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Viviana Rangil

FEMINISM: China

Advocacy of feminism emerged in China with the rising tide of nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century. In the course of one century, feminism generated significant social

changes while becoming a highly contested site in China's political transformations.

Origins of Feminism in China

After China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, reformers began to raise the "women problem" in their proposals for national strengthening. Reformers attacked foot-binding and campaigned for women's formal education. The most influential theme in their advocacy of women's social advancement was a utilitarian argument that women are half of China's resources. This paralleled the demand for women's equal rights that applied the western liberal concept of human rights. Inspired by international women's suffrage movements, some Chinese revolutionaries against the Qing dynasty envisioned a modern China in which women were entitled to all the rights that men enjoy. In a widely circulated pamphlet, *The Women's Bell*, published in 1903, Jin Tianhe first articulated a feminist principle for early-twentieth-century Chinese liberals: that natural rights should include women's rights. At this point the term *nüquan*, women's rights, entered public discourse.

A group of educated women from elite families were the first generation of Chinese feminist activists. They created about forty women's periodicals and newspapers between 1897 and 1912 in Shanghai, Beijing, and Tokyo, where many Chinese women went for an education. These publications advocated equality between men and women, and condemned foot-binding, arranged marriage, and the Chinese patriarchal family. Many feminists actively participated in the revolution of 1911 that toppled the Qing dynasty. Some scholars see them as nationalists rather than feminists. But women revolutionaries clearly expressed a feminist stance when they launched an organized suffrage movement in 1912 shortly after the Republic of China was founded. The rise of warlord power, however, suppressed the suffrage movement in less than a year. Many suffragists shifted their efforts to breaking gender barriers in professions.

Feminism in the New Culture May Fourth Period

In 1915, the creation of the journal *New Youth* ushered in an age of unparalleled intellectual exploration in China. Intellectuals disillusioned with the revolution turned to cultural solutions to strengthen and revitalize the nation. They believed that for China to survive as an independent nation, Chinese culture had to change. Advocates of the "New Culture" appropriated various ideologies from the West in their critique of the dominant Confucian cultural framework. Gender hierarchy as a Confucian principle was contrasted with the feminist principle of gender equality to demonstrate the backwardness of Confucian culture and the

advancement of western civilization. Centuries-old practices of arranged marriage, chastity, exclusion of women from public domains, and so on, were identified as "feudal oppression of women." Women's emancipation was presented as the key to changing and modernizing China. A large number of western feminist texts were translated into Chinese and were circulated by New Culture journals and newspapers.

After a student demonstration in Beijing against an imperialist infringement of China's sovereignty on 4 May 1919, a nationwide mass movement emerged in urban China. The May Fourth movement, as it was called later, became a powerful vehicle for circulating New Culture messages. Many female students in secondary schools and women's normal schools actively participated in demonstrations, petitions, and public speaking. Young women's public actions that crossed gender boundaries were legitimized by women's patriotism and hailed as a sign of China's modernity, as young women began to demand women's emancipation. Debates on women's issues that originated in New Culture journals exploded into the mainstream media. Women's education, careers, economic independence, political participation, free social contact with men, freedom to choose a spouse, freedom to love and divorce, birth control, and so on, all became hot issues of the era. Within one year of the public debate on coeducation at the college level, Beijing University, one of the most prestigious universities in China, opened its doors to female students in 1920 after a young woman, Deng Chunlan, first requested enrollment. Other universities soon followed suit.

In the May Fourth period (1915–1925), "feminism" had several Chinese translations, including *nüzhizhuyi* (female-ism), *nüxingzhuyi* (feminine-ism), *funüzhuyi* (womanism), *nüquanzhuyi* (the ism of women's rights), and *fumineishimu* (feminism). These unfixed Chinese terms reflect Chinese intellectuals' efforts to grasp the complexity of western feminism. But eventually only one version, *nüquanzhuyi*, remained in circulation. "The ism of women's rights" expressed the May Fourth feminist aims of women's equal rights in political, social, and economic spheres. The liberal feminist theme was popularized in several widespread Chinese phrases: "independent personhood," "women are human beings," "equality between men and women," and "pursuing women's rights." These phrases became the core of a new women's subjectivity within the May Fourth movement.

Feminism in Political Contestations

At the peak of May Fourth feminist agitation and activism in the early 1920s, the political landscape in China was going

through crucial changes. The newly founded Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formed a coalition with the Nationalist Party to start a National Revolution. Its goal was to reunify a disintegrated China by destroying the power of local warlords and imperialists. The two-party alliance at once incorporated the May Fourth feminist agenda and diverted feminist energy into a nationalist cause. By 1925 the growing nationalism overshadowed May Fourth feminist voices in the public discourse. Meanwhile, a two-party women's emancipation movement was gaining momentum in the central areas of the National Revolution.

As Christina K. Gilmartin observes, the 1920s were a "period of peak influence of feminism on Communist and Nationalist revolutionaries" (1995). From its inception in 1920, the CPP incorporated gender equality and women's emancipation in its platform, which reflects both the fact that its founders were the prominent New Culture advocates of feminism and also the new party's urgent need to attract a wider constituency. The Nationalist Party also included gender equality in its platform in 1924 as a result of senior women party members' efforts. May Fourth feminism shaped the dominant political discourse to the extent that women's emancipation became a badge of modernity that both parties claimed to wear. The two parties' promotion of the women's emancipation movement in the National Revolution further consolidated feminist discourse in China.

Although the CCP actively incorporated many May Fourth feminist ideas and issues in the National Revolution, it also adopted exclusionary practice in its efforts to win followers. The CCP publications in the early 1920s began to define feminists who did not join the nationalist movement as "narrow feminists." The term *feminism*, *nüquanzhuyi*, in the Communist usage became increasingly negative, eventually connoting a bourgeois fantasy detached from Chinese reality and the needs of the oppressed women, and a focus on gender conflicts at the expense of national interest. "Women's emancipation movement" (*funü jiefang yundong*) was adopted by the CCP to distinguish the women's movement led by the party from the nonpartisan feminist movement. Communist theorists proposed a line of women's emancipation based on European socialist ideas and the practices of the Soviet Russian revolution. Women's emancipation, as expounded by the CCP, could come only after the success of a proletarian revolution that overthrew both the imperialist power in China and an economic system of private ownership. And economic independence through participation in social production was the top priority in the CCP's definition of women's emancipation.

The influence of the CCP's definition of feminism and women's emancipation correlates with its political power. *Nüquanzhuyi* retained its positive meaning, and independent feminist organizations continued to exist in urban China before the CCP rose to dominance in 1949. After the People's Republic of China was founded, the CCP completed its institutionalization of the women's movement by establishing the All-China Women's Federation. Unifying the women's movement under the leadership of the CCP, the ACWF with its subordinate local branches at provincial, municipal, and district levels soon became the only women's organization that supposedly represented all women's interests in the Mao era. In the party's texts, the party-led women's emancipation movement was presented as the only correct route to women's liberation. A history of *nüquanzhuyi* was erased from the public memory.

Although the social space for spontaneous feminist activism was closed in the Mao era (1949–1976), much of the May Fourth feminist agenda was incorporated in the dominant political discourse of the People's Republic of China. Under the rubric of the party-led Chinese women's liberation, many practices reflected Marxist ideas of women's participation in social production; socialist feminist visions of public kitchens, nurseries, and other social welfare facilities for women; and liberal feminist concerns for women's equal rights in all spheres. But as many scholars have pointed out, the CCP continuously subordinated gender to class issues rather than fulfilling its promise for women's emancipation.

The incessant political campaigns and overbearing Maoist class analysis left little room for women to raise gender issues. The party dismissed the gender issue by declaring that Chinese women were liberated. Many "liberated" Chinese women were more empowered than ever by a state-sponsored discourse on gender equality and the state's mobilization of women to step into the public arena. At the same time, they were subjugated to a new patriarch, the party-state, that deprived women of their own voices and their need to define their own diverse interests.

Feminism in the Post-Mao Era

In the post-Mao era, women intellectuals joined men in deconstructing Maoism. Women's challenge had a clear gender dimension. They criticized the dominance of class analysis for overriding women's issues and the Maoist line of gender equality for its masculine bias. Women were told to be like men in the public arena while continuing to play the roles of wife and mother at home. This state-mandated assimilation to the male norm was condemned by both men and women intellectuals in the 1980s for "masculinizing Chi-

nese women." A reassessment of western feminism emerged in this process as an integral part in women's critique of the CCP's definitions of women's liberation and "narrow western bourgeois feminism." Against the specific historical background of the 1980s, an essentialist version of western feminism had a strong appeal to urban educated Chinese women who were trying to justify their revolt against the dominant framework of class and a masculinist gender equality by emphasizing women's "innate, unique femaleness." To avoid invoking the negative connotations of the *nüquanzhuyi* and to express their understanding of feminism, Chinese women adopted a new term for feminism, *nüxingzhuyi* (*feminine-ism*).

In the mid-1980s, information on women's studies in the West aroused great interest among Chinese women intellectuals. The term *women's studies* suggested to them that studying women's uniqueness was a legitimate academic field in the modernized West. Women who were eager to create a forum of their own to address women's issues in post-Mao China quickly adopted "women's studies" as a legitimate site for their activism. Unlike women's studies in the United States and Europe, "women's studies" in China was located not in academia but in Women's Federations at provincial or municipal levels. Women's studies associations formed by Women's Federations provided a unique forum where Women's Federations cadres worked jointly with women academics on research projects oriented toward solving contemporary women's problems. Women's studies, or "research on women," as it is translated in Chinese, emerged as a new form of Chinese feminist activism in the reform era.

The preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing (4–15 September 1995) generated further feminist activism in China. Increasing communication between women in and outside China enhanced Chinese women's knowledge of global feminism. The FWCW directly introduced many feminist concepts and terminology to China through the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, the two documents endorsed formally by participating governments at the UN conference. Because the Chinese government officially signed those documents, Chinese women activists in and outside the Women's Federation have gained new legitimacy for their goal to "merge with global women's movements." Conferences, workshops, and publications on *nüxingzhuyi* have become a part of Chinese women's legitimate efforts to materialize the agenda set in the Platform for Action, which called for improving gender equity and promoting women's social advancement in twelve areas. A feminist concept of gender has entered the official media and has been embraced

by many women activists. Women scholars who have been active in research on women are moving toward creating a women's studies curriculum in higher education in the twenty-first century.

See Also

CONFUCIANISM; DEVELOPMENT: CHINA; EDUCATION: EAST ASIA; FEMINISM: OVERVIEW; FEMINISM: SOCIALIST; LITERATURE: CHINA; MEDIA: CHINESE CASE STUDY; POLITICS AND THE STATE: EAST ASIA; POPULATION: CHINESE CASE STUDY; WOMEN'S STUDIES: EAST ASIA

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Wang Zheng

FEMINISM: Commonwealth of Independent States

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed in 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Twelve former Soviet republics, now independent states, are included in the CIS: Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Among these countries, some common cultural elements (even with recent strengthening of national characteristics) have developed, not only through their shared 70-year sociocultural past within the Soviet Union, but also through an even deeper history. All of these peoples were included within the Russian Empire before the socialist revolution of 1917. These circumstances allow us to single out and examine some social problems that these countries have in common—specifically regarding the status of women, the women's movement, and feminism.

Contemporary feminism exists, first, in the form of an ideology of women's equal rights; second, as a social movement, fighting for women's rights; and finally, as a counter-cultural theory—that is, as a philosophical analysis of understandings of gender and the ideas that society attributes to the biological differences between women and men.

This article will describe how, when, and in what form feminism is emerging in the countries of the CIS; what the specifics of that process are, and what prospects there are for the development of feminism in this region of the world.

The Soviet Experience of Solving the "Woman Question"

Feminism in the countries of the CIS must be examined in connection with the so-called Soviet experience of solving the woman question—a policy under which a significant gap existed between de jure and de facto equal rights.

Even the first Soviet constitution (1918) proclaimed the equal rights of women and men in all spheres of life. The actual state of affairs was contradictory. The civil-political rights of women (and of men) in the totalitarian state were fictional. These rights were merely declared; no opportunities existed for their realization, since all fundamental political and economic decisions were made by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CCCPSU). The citizens of the country were obligated to submit to the CCCPSU under threat of state sanctions up to and including imprisonment and physical harm.

The situation with regard to socioeconomic rights was better—women held equal rights with men to labor (on average, women were 50 percent of those employed), free schooling and higher education (women were 60 percent of specialists with higher and mid-specialized education), free medical services, free housing, and so on. However, in Soviet times the "right to labor" in fact meant identical obligations to labor, since the economic and noneconomic methods used by the state allowed people of working age no choice. Economic methods consisted of the impossibility of receiving resources for survival anywhere except by working for the state. Noneconomic methods were administrative and criminal punishment for not working (for example, the famous Russian poet Josef Brodsky was sentenced to five years in a labor camp simply for his failure to serve as an employee of a state enterprise). True, there was an exception for women with children: they could officially be located "under their husbands' support." However, only very few women, in upper Soviet party and state circles, could afford such a luxury. The main mass of women worked: the Soviet