prior to the conference, an open identification with human rights could put one in the official category of anti-government political dissident. An example of the "nonpolitical" projects some women undertook include the efforts of the Shanxi Women's Federation to create a massive silk wall hanging embroidered by over a thousand peasant women. The collective embroidery project was a way to inform rural women of the approaching women's conference since the piece was to be displayed at the site of the NGO Forum. This masterpiece of women's art was sold after the conference and the money used to fund Shanxi rural women's development.

³⁸ The official newspaper *Zhongguo funübao* is the best place to observe the evolution of the official discourse on women.