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FEMALE CHINESE COMMUNIST LEADERS AND THE QUESTION OF GENDER
EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate the tensions between women's liberation and class warfare through the perspectives of several prominent female leaders in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and also to push further to attempt to provide insight into how these women themselves reconciled these tensions. It has generally been argued that the discrepancy between the reality of gender equality and the policy goals of the CCP were due to prioritization of party agenda and the avoidance of alienating poor rural men who served the party's base. Traditionally, it is argued that this is what estranged female CCP members. Therefore, women within the party, it is often assumed, were in direct opposition to this prioritization. However, while this is a factor, my research demonstrates that this relationship was much more nuanced than is often presented. In fact, many female members decided to remain within the party and supported its goals despite gender equality being consistently compromised. To ignore this reality and the decisions many women within the CCP made would silence their voices and paint an over-simplified picture of their experiences. Each of the women discussed in this thesis reconciled gender equality with their own decisions in different ways. This thesis works to illuminate the nuanced relationships each of these women had with the tensions of CCP feminism.

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Introduction

Mao's famous quote, "Women hold up half the sky," exemplified how Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders hoped and claimed women would function as an invaluable backbone both inside and eventually also outside the party. During the 1930s and 1940s, numerous women played critical roles that contributed to the survival of the CCP. In their writings and speeches, CCP leaders proudly trumpeted how much they valued gender equality and the great strides they had already made in achieving it. However, despite women participating in a number of leadership roles and CCP leaders speaking strongly for equality, the realities of gender equality within the CCP lagged far behind the ideal. There was a clear gap between the rhetoric of gender equality officially given by CCP leaders and the reality women involved with the party faced. The source of that gap lay in a division between the CCP's gender ideology and the actual outcomes of these policies, which in some cases even negatively affected party strength. These conflicts between rhetoric and reality manifested itself in several ways.

My thesis examines the attitudes and perceptions of several prominent women involved in the party towards the conflict between the CCP's ideals of gender equality and the reality these women faced in their revolutionary work. Typically, it has been argued that gender equality was downplayed so the party could avoid alienating the poor peasant men who served as the party's base. Many believe this conflict alienated CCP female members, many of who had been involved in cultivating the party's commitment to gender equality. While there were female party members who felt such alienation, my research demonstrates that this relationship was more nuanced than is often discussed, as evidenced in the fact that many female leaders chose to

remain in the party despite this sacrifice of gender equality. Assuming that female leaders were completely at odds with this prioritization of class warfare over gender equality dismisses the choices and sacrifices of many women to put the good of the party before gender equality, despite their desire for equality. My research restores the voices of these women and delves deeper into the complicated attitudes of these female CCP leaders, assuming that the forms and strategies of accommodation that female party members reached between their commitments to feminism and socialism were complicated and diverse.

The four women chosen for this thesis exemplify the different reactions women had to the CCP's decision to prioritize party strength over gender equality. Each woman's experience illuminates a different strategy in managing competing political priorities, including gender equality. Zhao Yiman was a guerilla fighter whose martyrdom made her a subject of propaganda, the framing of her story shifting throughout the twentieth century to reflect CCP ideology. The novelist Ding Ling wrote about the reality of women's lives under the CCP, which occasionally put her in direct opposition with the party and got her into trouble, even though she was an otherwise loyal party member. Xiang Jingyu exemplifies how internalized sexism in the party manifested itself in double standards that seemed like successors to the the old Confucian culture, a culture the CCP claimed to have eliminated. Additionally, she illuminates how many women coming out of the May Fourth Movement adjusted their feminist principles to suit changing CCP priorities on women's issues. Finally, Deng Yingchao provides a window into how women needed to make concessions in order to thrive within the party, and how some female CCP members had no issue with seeing gender equality sacrificed for the CCP's greater goals. Each of these women faced the same division between CCP's rhetoric and reality of women's experience, but the choices they made in the face of this division are quite different.

Unlike previous examinations that have painted women as having a very unified view these shortcomings on gender equality, my work seeks to honor the authentic choices these women made. By examining their choices and how they reacted to their circumstances gives us a clearer window into the experience of women in the early Chinese Communist Party.

Chapter 1 Zhao Yiman

Zhao Yiman was a guerilla fighter and martyr during the Japanese occupation of China. In death, she became a subject of Communist propaganda. Dissecting her life means examining two distinct women. The first is the real Zhao Yiman who died in 1936 and whose voice has since been silent. The second is the character Zhao Yiman, who is more alive and active than ever. The character Zhao Yiman has remained a key propaganda subject for the CCP. Her martyrdom made her an ideal female representative for party leaders to prop up as an example, as she is unable to speak against or challenge the values impressed upon her memory. Her legacy has morphed over time along with PRC ideas about gender equality. Reconciling with her real life and propaganda portrayals illuminates the conflicts in CCP policies on gender equality, marking shifts in CCP policy. Beginning this thesis by examining Zhao Yiman gives us a view of what the CCP hoped and expected its female members to be over the years, and allows us to examine the choices she did make in her life and reflect on how those may or may not agree with later depictions of her by the CCP.

The Real Zhao Yiman

The real Zhao Yiman was born in 1905 in Baiyangzui Village in the province of Sichuan.¹ She was originally named Li Kuntai (李坤泰) and finally adopted Zhao Yiman (趙一

¹ Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward, *The Chinese Cinema Book* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 87.

曼) during her years of guerilla fighting. Her name change came along with her exposure to socialist ideas and the desire to surpass old society, and to avoid incriminating her family.² Her exposure to socialism began through newspapers and journals her elder sister brought home. Her sister supported her entry into a local communist youth group in 1923 to begin her activism.³ In the next year she began writing articles for a left-wing newspaper for women called *Women's Weekly* (妇女周报). In one article she encouraged her fellow women to be indignant about their brothers' unwillingness to fund her education, a position she categorized as "backward" (落后).⁴ Zhao Yiman's intense passion both feminism and politics were clear early in her life.

Zhao Yiman formally joined the CCP in 1926. She began her education, but after the 1927 Nationalist purge of communists, she escaped to Moscow. There she studied at the Comintern's Sun Yat-sen University. Her education was cut short however when she became pregnant. She returned to China during the winter of 1929 to give birth.⁵ At some point, she married the baby's father, fellow CCP member Chen Dabang, but it is unclear when this took place. An important point to mention is that there is no formal reason given for why Zhao Yiman ended her studies and left Moscow, especially since many other female students had unexpected pregnancies and either terminated them or left the babies with the school's nursery while continuing their own studies. The reasons later given by the CCP in various retellings depend on what impression of the early CCP the propaganda seeks to present. In some retellings, she left

² Xu Guangrong, *Zhao Yiman* (Nanchang: Ershiyi shiji chubanshe, 2008 [2004]), 11-12.

³ Louise P. Edwards, *Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 113.

⁴ Zhao Yiman, 'Bei xoing sao boduo qiuxue quanli de wo' (*Me, stripped of my rights to pursue an education by my brother and sister in law*), *Funu Zhoubao* (Women's Weekly), 6 August 1924, 1-4.

⁵ Sheng Yueh, *Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow: A Personal Account* (Kansas: University of Kansas Center for East Asian Studies, 1971), p. 126

ashamed because her indulgence in romance was seen as a failure and undesirable for other women to imitate. Other variations present her departure as an act of compassion by CCP leadership for a sick woman, rather than a punishment. These variances, which will be discussed in further detail later on, mark how the CCP shifted its policies and attitudes towards women between various retellings.

Zhao Yiman earned her credibility working with the resistance, laying the foundation for her to later become a war hero. Once she returned to China, Zhao Yiman began working as an underground communist agent in Jiangxi and Shanghai. During this time she gave birth and then in 1930 sent her son to live with a paternal uncle. This was the last communication she would have with her son. Afterwards she went to Shenyang and Harbin in northeastern China to aid the resistance against the Japanese invaders. There she worked in rural areas, attempting to organize laborers. She worked with women especially. In 1935 she formed anti-Japanese self-defense units among the rural population that launched guerrilla attacks on Japanese troops.⁶ Next she worked as political commissar in the North East Democratic United Army. In contrast to the Nationalists who minimized the Japanese aggression to focus on destroying their rival political party (the CCP), the Communist Party portrayed itself as fearless defenders of the Chinese people. Zhao Yiman's later portrayals as a fearless defender of China can be traced back to the Communists' self-portrayal in comparison to the Nationalists during this period.⁷

This portrayal of the CCP, and in extension its members who fought during this period, as fearless defenders of China is what defines much of Zhao Yiman's character in later retellings

⁶ Edwards, 122.

⁷ Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan, 1937 – 1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 32.

of her story. Zhao Yiman was wounded in battle, and captured by the Japanese. She was tortured and eventually executed on July 5, 1937.⁸ In the 1980s, a letter from Zhao Yiman to her son written before her execution was supposedly found in Japanese records of war criminals. The authenticity of this letter is unclear, but communist sources have vouched for it when it has been useful to do so. Although these are the few known facts about the life of Zhao Yiman, her story continued to inspire and educate people in China long after her death, as state media developed and fictionalized it for propaganda purposes.

Zhao Yiman as Propaganda

When discussing Zhao Yiman as propaganda, it is important to differentiate the real Zhao Yiman who died in 1937 from the character Zhao Yiman, who served as an advocate for the Chinese Communist Party. As a character she continued to speak, teach, and be a communist role model and feminist icon. This character illuminates the continuously changing and often conflicting realities of feminism in China. Like other female party members, Zhao's actions and ideas were routinely either censored or, in this case, altered to reflect party goals and expectations of CCP female members.

Zhao Yiman served as a political icon for decades. Analyzing how the presentation of her has changed illuminates the conflict between party leadership and its female members. In this case, a female member who did indeed sacrifice her life for the cause has not only been honored for her sacrifice, but has had every aspect of her life held up as a model for female party

⁸ Wen and Zhang, *Kangri yingxiong Zhao Yiman*, 1.

members. Zhao is utilized to tell women how to meet whatever role the party thinks crucial for the time. For instance, in the early sixties she was used to push women out of the home and into agriculture communes, but then in the 1980's she was used to bring motherhood back into fashion. The real Zhao Yiman's opinions on these topics is unknown, but ultimately it does not matter. The character of Zhao Yiman continues to serve party needs. As we will see in the next chapter on Ding Ling, her works were only praised when they fit the party's goals, and Xiang Jingyu was only respected when her personal life fit the double standard imposed on female party members. Likewise, Zhao Yiman's legacy only exists within the confines of the ideal communist woman.

Early Depictions of Zhao Yiman During Agricultural Reform

Initially, Zhao Yiman was the “eternal daughter of China,” a feminist figure who supported women's equality for the greater good of China and the CCP.⁹ After the formation of the PRC, Zhao Yiman became a subject of propaganda for the party's policies on gender equality. In these early depictions, Zhao Yiman's work as a female guerilla fighter was presented as exemplifying Mao's “women hold up half the sky” mentality. In this line of thinking, even women could be key players in fighting and warfare. As proof of the CCP's commitment to gender equality, Zhao Yiman was a successful female guerilla fighter in a traditionally male occupation.

The original push to honor Zhao Yiman was motivated by the party's desire to provide an emotionally charged example of how gender equality could serve the CCP, a push that began

⁹ Edwards, 118.

even before the People's Republic had been established. This trend continued into the 1950s and 60s with the party's experiments in collectivization. To achieve the agricultural collectivism of the Great Leap Forward, it was important to push women outside of traditional boundaries, not to achieve true gender equality but in order to facilitate economic transformation and growth. In *The Gender of Memory*, historian Gail Hershatter notes that early PRC experimentations with marriage and family reform were primarily undertaken in order to increase economic production, and were not concerned with thoroughly reconfiguring the patriarchal family.¹⁰

In 1948, communist authorities in Harbin opened a memorial called "The North East Martyrs' Museum." In anticipation of their victory in the civil war, they sought to honor all those who died in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The majority of this museum was dedicated to Zhao Yiman. The museum was housed in the same building she was tortured in by the Japanese twelve years earlier.¹¹ During her lifetime, few people knew who Zhao Yiman was, and this museum was one of the first times she became a tool for the CCP propaganda machine. To assist in involving women with jobs outside the home, such as labor and other more traditionally masculine roles, they needed women like Zhao Yiman who bravely entered and even excelled in masculine fields. She offered an emotional and inspiring story to motivate women to aspire to be self-sacrificing women who could take on any kind of role to ensure the success of China. Other memorials and museums honoring Zhao Yiman later opened up, including one in her hometown of Yibin in 1960, and another in Shangzhi City.¹² These commemorations created the character of Zhao Yiman that was a crucial piece of CCP propaganda. Originally, it was as a

¹⁰ Hershatter, Gail. 2011. *The gender of memory: Rural women and china's collective past*. Vol. 8.;8;. Berkeley: University of California Press. 185.

¹¹ Edwards, 117.

¹² Edwards, 118.

woman who was completely self sacrificing for her country, and unafraid of moving outside traditionally female roles, with the goal of inspiring rural women to leave domestic work for the communes. However, her image would change over the years as attitudes toward gender equality and women's roles shifted.

Early Film Portrayals of Zhao Yiman

Zhao Yiman has appeared in various film representations over the years, and how she is portrayed in each one shows us how the CCP's policies, as well its invented image of Zhao Yiman, has shifted. A 1950 biopic of Zhao Yiman portrays her as the common cinematic heroine of the time, inspiring the audience, especially rural communities, to put full trust in the CCP and its plans. This film followed a cinematic trend of idolizing selfless women who fall victim to enemies of China. Films in this period focused on simplicity. In part this was because simple films appealed to a rural audience who were just being introduced to cinema and literature. At the same time, the simplicity of their storylines made clear distinctions between the heroes (the communists) and the enemies (the Japanese and the nationalists), and made plain what the correct course of action against these enemies was. The political goal of films like these was clear. Zhou Enlai himself articulated the purpose of such films: "Our films must have a beginning and an ending; plots must be clear; patterns should not be as fast as foreign films."¹⁴ Films had an agenda, and required clear plots with clear heroes, leaving little confusion as to who the audience was meant to root for. This template started with "The White-Haired Girl," which was set in Yan'an during the war period, and featured a self-sacrificing heroine. "Zhao

¹⁴ As quoted in Lim and Ward, 89.

Yiman,” along with similar films such as “Liu Hulan,” followed. Both also possessed clear heroines and obvious villains, consistent with the film template of straightforward plots, obvious heroes and villains, and selfless heroines who meet cruel fates.¹⁵

This biopic fell into a period of films that focused on war and politics, and the heroes of these films emphasized the importance of sacrifice and complete devotion to China and to the communist party. They are filled with tales of martyrs to both the Japanese and the Nationalists. It makes sense then that Zhao Yiman as a heroine during this time emphasized these qualities of sacrifice and duty to the larger movement over her role as a mother, which was still largely ignored or underplayed (but would emerge, as we will see, in later depictions of her life). All her actions through the course of the movie are out of loyalty to the communist cause, and any devotion to her child is negligible. Again, these tales work to inspire the population to charge into the experiments of the early PRC, out of gratitude for the CCP’s valiant protection during the war with the Japanese (and setting aside personal concerns). In the Mao era, where – at least in government propaganda – the party came before all else, the films made sure their characters carried on that priority as an example to the audience.

The 1950 film presented Zhao Yiman as an educator, both to the rural people she encounters within the film, but also with the audience. The cinematic character produced continues to push the communist cause even after the death of the real Zhao Yiman. The film as a propaganda piece places value on Zhao Yiman’s femininity, showing how it can assist her even in such a traditionally masculine position. As part of the propaganda on gender equality to motivate women outside of traditional roles, the film takes pains to present Zhao Yiman as not

¹⁵ Ibid.

only a female guerilla fighter, but one who is successful because of her nature as a woman, as a patient and empathetic educator, rather than in spite of her femininity.

This film sought to praise how a woman could thrive in a traditionally masculine position like warfare. As an educator, she presents the importance of gentleness and understanding when working with the rural people she relied on. The film stressed the idea that the people and the party are one entity. Throughout the film, Zhao Yiman's feminine touch makes her an excellent communicator with the people, a factor historians identify as a crucial component of the CCP's success over the Nationalists. The fictional tales of her teaching rural women how to best serve China teach the audience in turn how they can best serve China and the new socialist society. Audiences watching the film were reminded that women could be of great service despite being traditionally feminine and working in the fields. Zhao Yiman's role as an educator is the focus in this narrative. The only references to her womanhood are to encourage audiences that being a woman shouldn't hold women back from serving the needs of the party and the society. This representation gives little heed to any aspect of her motherhood or struggles as a woman, but only as an educator and woman communist.¹⁶

Later in the film, after Zhao Yiman is tortured, she demonstrates for the audience what true loyalty to the party looks like. As she is recovering in a hospital, her gentle nature and undying loyalty to the party convince the nurse caring for her and her guard to convert to the revolutionary cause. They are won over by her resolve and strong spirit. The three attempt to escape to join the communists, although they are thwarted. In this version, rather than focusing on any regret of losing her family or abandoning her son, it recounts her last words, that she

¹⁶ *Zhao Yiman*. Directed by Meng Sha. China: Zhong Yang Dian Shi Tai (Beijing, China), 1950.

regrets nothing and is glad to be a sacrifice for the China, confirming her preparation to sacrifice her life for the cause and devotion to her nation.¹⁷ There are no mentions of regrets regarding the family she left behind or of any other kind. Until the end, Zhao Yiman never wavers in her loyalty or questions her commitment. She faces her execution confident that her sacrifice is for a good greater than her own life. This complete lack of fear is a creative choice, and likely fictional, as this presentation of Zhao Yiman possess super-human courage and resolve. However, the film makes her into a type of superhero for the Chinese people. The excitement of the portrayal of her underground work, the graphic nature of her torture and death, all worked to excite and motivate the viewer, as well as cultivate a sense of gratitude to the party and its many heroes who sacrificed to protect the Chinese people from the barbaric Japanese. As a propaganda piece, it reminds the audience of the debt they owe the party, and what lengths they should go to to repay and honor the party and its martyrs.

Other media dedicated to Zhao Yiman during this period includes, novels, newspaper articles, films, and comics, all of which seek to teach people the correct spirit and attitude to have towards the party and its cause. Shi Lianxing, the actress who portrayed Zhao Yiman in the 1950 film, spoke on multiple occasions of how inspired she was by Zhao Yiman, declaring the importance of both the Chinese people and of their leader, Chairman Mao.¹⁸ Shi published an article in the *People's Daily* in which she recounts her time working in a Worker-Peasant Theatre Troupe and her time participating in land reform.¹⁹ She elaborates on how her own experiences helped her understand Zhao Yiman. During her acceptance speech she thanks the

¹⁷ *Zhao Yiman*. Directed by Meng Sha. China: Zhong Yang Dian Shi Tai (Beijing, China), 1950.

¹⁸ Edwards, 125.

¹⁹ Shi Lianxing, Heartfelt Gratitude – a few lessons from acting in the film ‘Zhao Yiman’, RMRB 9 October 1951, 3.

party, claiming it was the party that guided her to success, and allowed her to learn from such an inspiring hero as Zhao Yiman. The 1950 film inspired not only the actress who played Zhao Yiman, but viewers everywhere.²⁰ One student, Zhao Qi, wrote to *People's Daily* acknowledging how inspired they were by Zhao Yiman, and by Shi Lianxing's inspiring speech on how much she owed the party. All of this demonstrates that Zhao Yiman as a propaganda piece was successful at inspiring others to understand the correct attitude to have towards the party.

This period stressed the positive viewpoint of Zhao Yiman's abandonment of her family and personal desires. A 1957 book by Zhang Lin and Shu Yang, titled *Zhao Yiman*, praised Zhao for not letting her personal life and family interrupt her devotion to the fight. Any kind of relationships she had are presented as mistakes, and giving up her child is framed as both pragmatic and a correction to previous errors. The comic book that came supplementary with the movie contained fictionalized accounts of Zhao Yiman educating Japanese soldiers on the righteousness of the cause. These dialogues provided the correct vocabulary and rhetoric to educate viewers on how to discuss and support party causes. A 1950 comic book by Zhao Hongben includes Zhao Yiman insisting to women villagers that they "must organize ourselves, unite together to join the movement to save the nation. Only in this way can we give full reign to women's strength and fight for women's social status!"²¹ This fictional discussion reaffirms this period's narratives on Zhao Yiman as a push towards gender equality in labor, especially in agriculture. Film reviews published in the *People's Daily* reaffirmed the right way to respond to Zhao Yiman's tale.²² A review from a writer for *People's Daily* named Qiu He affirmed how

²⁰ Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward, *The Chinese Cinema Book* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 88.

²¹ *Liu Hulan*, Feng Bailu dir. Changchun dianying prod, 1950, Film.

²² Edwards, 124.

anyone from any walk of life could have assisted in resisting the Japanese, and therefore anyone could devote themselves to the revolutionary cause if they were willing to be self sacrificing and persistent. Regardless of the medium, early uses of Zhao Yiman in propaganda employed her to demonstrate that anyone could serve the cause if they were loyal, self-sacrificing, and trusting in the righteousness of the communist cause.

Post-Mao Era Depictions of Zhao Yiman

While Zhao Yiman's fame began during the early PRC experiments in communal agriculture, the focus of Zhao-centered propaganda later shifted to celebrating her marriage and motherhood. In Mao's China, before all else, where family was not valued and even considered a distraction, how Zhao Yiman felt about her child during her imprisonment was not crucial. Furthermore, any indulgences in love and motherhood were portrayed as mistakes needing atonement. Using Zhao Yiman as a model for women during this period served to encourage them to take up the cause through action, not through motherhood. This is where we see, as mentioned earlier, Zhao Yiman was an example of early PRC gender equality. It was later, in the post-Mao era, that her motherhood began to be of importance.

Mao believed that the landlord class was the ultimate source of oppression in the China, and that by simply removing this system, other forms of inequality would vanish, including oppression of women.²³ After Mao died, the CCP shifted from this way of thinking, once again placing more emphasis on family values and social stability. Since revolutionary change was no longer a priority, the experimentations in socialist agriculture were reversed and, by the late

²³ Hershatter, 185.

twentieth and early twenty-first century, government emphasis on social harmony and tradition returned. With these changes came the return of importance on marriage and motherhood, and the character of Zhao Yiman evolved to match. The importance of her son and her husband who were left behind as she nobly sacrificed herself – not only for her country, but now also for her family – painted a new ideal picture for Chinese women. Zhao Yiman was no longer simply a heroic fighter, but instead became a devoted mother who happened to become a guerilla fighter to protect her family. In fact, it was through her military work that she was the ultimate mother. Now she could inspire women to strive to be the best mothers possible, not necessarily through resistance fighting, but any avenue that is required. As the CCP's expectations of women changed, so did Zhao Yiman.

When Deng Xiaoping enacted economic and political reforms in the 1980s, many public jobs including factories closed down, reducing the total number of jobs available. The result of this loss of jobs was that the unpaid domestic work of women was once again celebrated by the CCP.²⁴ Economically, the reduction in jobs meant people needed to leave the work force, so the CCP worked to push women out of the work force and back into the home. As policy on gender shifted, so did Zhao Yiman as a character. Zhao Yiman became less a heroic guerilla fighter devoted only to the party, which was the typical model for heroes in the early PRC, and now became a mother, both to her son and to the nation. Although the discovery of her husband and son was found in the 1950s, it didn't become a consistent part of her retelling until the 1980s.²⁵ Her family up until the twenty-first century was ignored to make the CCP her true family.

²⁴ Edwards, 128.

²⁵ Zhu Yu and Bai Ruixue, "Weichu hanchu de 'baba mama': zhuming kangzhan yinglie houren de zhuyi" (They have never called out father and mother: recalling the descendants of celebrated heroic martyrs from the war of resistance), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily) (August 22, 2005): 10.

Starting in the 1980s, Zhao Yiman's sacrifice for her family was played up to elicit emotional connection to a grieving mother who will do anything for the betterment of her family, while simultaneously acknowledging the importance of the revolutionary cause. It was not until 1993 that the *People's Daily* first mentioned her son's existence. This kind of propaganda made Zhao Yiman much more accessible to women across China who were now told to focus more on their roles as mothers and wives than they did before. Once again Zhao Yiman, changed as a character to match the audience she was designed to reach.

The earlier mentioned museums and memorials that honored Zhao Yiman and other martyrs never emphasized her role as a mother, but later memorials put more emphasis on her son. In 1993, the *People's Daily* published an article describing one woman's experience visiting a martyr museum. She recounts that the most heartbreaking moment was when the tour guide ended the section on Zhao Yiman by reading the supposed final letter she wrote to her son. This article relays to the reader that Zhao Yiman's motherhood was a positive thing, that through her devotion to her son, she was serving the party. In this telling, motherhood was a good and virtuous way to serve the cause, and should not be underestimated as a way to make a contribution to the nation. Female fighters were really just mothers who were making the ultimate sacrifice, rather than devoted fighters who prioritized the revolution over their families. A book published in 2005 about Zhao Yiman devotes an entire chapter to Zhao Yiman's separation from her son, and the emotional struggle she faced. It also discussed her marriage to Chen without painting it in a negative light like previous retellings, and has no negative implications against marriage or romance.²⁶ It even presents their marriage as mutually

²⁶ Wen Ye, *Bi xue ying hun: Zhao Yiman zhuan*. (The spirit of the hero that shed blood in a just cause: a biography of Zhao Yiman) (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang ren min chu ban she, 2005) p. 72.

beneficial. This book even includes an essay from one of Zhao Yiman's comrades that details how heartbroken she was at giving up her child, but since she could not feed him, this was the best thing for her to do as a mother. Her decision to give him up is not only presented as pragmatic for the revolution, but also because it is the best course of action for the child. Her motivations for giving up her child contrast with earlier versions that present it as the obvious solution solely so Zhao Yiman can fully devote herself to the war efforts. While earlier periods scorned putting the notion of being a wife or mother above political cause, this retelling presents motherhood and her sacrifice for her son as virtuous and totally acceptable for a devoted communist woman.²⁷ Zhao Yiman now teaches Chinese women that it is okay to serve the party through motherhood, a clear contradiction to earlier presentations. Modern propaganda teaches that just like Zhao Yiman, women can serve the party through motherhood and domestic life, a stark contrast to earlier portrayals that pushed women out of the home and into the fields and battlegrounds.

Modern Film Depictions of Zhao Yiman

Zhao Yiman has become so important to the CCP narrative that a film about her was produced to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. The 2004 film, "My Mother Zhao Yiman," explores the life and death of Zhao Yiman. This retelling shifts from previous representations by emphasizing her role as a mother, and her connection with her son.²⁸

²⁷ Lee, Haiyan. 2007. *Revolution of the heart: A genealogy of love in china, 1900-1950*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press. 221.

²⁸ Yu, Min, Meng Sha, Lianxing Shi, Ping Zhang, Ying Zhang, Dongbei dian ying zhi pian chang (Dongbei Film Studio), and Zhongguo san huan yin xiang she (Chinese Sanhuan Audiovisual Studio). 2004. *Zhao yiman*. Beijing: Zhongguo san huan yin xiang she (Chinese Sanhuan Audiovisual Studio)

While in the early decades of the PRC, her ties to her child were downplayed to focus on her ultimate commitment to the party, the growing importance of a woman's duty to her family meant refocusing Zhao Yiman's sacrifice as not only to the China, but also to protecting the country for her child. In the 1950s and 1960s, Zhao Yiman was presented as a devotee to the communist cause with little concern for her child, but this retelling played up her role as mother. In the more recent retellings, her martyrdom was the ultimate act of motherly love, sacrificing herself for her son and his future, alongside her loyalty to China and its cause. Even the title, "My Mother Zhao Yiman," puts the viewer in a position to constantly consider her motherhood from the start. Establishing the humanity of her child takes the focus from Zhao Yiman's motivations and resolutions, and keeps the focus on her child and her role as mother. This portrayal doesn't portray her as an exceptional mother, or that her only motivation was her son, but it does put significantly more emphasis on her role as a mother than previous portrayals. As discussed earlier, the legitimacy of Zhao Yiman's final letter to her son is questionable. It is still unclear if the letter is real or fictional, but its impact on the narratives of Zhao Yiman is very real. It can be interpreted as her way of affirming her devotion to China and the communist party above all else, or a heartfelt final goodbye to her son in which she affirms her sacrifice was for him.

The Descendants of Zhao Yiman and CCP Propaganda

Zhao Yiman's family have continued to help promote her memory, and simultaneously validate the current version of her being pushed by the CCP. Despite not having contact or much personal knowledge of her and her life, her child and grandchild have continued to speak about her and what she represents. Their involvement adds a sense of credibility to the stories, but still

following the changing trends of feminism in the party. At the 60th anniversary of the victory of the Second Sino-Japanese war, Zhao Yiman's granddaughter, Chen Hong, spoke about the incredible sacrifices her grandmother had made for the revolutionary cause. She also spoke about the responsibilities of the current generation, foreign affairs, the accuracy of third party representations of her grandmother, and finally added credibility to her speech by citing a close connection to her grandmother.²⁹ Chen has been active in adding credibility and establishing the "truth" of her grandmother's legacy. In February 2010, Chen filed suit against author Shi Gengli for books that detailed Zhao's time as a war prisoner. Chen claimed they were groundless and disrespected her grandmother's legacy.³⁰ Despite Shi Gengli's position as dean of the Chinese Language Department of Shandong Heze College and a member of the Chinese Writers' Association, and his use of multiple historical archives in his book, Chen has argued that his supposed misrepresentation of Zhao Yiman is fictional and offensive.³¹ Chen's connection with the party -- she possesses the Revolutionary Martyr Certificate awarded by Ministry of Civil Affairs -- means she is part of keeping the image of Zhao Yiman pure and clear. Despite having no real connection or first-hand knowledge of her grandmother, Chen is the designated authority on Zhao Yiman. A 2005 *People's Daily* article included one of her two granddaughters, focusing on the hard life of martyrs' families, and the emotional burden they carry.³² While early accounts of Zhao Yiman were unconcerned with the family left behind, this previously ignored family became the focus of many retellings and propaganda regarding Zhao Yiman. Appearances by her grandchildren and child add emotional connection to her story.

²⁹ "Peace Wall Symbolizes Brighter Tomorrow." *China Daily*, September 03, 2005.

³⁰ Yi Zhao. *Defamation suit from martyr's descendant*. Global Times (2010).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Edwards, 132.

Conclusion

Zhao Yiman's changing representations in media and propaganda illuminates the inconsistencies and evolution of the CCP's policies on gender equality. Since we cannot ask her, and limited writings exist, Zhao Yiman's true motivations will remain a mystery to us. We can only speculate as to how she felt about her family, women, and the communist cause overall. Though few first hand accounts of her have surfaced over the decades, yet her character has changed repeatedly, and it is not a coincidence that it changed along with society's perceptions and expectations of women. In the approximately eighty years she's been a feminist figure, she continued to represent what leadership thought an ideal woman should be. As that ideal has shifted, so have the representations of Zhao Yiman. The changes in Zhao Yiman as a character illuminate how gender equality as a goal of the CCP evolved and developed based on what best served the party. Zhao Yiman serves as a good starting point as she was not alive to protest or call out the gap between the CCP rhetoric on gender equality and how they actually addressed the role that early female martyrs like Zhao had played in the revolution. As we discuss other women who lived through and objected to this discrepancy, Zhao Yiman becomes a good background for what the CCP was using gender equality to achieve in terms of party goals. Just as policies and the state's relationship to women changed, so did the story of Zhao Yiman, communist martyr.

Chapter 2 Ding Ling

The fragile balance between feminist activist, author, and loyal party member was an uneasy road for Ding Ling. With Zhao Yiman, we examined propaganda to illuminate how attitudes on gender equality within the party shifted with CCP goals. With Ding Ling, we are examining primarily at how one woman navigated activism on women's issues in the party and her artistic authenticity. The conflict between furthering China's political and social revolution and advancing women's liberation are personified in Ding Ling and expressed in her writings. What makes Ding Ling's various works so complex is that she took CCP ideas on a case by case base, making her relationship with the CCP far more complex than is often presented. Ding Ling sought to critique the party from within the system. Despite her intentions, her work was at times seen as dangerous and rejected by party leadership. How Ding Ling managed these responses and criticisms opens a window for us into how female CCP leaders really felt about the working environment and the decisions of the CCP leadership. More specifically, it opens for us how Ding felt about the existence of these conflicts, and her inability to ever reconcile these conflicts in her own life.

Ding Ling's Early Years and Education

Ding Ling's background reveals her activist roots from early in her life, even before her time in the Chinese Communist Party. Ding Ling was born in 1904 in the Hunan Province as Jiang Bingzhi.³³ Her father passed away when she was three, and she was raised solely by her

³³ Xiaojie, She. 2009. *Ding Ling*. Vol. 2. 610.

mother, who was her first model of female strength.³⁴ Ding Ling chose to take the surname of her mother, instead of her father's (Jiang) because she believed since men and women should be equal, children could take either name.³⁵ She fled to Shanghai in 1920 to escape a traditional marriage. She rejected marriage to her cousin, and chose instead to devote herself to literature and social activism. Even as a young woman, she rebelled against social norms. For example, she rejected the Confucian notion that her parents owned her, and in her early writings she explored how her body was hers to use (in contrast to the traditional Chinese notion that a child's body belonged to his parents).³⁶ In her youth, Ding Ling had already found her passion for social activism through literature. She surrounded herself with other left wing progressives at the People's School for Girls, including her husband Hu Yeping, a left wing poet, and began publishing her own works, including the popular "Diary of Miss Sophie" in 1927, which dealt with controversial themes and social issues. Her passion for literature developed alongside her passion for activism, and the two would always remain intertwined throughout the rest of her life.

Ding Ling and the May Fourth Movement

Before examining how Ding Ling's writings compared to CCP ideology, it is important to note that much of her style came from the May Fourth generation, and establishing its influence on her helps us better understand the messages she was trying to portray. How Ding

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Yuan, Liangjun. 2011. *Ding ling yan jiu zi liao: DingLing yanjiuziliao*. Di 1 ban. ed. Vol. 62.;62;. Beijing: Zhi shi chan quan chu ban she. 214.

³⁶ Ding, Ling, Tani E. Barlow, and Gary J. Bjorge. 1989. *I myself am a woman: Selected writings of ding ling*. Boston: Beacon Press. 6.

Ling used literature to narrate the experiences of women was rooted in the literary style of the May Fourth generation. This generation of young people found its voice in the 1910s amidst a “New Culture Movement” that sought to overthrow traditional Chinese society. Though this was a broad-based movement, many of the students were from elite or literati backgrounds, and they were thus quite influential, not just in literature and art, but also eventually in politics, business, and academia.³⁷ As the May Fourth Generation rebelled against traditional Confucian politics, they simultaneously redefined traditional social constructs. The Confucian style civil service exam, in use since the eighth century, was deemed outdated, and with it went the reliance on classical Chinese and classical writing styles. Instead, young writers began to produce works in vernacular Chinese. This new style of literature is what Ding Ling would adopt in her narratives.

The May Fourth Movement began with a protest where over three thousand Peking University and other universities’ students met in Beijing at Tiananmen to demand change.³⁹ What had started as simple protests turned into a mass social and political movement. Angry protests of educated youth insisted that the true culprit of China’s failure and the betrayal by its leaders was all Confucian ideas, both in literary form and culturally.⁴⁰ Rhetoric around Confucianism and its failures began to refer to anything, from literary texts, language, social customs, moral standards and ideals, and other various aspects of culture, and lumped them together into expression of Confucian values.⁴¹

Ding Ling found her voice in Western-style literature that focused on narrating the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁹ Schneider, Michael. 2013. *May fourth movement (1919)*. 227.

⁴⁰ Gilmartin, 21.

⁴¹ Ling, Barlow, Bjorge, 3.

experience of the characters. In rebelling against Confucian values and literature, many young writers in the May Fourth generation delved into Western novels to find an avenue for not just literary reform, but cultural reform. Writers of the period shifted into a style of fictional novels that had been popularized in the west, as they were an established venue of circulating social ideas through literary works.⁴² Importing the Western style of literature offered a way to simultaneously import Western values and ideas. Western ideas were what many of the May Fourth generation believed were needed in China. Western style literature offered a sense of familiarity that made new ideology more palatable to the masses. This type of fiction also allowed writers to articulate their experiences and perspectives on society through a convenient medium that made it easier to articulate a complex reality. This new type of fiction contrasted with the traditional Confucian style of fiction, which served only to straightforwardly explain facts and truths rooted from the canon Confucian texts.⁴³ Ding Ling explained the influence Western literature had on her: “I can say that had I not been influenced by Western Literature, I would not have been able to write fiction.” Western literature introduced her to realism and to the style of Western fiction that focused on experience. This style of literature is what brought Ding Ling into expressing the authentic experience of women, rather than romanticized heroines. It is this authenticity that would get her in trouble with CCP leadership.

⁴² Ibid, 5.

⁴³ Ding, Ling, Tani E. Barlow, and Gary J. Bjorge. 1989. *I myself am a woman: Selected writings of ding ling*. Boston: Beacon Press. 6.

Ding Ling and Contrasting Attitudes

What makes Ding Ling noteworthy in the context of gender and politics in the CCP is that she was never distinctly on the side of either gender revolutionary or communist supporter but attempted to maintain both positions. Despite views that she would sacrifice her ideals for the party, her consistent return into keeping her art authentic tells us that Ding Ling never committed to upholding party goals above the marginalization of women in China. Examining the various writings of Ding Ling illuminate that she lacked a clear agenda in her work. Some of her work, like “When I Was in Xia Village,” is very supportive of the positive impact the CCP had on women in China. Other works, like “Thoughts on March 8th,” demonstrate that Ding Ling felt the CCP was not above criticism when it came to gender inequality. In an interview, Ding Ling stated that she sought to use her female characters to force the reader to consider the female tragedy that women faced in a male-centered culture.⁴⁴ This stance took no agenda for or against the CCP, but sought to illuminate the true experiences of women. This honest and creative expression took varying views of the CCP and its leadership. The existence of conflict in her writings between these two stances and in her personal relation with the CCP open for us a window into the nuanced and perilous position of women within the CCP.

The Diary of Miss Sophie: Ding Ling and the CCP’s Ideology on Love

“The Diary of Miss Sophie” is a piece of work set on expanding and articulating the female

⁴⁴王晓芳(Wang Xiaofang). 2012. 论丁玲小说中女性形象的审美特征(*On the Aesthetic Features of Female Images in Ding Ling’s Novels*). 作家(16): 17-8.

experience in the changing 1920s, and details how Ding Ling's views on personal love and romance were deeply in line with the CCP agenda. I begin with this piece as it takes no significant stance for or against CCP policy (Ding Ling was not yet a party member when she wrote it), but on society itself. "Diary of Miss Sophie" provides a clearer picture of what Ding Ling's writings look like before delving into the more political agendas of her later works. Published in 1927, this short story detailed the life of a young woman living in Shanghai, and is ultimately a tale of self-enlightenment. As a text, it was provocative but relatable and endearing. Traditional Confucian literature dissuaded women from writing about their experiences, particularly those that were sexual in nature. A female author writing about the authentic experiences of a female protagonist was not the norm, and was intriguing to both female and male readers alike.⁴⁵ Beyond its provocative subject, it is familiar as a coming-of-age story. The titular Sophie (transliterated as Shafei in the Chinese original) makes poor decisions and chases her own whims but then ultimately face consequences and embraces reality. This tale of embracing one's actions, however reckless, resonated with the younger generation who saw their lives going in a different direction than that of their parents or ancestors, particularly in their high level of education but lack of intellectual work.

In "Diary of Miss Sophie," Ding Ling adopted ideology and literary traditions that were popular in the West, including, critically, the notion of love. The love that Miss Sophie experiences is not traditional Confucian love. It is not a love of duty or obligation, like the love stressed in Confucian ideals. Traditionally love was seen as a sort of obligatory devotion to those in relationship to you. Love was not seen as a passionate impulse. Following the New Culture

⁴⁵ Wong, Ka F. 2014. Modernity, sexuality, and colonial fantasy in ding ling's "miss sophia diary" (1928). *Studies on Asia* Series IV, 4 (2): 120.

Movement's overthrow of Confucian ideals, though, love was embraced by young people as a modern ideal. Yet almost simultaneously, love and the effect it had on people were seen as frivolous.⁴⁷ The scholar Tani Barlow in her work on Ding Ling concludes that to Ding Ling "love was becoming a catchall for all personal indulgences balanced not against revolution, but against all progressive communities larger than the self."⁴⁸ Ding Ling made clear sacrifices for the revolution, including forgoing personal attachments and passionate love. The nuance of Ding Ling and her work is that, as in the case of "Diary of Miss Sophie," not all of her societal critiques and notes on feminism were in opposition to CCP ideology. In this case, her suggestions are in line with accepted thought. However, when it came to her art she was unwilling to sacrifice its honesty to fit the CCP's representation of itself, making her relationship with CCP leadership more complex.

Brief Summary of Gender Reform in the Early CCP

The conflict on gender equality is a key part of most of Ding Ling's work, so it is crucial to briefly explain the situation she found herself exploring in her literature. The issue stretches back to the beginning of the Communist movement in China. Women's liberation and gender equality had always been closely linked with the Communist movement's overarching goal of social transformation.⁴⁹ As members of the early communist movement made their way along the countryside of China, fleeing from Nationalists, their survival was dependent on the support of

⁴⁷ Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the heart: a genealogy of love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. 267.

⁴⁸ Ling, Barlow, Bjorge, 167.

⁴⁹ Gilmartin, 19.

the rural communities they hid in. Maintaining the support of the rural community was crucial. So while the communist revolutionaries may have personally valued gender equality, if that notion wasn't shared by the rural communities that housed them, that could prove problematic. Communists during this period also promised poor men that under communism they could marry, and would not be deprived of marriage by the land-owners. After they took power, they were careful not to retract on that promise.⁵⁰

Furthermore, during the Mao era, agriculture reform meant removing some traditional gender roles in order to push women into agriculture, but the government really never sought to effect widespread social reform. Gender inequality issues outside of what effected these socialist experiments were not a priority for party leadership. Like we discussed in Zhao Yiman, gender reform often has an underlying political goal that motivated it. For survival of the movement, certain aspects of the communist movement may need to be put aside. The trend began with rural men, and continued in the Mao Era as CCP leadership prioritized other goals over women's issues. This was the reality of gender equality within the CCP that Ding Ling sought to illuminate.

“A Woman and A Man” and “When I was in Xia Village”: Critique of Traditional Ideology on Gender

In discussing what it meant to be a woman in China under the CCP, Ding Ling sought to delve into the authentic experience, and she did not shy away from the realities of how the

⁵⁰ Hershatter, 186.

Communist Party was not living up to its rhetoric on gender equality. As previously stated, this sometimes caused her to support and praise CCP ideology, but also occasionally caused her to go in direct opposition to CCP ideology. The CCP rhetoric on gender equality was progressive for its time. Communism in China seemed to many like an avenue to women's liberation.⁵¹ Early CCP leaders promoted gender equality as a step towards true equality between all people and an ideal China. On the surface, the party continuously promoted this goal. The 1954 Constitution of the PRC stated that women should have equal rights to men. One of Mao Zedong's most famous quotes, that "women hold up half the sky," was heavily promoted as the slogan of the CCP's commitment to gender equality.⁵² An article by *China Youth Daily* sang the praises of the advancements in gender equality provided by the party. Particularly, praising the revolution of marriage that now, as the article claims, allows wives to be equal partners in marriage. This was the new "Communist Marriage" that saw both husband and wife equally sacrificing for the good of the nation. Although the CCP preached within their propaganda to revolutionize marriage and give women equal rights, this was not a reality in the lives of many women throughout China, even decades after the founding of the PRC. In reality, the CCP, while it did value the concept of gender equality, found it necessary to sacrifice strong moves towards equality if they threatened the Party's overarching goals. The Marriage Law of 1950 for example, was rather incomplete in protecting women, as it gave them no power to divorce, leaving them still under the control of their husbands and other men of the village. Furthermore, women often suffered during the push to agriculture, as they were not rewarded for domestic duties, leaving rural women, for instance, with small children caught between their domestic

⁵¹ Gilmartin, 22.

⁵² Ibid, 26.

duties and their agricultural duties. Within the party, some leaders felt that putting the party first meant more ability to slowly work towards gender equality without risking CCP goals. Ding Ling did not concur with this attitude of sacrifice. She wrote what she believed to be the authentic experience of Chinese women, regardless of the impression it might give about China under the CCP.

Ding Ling acknowledged the stereotypes women faced in many of her fictional works, two examples being “A Woman and a Man” and “When I was in Xia Village.” While they hold the same theme of social stereotypes against women, they differ in their positivity towards the CCP. The first, published in 1928, explored through fictional characters, how the CCP leadership actually viewed women and their behaviors, the differences between a true “modern woman” and woman as the victim of the Chinese society.⁵³ It illuminates how progressives claimed they wanted one type of woman, but often found themselves falling back to a more traditional ideal when it came to love and marriage. This fictional story follows Wendy, a Western style femme fatale who is bold, aggressive, and demands respect from her male peers. In theory she is a true progressive feminist woman who rejects in full the Confucian notions of womanhood. She is in contrast to Aijin, who is passive, and exists to serve sexual needs, and does not demand respect the way Wendy does. She is a personification of a traditional woman.

Ding Ling's social commentary is found in the conflict between these two women and the male character's desires. The man, Ouwai, respects Wendy and finds her intriguing, but ultimately going to Aijin as she fulfills his concept of femininity, an ideal made clear when Ouwai daydreams about her tiny feet. Despite being married to Wendy, he is both intrigued and

⁵³ Ding, Ling, Barlow, Bjorge, 82.

afraid of her. “Afraid of me! Afraid of me!” cries Wendy, as she discovers that her husband prefers the passiveness and familiarity of Aijin.⁵⁴ His desires represent how Ding Ling believed progressive men viewed women: they found the modern woman intriguing and boasted of their respect for her, but found comfort in the familiarity of traditional womanhood. Such ideas confronted many communist women with the party: CCP leaders often saw women within the party as distractions, their boldness seen as aggression and dramatics. Furthermore, any attempts at copying their male peers’ sexual behaviors would result in public shame and as in the case of Xiang Jingyu (to follow), removal from their position. This work thus uses fictional characters to illuminate how women in the party were encouraged to reject traditional roles and characteristics, but found themselves the target of gossip and disdain if they did not fulfill certain expectations such as marriage and childbirth. Communist men may have found modern women intriguing, but couldn’t seem to let go of their own concepts of what it meant to be a woman. In “A Woman and a Man”, Ding Ling demonstrates that she was willing to address the hypocrisy between the rhetoric of CCP on gender equality.

“When I was in Xia Village”, written over ten years after “A Woman and a Man” has a narrower and significantly more positive focus on women’s experiences under CCP China. “When I was in Xia Village” is Ding Ling’s way of simultaneously revealing what she believes is wrong with how communists in China view women and how the party offered hope for improvement. This piece is reflective, examining the situation women may have found themselves in prior to encountering the CCP, and the way women had escaped their earlier pitiful condition through the communist movement. It signifies how despite Ding Ling’s many critiques of the Communist Party, she saw the ways it improved the lives of women in China, especially

⁵⁴ Ding, Barlow, Bjorge, 101.

compared to traditional notions of womanhood.⁵⁵ Ding Ling approached this piece with the idea that only through consistent work to improve itself could the party be a beacon of hope and move past the prejudices of the villagers. It would be a misinterpretation to assume that because of her criticisms, Ding Ling did not see the Communist Party as a solution for gender inequality. “When I was in Xia Village” paints the Communist Party as the savior of women, who have been abandoned by traditional culture (Confucian culture).

This story, published in 1941, followed a character named in Zhenzhen, a woman who was kidnapped and raped by Japanese soldiers, and contracted a venereal disease.⁵⁶ Upon returning to her poor village, she is rejected by her neighbors, who force her into the role of tainted victim. Although some sympathize for her, they all agree she is now impure. The young woman faces gossip and disgust, and her rape has become her identity. The narrator recognizes how Zhenzhen is unable to lead the life she lived before, because no one will allow her to start over. Zhenzhen’s identity is sealed within the village. Finally, she concludes that only leaving the village can give her hope, “when the end of a road is reached, one must turn”. Her salvation comes from the Chinese communist party. The party not only sends her to get treatment, saving her physically, but it saves her spirit by giving her a new purpose. Devoting herself to the revolutionary cause gives her life meaning by making her something other than a victim.⁵⁷ This notion that the communist movement “saved” women from traditional culture demonstrates just how nuanced Ding Ling’s views on the CCP and gender were. While here she acknowledges positive improvements from Confucian society, other works call out issues on gender that still

⁵⁵ Edwards, 165.

⁵⁶ Edwards, 159.

⁵⁷ Ling, Barlow, Bjorge, 298.

remain within the CCP.

“Thoughts on March 8th”: Critique of CCP and Gender Equality Rhetoric

One of her most controversial pieces, Ding Ling’s “Thoughts on March 8” delved into examples of gender inequality that existed within party ranks. “Thoughts on March 8th” discussed the experiences many women, including herself, faced as active members of the CCP. This piece more than any of her others exemplifies the inner conflict Ding was facing between activism and party needs. This piece, published in March of 1942 - just in time for International Women's Day" -- focused on the hypocrisy between party rhetoric on women and the way female party members were treated. They were not only party members, they were “women” members, Ding Ling elaborates. The attitudes towards female party members demonstrated a clear double standard. In “Thoughts on March 8th”, Ding Ling acknowledges that the women in the party headquarters in Yan’an had a better situation than other women throughout China, yet even they were not immune to inequality.⁵⁸ Ding Ling discusses the reality of how women in the party were perceived. She discusses the criticism they receive on marriage, both when and to whom women chose to marry. While women were mocked for their decisions to marry, women who did not marry were also ridiculed for being unmarried. The same conflict existed with childbirth as well. Women were persuaded to have children, but if they devoted themselves to raising their children, they were criticized for their abandonment of the party. If they left their children to nannies, then their parenting was brought into question. For a party that boasted its progressiveness in women’s liberation, these attitudes

⁵⁸ Ibid, 316.

left many female party members feeling abandoned and disappointed.

The reality was that women in the party still faced strict expectations of what it meant to be a woman, and were ridiculed for failure to adhere to these expectations. Women were expected to maintain "political purity, the same age and comparable in looks, and be a mutual help".⁵⁹ Ding Ling rejected these notions and explained how these notions meant nothing. Everyone in Yan'an is with the party, and "mutual help" often meant women were reduced to partaking in cleaning and other domestic duties. All of this comes down to the stereotype that women were "backwards" - in marriage they supposedly pulled their husbands back away from progressiveness, as mothers they either rejected children and are called lazy. Otherwise, as mothers their children distracted them from party work.⁶⁰ Ding Ling urged that comradery between male and female comrades was crucial not only for gender equality, but for the overall support of the party. Her strong critique comes not as someone outside the party, but from within, as a loyal member committed to the health and vitality of the CCP.

Ding Ling's House Arrest and Later Years

Ding Ling recognized the failure of the party to achieve true gender equality, and although her critiques were well-intentioned, they were not always received that way. While some of her writing, like "Thoughts on March 8th" directly critiqued this failure, other works simply described the realities of modern women, subtly referring to inequalities that still existed. Despite recognizing and articulating these issues, Ding Ling was an exemplary party member.

⁵⁹ Ling, Barlow, Bjorge, 315.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 319.

After she joined the Communist Party in March of 1932, she immediately prioritized all her writings to promote the party. She suffered exponentially for the sake of her party. Her first husband, also a left wing poet, was captured and executed by the Guomindang (GMD), and Ding Ling herself was held under house arrest in Shanghai for three years by the GMD.⁶¹ After escaping to Yan'an she became the Director of the Chinese Literature and Arts Association, and worked with party newspapers.⁶² This newspaper is where she later published "Thoughts on March 8th".⁶³

Ding Ling spent her life suffering and devoting her art to the party. Even so, she did struggle with the notion that art should be censored or altered to reflect party policies. Her controversial work was not out of lack of loyalty, but rather due to her loyalty and commitment to improving the cause. She believed that the party must first redefine what it meant to be a woman before rural communities would do the same. Ding Ling was fiercely loyal to both party and to her art, and this conflict manifested itself throughout her life. Ding Ling was denounced by party leadership and even Mao Zedong himself. She retracted much of her work and was forced to apologize publicly, demands that she complied with. She continued to write, but avoided the issue of gender altogether. Her later works, including "The Sun Shines Over Sangan River" which won the Stalin Prize in literature in 1951, were well respected. At the risk of her prominence and respect within the CCP, she continued to perform activism for gender equality. This culminated in her arrest in 1957, and she spent five years in prison during the Cultural Revolution. Afterwards, she was sent to labor in the countryside until the late 1970s. Despite

⁶¹ 李美皆. 2013. 丁玲的历史问题(Ding Ling's Historical Issues). *作家*(5): 101-43.

⁶² Yuan, Liangjun. 2011. *Ding ling yan jiu zi liao: DingLing yanjiuziliao*. Di 1 ban. ed. Vol. 62.;62;. Beijing: Zhi shi chan quan chu ban she. 50.

⁶³ Ling, Barlow, Bjorge, 316.

being banned as a "rightist", she never renounced the Communist Party.

Conclusion

Ding Ling's relationship with her beloved party was complex, and it appears that she herself never could reconcile the conflicts. Ding Ling never made a strong push towards one cause. Instead, she continued to act in the efforts of both, her conflict producing tension all throughout the rest of her life. Unlike other women within the party, such as Deng Yingchao who will be discussed in a later chapter, Ding Ling was unable to commit to putting party health above work on gender equality, at least not in her art. To describe her work on gender equality as a sort of rebellion would be a disservice to the sacrifices she made her entire life to bettering the party and furthering the cause of Communism. Her short stories are full of colorful characters that give us a picture of the writer and her perspective. The themes of her stories constantly change with the shifts in her political views.⁶⁴ Her work on feminism gives us a window into the inner personal struggle Ding Ling faced on how to stay authentic and devoted to both Communism and expression through art. She never seemed to resolve which one she prioritized more, as she continued to perform activism despite punishment, but never fully rejected or betrayed the best interests of the party. She could not restrict her art to only entertaining revolutionary needs, nor could not devote herself to art only, leaving the party behind. She is only one of many women within the party who faced inner personal struggles, and in a variety of ways debated how to reconcile this struggle.

⁶⁴ Yuan, Liangjun. 2011. *Ding ling yan jiu zi liao: DingLing yanjiuziliao*. Di 1 ban. ed. Vol. 62.;62;.Beijing: Zhi shi chan quan chu ban she. 462.

Chapter 3 Xiang Jingyu

During the formative years of the CCP, revolutionaries reconciled their expectations for gender equality with the strategic decisions made by party leadership. These conflicts created tensions between feminists and the party, and continued to be a source of conflict as party policy failed to commit to aggressive gender equality. Xiang Jingyu is a prime example of a female revolutionary whose feminist upbringing and passion for gender revolution was incompatible with the policy direction of the CCP and often the expectations of her in her various communist positions.

Executed in 1928, Xiang was glorified by the party as the “grandmother of the revolution.” However, as a result of her early death and the role that canonization has played in her memorialization, like Zhao Yiman, it can be complicated to decipher the reality of her role in the early communist movement. In this way, articulating the details of her life – one defined by her coming to terms with the tensions her beliefs created between her and the party attitude on

women's emancipation, as well as her historically strong ties to nationalism – is itself a worthy goal. Xiang Jingyu continuously reconciled her personal feminist ideas, rooted in nationalist feminism, with her commitment to the revolution. Her two passions, feminism and revolution, often conflicted with one another and required her to prioritize, like other female communists, communist victory over her desire for gender equality.

Xiang Jingyu's Early Years and Exposure to Nationalist Feminism

Xiang Jingyu was exposed to nationalist ideas, especially on gender equality, from early in her childhood. She was born in 1895, as multiple biographers note, in the middle of the Sino-Japanese War, during which China would experience a devastating loss to Japan and which marks the beginning of the social and intellectual turmoil of the early twentieth century. Western Hunan, where Xiang Jingyu grew up, had strong nationalist influences, which shaped her family life and ultimately her interests in national affairs. After the Sino-Japanese War, European economic influences increased in Xiang Jingyu's home as various European powers sought to carve out "spheres of influence," a process especially prominent in Hunan because it could no longer keep out foreign entrance into its territory.⁶⁵ The influences of Western countries, such as European businessmen pursuing China's forced openness and missionaries, who were granted unfair privilege due to foreign influence, created a national pride in Xiang Jingyu. Living with her father and eight older brothers, Xiang Jingyu grew up surrounded by men who were highly invested in national affairs. Her father was a businessman and head of Hunan's Xupu County's

⁶⁵ Gilmartin, 73.

chamber of commerce, he encouraged his children to maintain interest in current events and foreign affairs. He also encouraged his daughter to invest in education, as elite men around the country were doing for their female relatives. It is highly likely that this mix of family conversations had a strong influence on Xiang Jingyu.⁶⁶

One key element in Hunan that illuminates the environment Xiang Jingyu grew up in was the introduction and tensions from Western missionaries. Foreign missionaries were allowed to enter Hunan in 1900, when Xiang Jingyu was only five years old.⁶⁷ The attitudes towards these missionaries was skepticism at best and outright fear and hatred at worst. As missionaries in Hunan increased steadily, conflicts arose between the missionaries and the local Chinese citizens. Occasionally, these conflicts resulted in violence. One prime example that was later mentioned by Xiang Jingyu's brother as having an influence on her was in 1902. Two British missionaries in Chenzhou set up both a church and a hospital. However, their rumored relation with an untrusted local landlord created public animosity. When a cholera outbreak spread in the summer of 1902, the local populace blamed the missionaries for purposely poisoning the town well. Over two thousand people gathered to accuse them and eventually clubbed them to death.⁶⁸ Historical accounts confirm that the impact this had on western Hunan was quite strong, and was even discussed in the home of Xiang Jingyu.⁶⁹ One of Xiang Jingyu's older brothers recalled that Xiang Jingyu was inspired by the event, and it motivated her to take action like her hero Hua Mulan, who fought back against foreign invaders.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Gilmartin, 74.

⁶⁷ Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China*, p. 37.

⁶⁸ Gilmartin, 73.

⁶⁹ Esherick, 36-37.

⁷⁰ Gu, *Xiang Jingyu*, p. 59.

Xiang Jingyu's Early Education and Political Development

Events like these cultivated strong nationalist ideals in many Chinese, including young Xiang Jingyu. This laid the framework for her interest in political movements and eventually communism. Her older brother, Xiang Xianyue encouraged her education, when he began as a teacher at the Changde Girls' Normal School and later brought Xiang Jingyu to the school in 1907.⁷¹ During her time at this school her brother facilitated her interest in political ideas, including exposing her to newspapers, such as like *People's Journal* (民报) and *Renovation of the People* (新民丛报), and speakers who promoted anti-foreign ideology.⁷² This is also where Xiang Jingyu was exposed to feminism, especially French feminists and Western female revolutionaries.⁷³ While in Changde, she was surrounded by other young women with revolutionary goals, including the mother of Ding Ling, who she later collaborated and discussed politics with. The environment Xiang Jingyu found herself in at Changde was encouraging to feminism and surrounded her with peers who shared some of her values. During this period Xiang Jingyu began to define herself as a revolutionary. The broad environment she found herself in and the peers she worked with incited Xiang Jingyu's passion for feminism and politics.

The next step in Xiang Jingyu's education in patriotism and feminism came in 1912 when she transferred to the First Provincial Girls' Normal School in Changsha. It was here that she met one of the most influential people in her life, Zhu Jianfan. Zhu Jianfan had studied in Japan, and was by 1912 an educator at the school. Zhu Jianfan studied abroad in Japan and was inspired by

⁷¹ Gilmartin, 74.

⁷² Ibid, 74.

⁷³ Gu, *Xiang Jingyu*, p. 59.

nationalist thinker and reformer Liang Qichao, especially in regards to his ideas on gender reform.⁷⁴ Liang Qichao's reform ideology held that women's education and equal footing as men would fix the problems of women's inequality and oppression.⁷⁵ It is easy to see his influence on Zhu Jianfan in his recorded teachings to his students. He encouraged his students: "Half of China's four hundred million are women. If China is to become strong, it must educate and employ its two hundred million women. Women will then leave their homes and go out to run schools. They will wholeheartedly walk down the path of saving the nation through education."⁷⁶ Zhu Jianfan's ideology on gender equality and the emancipation of Chinese women was progressive and had a strong influence on young Xiang Jingyu.⁷⁷

Xiang Jingyu's Nationalist Feminism

Xiang Jingyu's early exposure to socialist ideas culminated in her decision to change her name. She rejected her traditional name, Junxian, which represented beauty, and chose instead the more modern Jingyu (警予), which means "alert to." Jingyu represented her awakening, and the broader need for women to awaken and begin pushing for their freedom.⁷⁸ Her name change also signified her shift into political awareness, as she began to identify with the Nationalist Party, and followed Sun Yatsen's notion that women were needed to help themselves so that they could ultimately help the country. She lamented the small role that women played in national

⁷⁴ LIANG, *qichao*2009.

⁷⁵ Wang, Ban. 2015. Morality, aesthetics, and world literature in liang qichao. *Chinese Literature Today* 5 (1): 85.

⁷⁶ Gu, *Xiang Jingyu*, 61.

⁷⁷ 向警予 (Xiang Jingyu). 2014. *诗词月刊*(*Shici yuekan*) *Poetry Monthly Magazine*(11): 2.

⁷⁸ Gilmartin, 75.

affairs in her diary, where she declared that she felt hopeful in what she as a woman could do for China. She recounted in her diary that, “Teacher Li told us about the problems and all the work that have gone into the republic in these four years. In his view the reason that the country has been steadily sinking is because of us; we are unable to help the country because we cannot support ourselves. The country is a congregation of individuals. How can we let the country collapse? Hearing Teacher Li tell us that we should strive for independence. I suddenly felt a great hope that I could help create a new China.”⁷⁹

Xiang Jingyu’s Early Political Work

Xiang Jingyu’s first political work was with the May Fourth Movement. The movement’s resistance to foreign control over China and nationalist principles were not unfamiliar to Xiang Jingyu, nor to many other young nationalists who had, like Xiang, been steeped in them since childhood. Unsurprisingly, she was attracted to this movement, and in 1915 she worked as a leading student activist at Zhounan against Japan’s 21 demands. These demands, given by Japan during World War I, sought to extend Japan’s control in China. In China, people responded with anger and boycotts of Japanese goods. Xiang Jingyu took part in organizing these boycotts, as well as writing pamphlets, and encouraging resistance to Japan. She also worked with the New Citizen’s Study Society (新公民学习协会) working with the protests in Changsha. This began her official political work and thrust her into a path of action.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Xu Rihui, *Xiang Jingyu wenji*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Gilmartin, 76.

The next action Xiang Jingyu undertook was establishing a school for girls, a marriage of her passion for feminism and nationalist goals. She returned to her hometown of Xupu where she opened an upper-primary school for girls.⁸¹ This school fulfilled her desire to see women awakened to the importance of their role in restoring China, as well as the nationalist ideal of seeing women educated and entering into the workforce. It was the logical next step in Xiang Jingyu's plan to enact change and prepare Chinese women for revolution. Her area of teaching in the school reflected her own education and childhood -- she emphasized national affairs and the importance of an independent China. Xiang Jingyu had no reservations over what her school was trying to accomplish: her students "were not studying for the sake of education or to get a husband, but rather to become part of a new citizenry."⁸² Xiang Jingyu exemplified this attitude in her own life, when she refused to marry a suitor her father had chosen, turning her -- despite her family's modern views on women's education -- into an outcast, and thrusting her into a more radical feminism.

This included a turn to communism. The decision to join the communist cause was a combination of principles she had previously developed, such as her commitment to the need for cultural revolution and her interest in socialism. Important, too, was the influence of her future husband, Cai Hesen. Cai Hesen was a communist who was interested in Marxist literature, and involved with the New Citizen's Study Society in France. Cai was integral to the founding of the European Chinese Communist organizations in 1922.⁸³ He talked about founding a true Communist Party in China early on. It is even said that his letters and writings regarding

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Gu, *Xiang Jingyu*, p. 65.

⁸³ Gilmartin, 77.

revolution had an impact on Mao Zedong.⁸⁴ Cai Hesen matched Xiang Jingyu in passion and fearlessness, both of them embracing being called radical. His intense knowledge of political affairs and revolution attracted Xiang Jingyu, and he shaped her political views into that of a strong communist. After meeting Cai Hesen, she spent hours studying in his home with both him and Mao Zedong.⁸⁵ She published her first communist writing in 1920, “A Discussion of Women’s Emancipation and Transformation.” This began Xiang Jingyu’s identity as an early leader of the communist movement.

Conflicts Between Nationalist Feminism and Communism

Xiang Jingyu experienced the conflicts between Marxist ideas about women and her attitudes on feminism. Xiang Jingyu believed that “changing the social status of women through education, is the best starting point for women’s liberation.”⁸⁶ However, early PRC policy had little interest in increasing education for women, beyond what was necessary for party training. Early policies on gender equality from the CCP worked to push women into labor for the communes, not to provide them well-rounded education. Furthermore, the Nationalist rejection of Confucian values on sexuality, which they believed went counter to human nature, was not as largely a priority of the CCP. As discussed by Ding Ling, stereotypes against women as fickle or distracting still plagued the CCP.

⁸⁴ Scalapino, *The Evolution of a Young Revolutionary*, p. 49-56.

⁸⁵ Gilmartin, 73.

⁸⁶ 向丹丹 (Xiang dandan). 2014. *论向警予的女权主义思想* (Xiang Jingyu’s writings on feminist ideology). *黑龙江史志* (Heilongjiang history)(15).

Xiang Jingyu also found differences in her ideas and expressions on love. Individualism and free love and expression were key in May Fourth thought, which sought to remove the patriarchal family and traditional relationships.⁸⁸ Xiang Jingyu was married to Cai Hesun and wrote about her love for him. While their union was not directly out of line with communist thought, it reveals her May Fourth ideas about love. *Revolution of the Heart* by Haiyan Lee details how fiction of the period presents heroes and heroines that reject traditional romantic love as paltry and meaningless.⁹² In fact, the younger sister of Cai Hesun, Cai Chang, renounced marriage and all romantic relationships, already beginning to establish the communist attitudes towards romance. In Xiang's article "A Discussion on Women's Emancipation," she praises the communist cause. Although some of her feminist ideals founded in nationalism and the May Fourth Movement remained, such as her proposal that women establish associations to promote free marriage and terminate the arranged-marriage system.⁹³ While working in rural areas, communists promised rural men that they would be able to afford marriage under communist leadership. Free love, and the total removal of traditional relationships would have compromised this promise, so CCP ideology never went as far as May Fourth ideology did. This resulted in a discrepancy between Xiang Jingyu's ideas on love and her actions, and the expectations of the CCP.

Despite being a motivated feminist, Xiang Jingyu originally had little to do with women's emancipations movements that arose during this time. Despite her position as the director of the Communist Women's Bureau, Xiang Jingyu surprisingly had little involvement with much of

⁸⁸ Lee, Haiyan. 2007. *Revolution of the heart: A genealogy of love in china, 1900-1950*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press. 221.

⁹² Lee, 125.

⁹³ Xiang Jingyu, *Nüzi jiefang yu gaizao de shangque*, p. 30-37

“women’s work” during her first few years.⁹⁴ In response to General Wu Peifu’s attempts in the 30’s to reinstate the old parliament and former president of the republic, women across China decided to begin pushing for women’s rights. Eventually this mass movement split into two separate groups: The Women’s Suffrage Association and The Women’s Rights League. Both groups pushed for things like marriage equality, and more equal rights under the law, but the latter focused especially on things like banning footbinding, prostitution, and slavery. Because of the broader reforms sought by the Women’s Rights League, and attitudes towards total family reform, they were preferred by Communists. Furthermore, one of Xiang Jingyu’s friends and former classmates, Zhang Renrui, was one of the founders. Despite this, Xiang Jingyu initially refused to involve herself with their work.

Eventually Xiang Jingyu was pressured into working with the Women’s Rights League, and drafted a resolution for congress, including not only the Women Right’s League principles, but also some of her own values including free social contact between men and women and higher quality education for women. Her husband later commented that she was never happy to be doing work with them, and preferred to focus strictly on communist reform, which is odd considering her history of dedication to feminism.⁹⁵ Since she had no lack of motivation when it came to feminism, and was working diligently at communist work, it seems that her own feminist ideals, rooted in nationalism, conflicted with the larger women’s movement. Xiang Jingyu found she preferred to stay out of women’s work entirely than to work on reforms she did not support. An alternative explanation for Xiang Jingyu’s absence during the early 1920s is that the Women’s Rights League called for sweeping reform, and did not support the idea of a

⁹⁴Gilmartin, 80.

⁹⁵ Cai Hesen, *Xiang Jingyu tongzhi zhuan*, p. 2.

communist alliance with the Nationalists in order to enact said reforms. Xiang Jingyu was a supporter of the united front, and aligning herself with the Women's Rights League would mean supporting political policies that she did not agree with. Either way, Xiang Jingyu sacrificed an opportunity to work on the kind of feminist movement she loved in order to prioritize work for the communist movement as a whole.

However, Xiang Jingyu eventually ceased her alienation from the Women's Rights League, noticeably once the United Front was formed. The United Front was a coalition formed between the CCP and the KMT (Nationalists) formed in 1923 to fight off the warlords. The communists saw this as an opportunity to spread communism, while the Nationalists hoped to curb the expansion of the party. The United Front ended in 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek ordered a purge of the Communists. At the third congress of the CCP in June 1923, Xiang Jingyu finally involved herself in the women's work within the party. She took on the position of director of the Communist women's program.⁹⁶ Her first act was drafting a resolution for the party congress that defined the focus and goals of the women's program. These included men's and women's social communication, eliminating the ethics code, and a high standard of education for both women and men.⁹⁷ Much of her draft was influenced by May Fourth ideology, especially the education for women and encouragement of social behavior between the sexes. The explanation for Xiang Jingyu's decision to lead the women's movement is not clear, but we do know it was not out of pure interest. Cai Hesen said on the matter: "She was responsible for the women's work of the party, yet she herself was never happy to do 'women's work.'"⁹⁸ It seems Xiang Jingyu was resentful of becoming a token for CCP feminism, and she accepted her positions as a

⁹⁶ Gilmartin, 84.

⁹⁷ Xu Rihui, *Xiang Jingyu wenji*, p. 216.

⁹⁸ Cai Hesen, *Xiang Jingyu tongzhi zhuan*, p. 2.

way to gain politically, rather than out of passion for the specific women's work being done by the PRC. Her previous work on feminism implies this was not out of lack of interest for women's issues overall, but a lack of interest in the specific feminism of the CCP. While she never outright criticized the CCP on gender inequality like Ding Ling did, she appears to have quietly accepted these discrepancies for the sake of political progress.

Her initial hesitation to enter the movement did not stop Xiang Jingyu from putting an incredible amount of effort into the work. She seems to have accepted her new position has a new mission for the party rather than defeat or compliance.¹⁰⁰ Xiang Jingyu, with approval from the Nationalist party, created *Women's Weekly*, a weekly piece in the larger *Republican Daily*. This provided an outlet to share her ideology and goals for women's equality across the movement. Its goal was to "guide and criticize" the growing movement.¹⁰¹ This collaboration with the Nationalist paper meant her kind of feminism, with many nationalist principles, was well accepted and easy for her to spread. This gave her an opportunity to avoid the conflicts her feminism had with Marxism, and allowed her to reconcile her two passions. She also established independent groups for women's equality in Shanghai, and used resources from the Nationalist party to achieve her goals. Xiang Jingyu's acceptance of the alliance with the Nationalists meant that her work was not bounded by politics. She established the first women's program within the Nationalist party as well. Overall, *Women's Weekly* was highly influential, running from August 1923 to January 1926.¹⁰² As Xiang Jingyu could speak directly to women, she was in a position to encourage them to fight for national interests and value their education. Her freedom to use

¹⁰⁰Gilmartin, 86.

¹⁰¹Gilmartin, 86.

¹⁰²Gilmartin, 88.

her voice shows us the differences between Xiang Jingyu's idea of the women's movement in comparison with the general communists' view.

The Affair and Aftermath

During this time, Xiang Jingyu saw another conflict in her desires and communal expectations. She had an extramarital affair in 1925 with Peng Shuzhi. Both Peng and Xiang Jingyu had grown up in Hunan, and been involved with the May Fourth protests, giving them similar backgrounds, and perhaps provided Xiang Jingyu with someone who understood her own principles and their formation. The news of the affair caused her to be removed from her job as director of the Communist women's movement. Peng, however, kept his position. Her affair had effects outside her own position however. It aggravated a split in Party leadership, where her husband and lover were on opposing sides.¹⁰³ The previous chapter on Ding Ling explored the trope of women in the party causing drama and becoming a distraction to their male peers. Xiang Jingyu's experience reinforces this trope and demonstrates how it burdened the rise of communist women within the party apparatus. Despite all of the pushes for gender equality, many accused Xiang Jingyu of loose morals, arguing that she was unsuitable to be a leader and that a failed marriage meant she was a poor communist as well.¹⁰⁴ While Xiang Jingyu believed women should follow their inclinations and not societal rules on their behavior, many communist men—and women – retained more traditional views of the burden women should bear in upholding moral standards. Xiang Jingyu commented herself that “(the woman) accepts men

¹⁰³ McElderry, Andrea. "Woman Revolutionary: Xiang Jingyu." *The China Quarterly*, no. 105 (1986): 95.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

having three wives and four concubines and doesn't worry about abusive husbands, but she considers it a terrible crime for a woman to divorce and remarry. One's own body is one's own body.”¹⁰⁵ The party was unable to fully support gender equality in this regard of one's body being their own. Expectations of women and how they ought to behave with their bodies, such as their sexuality becoming a distraction and a problem by their very nature, always plagued the CCP. While Xiang Jingyu spent so much time sacrificing her own ideals for party success, her own feminism finally came head to head with communism, and Xiang Jingyu suffered for it.

After the affair, Xiang Jingyu went to Moscow for a short time, but returned to China in 1927, where she stayed with Zhou Enlai's wife (and communist leader in her own right), Deng Yingchao, for a period. Afterwards Xiang went to Wuhan and was made head of the propaganda department. In 1927 the Nationalist party expelled the Communists, and Xiang disappeared. In 1928, she was captured by authorities and executed by the Nationalists. After her death, her legacy became that of a valiant communist woman who lived and died for the party. Many after her were influenced by her strong commitment and bravery.¹⁰⁶ This isn't, however, the reality of her life. Xiang Jingyu's passions for feminism seemed incompatible with what the CCP asked of her, and she appears to have been willing to put her specific feminist beliefs aside to serve the party. She allowed women's groups to work on policy that did not align with her own beliefs, and ultimately lost her well-deserved position because of double standards on gender within the party. Like Ding Ling, her commitment to equality for her gender lost her respect and power within the communist movement. Her martyrdom made it easy to ignore these realities and paper

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 142

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 122.

over her transgressions, but Xiang Jingyu was a strong and defiant woman who was never able to fully reconcile her passions, and lost considerably because of it.

Conclusion

Xiang Jingyu seemed to walk a middle line in how she handled issues of gender inequality within the CCP. Unlike Ding Ling, she never outright critiqued it, but she was unable to completely hide her individual ideas and beliefs. Xiang Jingyu's formative years in the May Fourth activities made her brand of feminism occasionally incompatible with the communist thought. Her treatment after her affair gives credibility to Ding Ling's outcry about double standards within the party, and reveals how the reality of gender equality under the CCP did not always match the rhetoric they produced. Xiang Jingyu needed to prioritize CCP goals and feminism, and her life illuminates for us the difficulty and complexity in this task that all women within the CCP had to face.

Chapter 4 Deng Yingchao

In embarking on my analysis regarding how women within the Chinese Communist party reconciled their personal beliefs and agendas with the various ideological shifts on feminism within leadership, I expected to find consistent examples of conflict between the women I've chosen to examine and the party. I originally selected Deng Yingchao due to her high profile position as the wife of Zhou Enlai. I anticipated that upon further examination of her life, I

would find some examples of conflict between her personal beliefs and what the party expected her to support, especially given her various positions and extended time in the movement. However, in contradiction to my expectations, Deng Yingchao, at least in the public picture of her, was a woman who successfully compromised her own ideas and desires with the goals of the party. Deng Yingchao serves an example of a successful manifestation of the expectations the CCP had for women within the party. Unlike the previous women discussed, Deng Yingchao fit expectations both in her involvement with women's work within the party, and also in her personal life.

Her success in keeping in line both politically and personally made Deng Yingchao one of the most influential and important women in CCP history. Her role in shaping Chinese politics has been critical. While her marriage to Zhou Enlai helped propel her to fame and established their reputation as practitioners of a moderate strain of communist ideology, she became prominent on her own since his death in 1976 with her own lengthy and substantial political career.¹⁰⁷ She was one of the most honored women in the People's Republic of China up to her death in 1992.¹⁰⁸ Her many political achievements and leadership positions provided her a high level of respect and fame within the PRC. As such, she provides an alternate story to that of devoted feminists always in conflict with the party. Deng Yingchao demonstrates that each female cadre reconciled feminism with party goals differently, and these relationships between female cadre and the CCP were just as nuanced as the relationship between the CCP and feminism itself.

¹⁰⁷ Li, Yu-ning. 1992. *Chinese women through Chinese eyes*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.144.

¹⁰⁸ *Deng yingchao (1903–1992)*2007. Vol. 1.

Early Years

Like Xiang Jingyu, Deng Yingchao's early years built a foundation for feminism that would be incompatible with Marxism. Like the other women discussed in this project, Deng Yingchao had strong influences pushing her into feminism from an early age. In her case, the death of her father when she was a young child put her solely under the care of her mother, who worked as a teacher.¹⁰⁹ Her mother, by word and action, impressed on her the importance of independence for women. Later, she began her education at the Beiyang First Girls Normal School in Tianjin and later the Zhili First Women's Normal School.¹¹⁰ During her time at Zhili First Women's Normal School, she became involved with the May Fourth protests. The beginning of her political career started at only sixteen when she organized the Tianjin Association of Women Patriots, the most active women's group in Tianjin.

Early on, Deng Yingchao was known for her lively personality and strong leadership.¹¹¹ An article she wrote for *Women of China* (Zhongguo funü) in 1959 reflected on how the May Fourth principles on feminism had affected her. She recalled the push for gender equality, including free love, public social intercourse between men and women, and the need for female education. She exclaimed how she and others worked diligently "in order to wake up the consciousness our fellow students."¹¹² During her May Fourth period she worked with other female comrades to open schools for girls across rural China in order to "promote Chinese

¹⁰⁹ Encyclopedia of women social reforms volume 1 pg. 182

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Li, 147.

¹¹² 王, 月宗. *The Brilliant Life of Deng Yingchao* (邓颖超光辉的一生). Henan People's Publishing House. 17.

women and arouse patriotism".¹¹³ These principles sound similar to those that initially motivated Xiang Jingyu, but unlike Xiang, Deng Yingchao did not continue to press for these issues once she joined the communist movement. While Xiang stood for these principles and they ended up causing her grief later on, Deng instead – at least publically – devoted herself wholeheartedly to the CCP, even when that meant compromising on feminist principles developed during the May Fourth Movement.

Deng Yingchao married political work and gender equality early in her career. In 1919 Deng Yingchao joined a group of student players in Tianjin to form the Awakening Society. It was here she met her future husband Zhou Enlai. This collaboration chose ten male and ten female members, as they sought to endorse gender equality in their manifesto, drafted by Zhou.¹¹⁴ This endorsement included May Fourth thought on gender equality such as the importance of education, romantic expression, and individualism for women.¹¹⁵ This underground society was a key part in beginning Deng Yingchao's long political career, and demonstrates her early interest in gender equality.

Deng Yingchao joined the Nationalists (GMD) in 1924, and, shortly after that, the young Chinese Communist party.¹¹⁸ She married Zhou Enlai in 1925¹¹⁹. Both can be characterized by their strong leadership skills, and friendly, energetic manner of speaking. Zhou Enlai served as

¹¹³ 董, 振修 (Dong, Zhenxiu). "邓颖超早期在天津的革命活动 (*Deng Yingchao's Early Revolutionary Activities*). " *Journal of Tianjin Normal University*, April 1990, 37. Accessed March 19, 2016. CNKI 主页.

¹¹⁴ Gao, Wenqian, Peter Rand, and Lawrence R. Sullivan. 2007. *Zhou enlai: The last perfect revolutionary : A biography*. 1st ed. New York: PublicAffairs. 33.

¹¹⁵ Gao, Wenqian, Peter Rand, and Lawrence R. Sullivan. 2007. *Zhou enlai: The last perfect revolutionary : A biography*. 1st ed. New York: PublicAffairs. 34.

¹¹⁸ 145. CWCE

¹¹⁹ *Deng yingchao (1903–1992)*2007. Vol. 1.

deputy director of the Political Department of the GMD's military academy in Whampoa, as well as secretary of the CCP's Kwangtung Provincial Committee. Deng Yingchao served as director of the CCP's Women's Department, and in 1931 was an alternate member of the CCP Central Committee. Their early participation in various positions within the CCP demonstrates their ability to survive the various ideological shifts and political waves. During the United Front, they both played crucial roles in creating alliances and keeping peace between the CCP and GMD. Their various leadership positions with various ideological factions foreshadows the pattern of survival that would characterize both their lives. This political balancing act demonstrates Deng Yingchao's ability to successfully maneuver the given political framework. Either she was willing to temporarily set aside her feminist notions, or felt it more prudent to focus on the larger goals of the CCP first. Either way, this strategy gave her long term success within the party, but saw only small and often incomplete improvements in gender equality.

Deng Yingchao rode the ideological waves well, beginning with her portrayal as a woman-educator in the early CCP period. Despite suffering from tuberculosis, Deng Yingchao and her husband Zhou Enlai joined the Long March in 1934, enduring the 9,600 kilometer journey to northern Shaanxi province.¹²⁰ It was during this journey that she and her husband established their credibility and leadership. For Deng Yingchao, she not only fit the trope of the female cadre who rejected family life, she also fit the role of woman-educator. Like Zhao Yiman, she was presented as using her feminine strengths to educate the masses, Deng Yingchao is recorded as working to awaken the local masses, especially rural women. She encouraged them to join the revolution, and forsake traditional Chinese ways of thinking. Deng Yingchao denounced traditional ideology: "the feudal family system is evil; the old system is responsible

¹²⁰ Encyclopedia of women social reforms volume 1 pg. 183

for the prison women find themselves in.”¹²¹ While traveling through rural villages she helped organize women’s cadres that set up local women’s associations across rural China.¹²² These organizations pushed for women’s liberation and organization, and owed their development to Deng Yingchao’s early leadership in organizing as she traveled. As a female educator, she was successful in leading female cadres into organization, and ultimately liberation. Her early work in this period focused on women rejecting patriarchy, but as we shall see, this goal was later abandoned when it was not prudent for the party to pursue.

Deng Yingchao and her husband managed to survive the conflict between the CCP and GMD, and played key roles in establishing the People’s Republic in 1949. Deng Yingchao worked in numerous posts including as a full member of the Central Committee in 1956 at the 8th Party Congress. In 1978 she became a member of the ruling Politburo. She also held the position of a vice-chairperson of the Standing Committee of the Women’s Federation in 1949.¹²³ Unlike many other strong players in the PRC, Deng Yingchao and Zhou Enlai managed to stay in the ruling party’s good favor. Their strong diplomatic skills enabled them to ride the various waves, and maintain power. For Deng Yingchao, she had the added challenge of keeping her feminism in line with party policy. Her ability to avoid the numerous conflicts that emerged between women’s groups is a testament to her diplomatic and strategic abilities.

¹²¹ 邓颖超 (Deng Yingchao). "致恩来 (Thanks to You)." *天津师大学报 (Journal of Yaiting Teachers College)* 4 (April 1990). CNKI 主页.

¹²² Encyclopedia of women social reforms volume 1 pg. 183

¹²³ Ibid.

Deng Yingchao and Women's Work in the CCP

Deng Yingchao successfully navigated women's work within the CCP, keeping in line with party agenda. Once she became involved with the communist movement, Deng Yingchao held the stance, at least formally, that gender equality would come through economic liberation of women, similar to the Mao era idea that women's entry into production would solve the issue of gender inequality. This rhetoric attempted to motivate women to utilize their personal struggles to advance communism, not simply to improve their own personal lives. "Women's emancipation is built on the solid foundation of economic independence" was the claim that Deng Yingchao and others in the CCP made.¹²⁵ The CCP rhetoric on gender equality offered the solution that women could fix their personal issues through liberation by the party. Party liberation did not seek to fix the issues facing women, rather it asked women to devote themselves to the call of the Communist party can they reform society to a culture that will value and respect them. So the idea was to fix the state first, and society would follow. This rhetoric attempted to motivate women to utilize their personal struggles advance the over cause, not just specifically a feminist cause. It is within this framework that Deng Yingchao worked to enact gender reform.

Deng Yingchao was vocal about her position that "women must respond to the call of the Chinese Communist party... freedom and emancipation can be obtained only in a society where democratic political power is safeguarded." This stance took little interest in the personal lives of women, their education level, or personal rights, but rather looked more broadly at the strength

¹²⁵ Wayne, Tiffany K., ed. 2011. *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World : A Global Sourcebook and History*. Westport, US: Greenwood. Accessed February 5, 2017. ProQuest ebrary. 550.

of the party, and how that would in turn liberate women. Deng Yingchao illustrated the agenda of pushing women into agriculture through her encouragement that “the most important task at present is to actively restore and expand production. Accomplishment will enable the People’s War of Liberation to promote women’s education.”¹²⁶

Deng Yingchao’s “A Report on the Present Policy and Task of the Women’s Movement in China” lays out for us how she viewed the CCP’s responsibility towards gender equality. A senior official in the CCP approached Deng Yingchao in 1949 asking her to write a report detailing her thoughts on the Chinese Women’s movement and its future. This provided her an opportunity to discuss the unique problems and experiences of Chinese women. Especially given Deng Yingchao’s background as a survivor of the Long March, she was in a unique position to illuminate the realities of gender equality in China. Her report was later presented to the First All China Women’s Congress on March 26, 1949.¹²⁷ The report focused on women’s role in the reconstruction of China, and how they would participate in the labor force and the building of a new infrastructure. It touched on women’s rights to equality. The report failed however, to engage with the more personal aspects of women’s experiences. Their roles and the accompanying expectations of women as mothers and wives was ignored in favor of focusing on women’s role in the revolution. Issues like divorce, double standards, and childbirth were absent. The report did discuss how women would be involved in the construction of the new socialist state, but ignored that women might have different needs and protections than men.¹²⁸ Deng

¹²⁶ Yingchao, Deng, and Xiaoping Sun. 2012. *A report on the present policy and task of the Women’s movement of china (1949)*. Vol. 2.

¹²⁷ Wayne, Tiffany K., ed. 2011. *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World : A Global Sourcebook and History*. Westport, US: Greenwood. Accessed February 5, 2017. ProQuest ebrary. 550.

¹²⁸ Encyclopedia of women social reforms volume 1 pg. 183

Yingchao chose to focus on the party's goals for women in their new system, but not the issues women were experiencing in their lives currently. This absence was not out of ignorance. Who better than Deng Yingchao to give voice to the women she worked with? Her decision to neglect these aspects demonstrates that she wrote this report with a careful lens. Unlike Ding Ling, she felt most progress could be made by working within the system, rather than critiquing it

The CCP rhetoric on gender equality offered the solution that women could fix their personal issues through liberation by the party. Party liberation did not work towards solving the issues facing women, rather it asked women to devote themselves to the call of the Communist party can they reform society to a culture that will value and respect them. So fix the state first, and society will follow. This rhetoric attempted to motivate women to utilize their personal struggles advance the over cause, not just specifically a feminist cause. in the report, Deng Yingchao recites this same idea. Deng Yingchao believed that "Women's emancipation is built on the solid foundation of economic independence."¹²⁹ She begins by noting that only in a society where political power is secure can freedom and liberation come to women.¹³⁰ This narrative, coming out in 1949, had the agenda not to present strategies to fix cultural sexism, but to push women into labor.¹³¹ The big hurdle the party faced in attempting to communize industry was to convince women to reject traditional notions about a woman's role, and leave their home life. Deng Yingchao encouraged women that labor was honorable, and that it was the evil of feudal society and traditional gender roles that was the cause of women's problems. She mentions using the government to help protect mothers and infants, but this could only come

¹²⁹ Wayne, 550.

¹³⁰ Yingchao, Deng, and Xiaoping Sun. 2012. *A report on the present policy and task of the Women's movement of china (1949)*. Vol. 2

¹³¹ Wayne, 548.

after the party's labor goals have been achieved. Continually the party used feminism as a guise to push their overall agenda of national economic growth, while ignoring the genuine suffering of women. Deng Yingchao promised for marriage equality, women's rights in democratic construction, and child welfare, all by "implementing the above mentioned tasks of labor reform, doing away with the conception of "labor is contemptible" and bringing the new idea that "labor is honorable."

Recalling the May Fourth principles on feminism that shaped Deng Yingchao and many other leftist women's ideas about gender equality, it becomes clear that this report seeks to answer the issues of gender equality brought up in the movement, but answers them with an agenda beneficial to the newly empowered CCP. As for peasant women and their dilemma of equality in marriage, Deng Yingchao suggests that the CCP method is equal opportunities and equal pay for women in labor. This will free women of "the feudal conceptions and traditions that prevent women from participating in productive activities."¹³² In theory, equal work opportunities would make men and women equal. The reality was quite different. The point system subsequently adopted, for instance, in rural communes did not award women who stayed home to care for children or perform other household duties, only women who labored in the fields. While some locations offered nursery care for young children, not every area was as fortunate. Women were forced to either leave small children home alone without supervision, or to sacrifice pay. This sacrifice never fell on the man of the house, since this system of equality through labor failed to eliminate traditional notions about gender roles and homecare.¹³³

¹³² Yingchao, Deng, and Xiaoping Sun. 2012. *A report on the present policy and task of the Women's movement of china (1949)*. Vol. 2

¹³³ Ibid.

What can be more telling than what was said in the report, is what was left out.

Throughout the entire report, there are no mentions of women's access to divorce, protections for women who are pregnant or have young children, or women's right to choose their husband. Early feminism in the May Fourth Movement promoted ideas of free love, free choice in social contact, and a woman's right to divorce her husband. None of these issues are addressed in this report. As mentioned previously, it wouldn't be until the 1980s that the marriage law addressed divorce. The lack of access was a real issue that plagued especially rural women, but it is not mentioned at all in the report. Pushing both genders into labor did not bring about the gender reform women needed and asked for in their personal lives, and the liberation of women seems to be restricted only to where it was convenient for the CCP and their goals.

Reaffirmation of the continuous agenda behind gender equality rhetoric can be found in Deng Yingchao's article for *Women's Life* where she discusses how to organize rural women.¹³⁴ In her article, she notes how labor and agricultural reform would free women from the curse of evil traditional society. This article, written in 1935, fourteen years before the above report, demonstrate that this agenda was persistent, and a key part of gender reform work in the CCP throughout the Mao era and even before the establishment of the PRC.

These writings make clear that the women's movements under the PRC, formal or non-formal, were subordinate to the CCP and its overall goals. This is not to say that Deng Yingchao did not personally care about women's liberation, but her political moves seem to only skim the surface of what was really needed for women's liberation. Her own political moves never seemed out of line with CCP goals, but did not take a hard look at the needs of women either. As

¹³⁴邓, 颖超. "How to Organize Rural Women (怎样组织农村妇女)." *Women's Life (妇女生活)* 5, no. 12, 9-10.

a female communist leader, Deng Yingchao sought to protect women's interests but only while conforming to the demands of the communist movement and its broader goals.¹³⁵

During her time as Vice President of the All China Democratic Women's Federation (ACWF), Deng Yingchao delivered a speech at the reception given in honor of the female delegates to the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions.¹³⁶ In her opening remarks, she emphasized the great progress on gender equality made in the three years of the People's Republic of China. She notes that China had successfully implemented gender equality in accordance with Article 6 of the first chapter of the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which states "Women shall enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational and social life." She follows that all the women in China reflect on their happy life and can see how they now "enjoy totally equal rights with men."¹³⁷ She goes on to congratulate the party on this success, noting that female communists are on "equal footing with men." Statements like these were perpetuated by the idea that since women were equal in labor opportunities and ability to serve the state, this meant they had achieved equality, ignoring the broader scope of social and political issues that still plagued women across China.

It is unsurprising that a leader in the CCP would avoid being critical of the progress being made on gender equality. However, Deng Yingchao did not hesitate to assure the other women

¹³⁵ Andors, Phyllis. *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, 1949-1980*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983.

¹³⁶ Deng, Yingchao. 1952. *Women of china build for peace: Report made at the reception in honor of the women delegates to the peace conference of the Asian and pacific regions*. Peking: All-China Democratic Women's Federation. 2.

¹³⁷ Deng, Yingchao. 1952. *Women of china build for peace: Report made at the reception in honor of the women delegates to the peace conference of the asian and pacific regions*. Peking?: All-China Democratic Women's Federation. 3.

of China and the delegates from other Asian countries that China had totally healed its gender equality problem. She even references how poor women were treated under traditional Confucian values, in contrast to the bright and happy life women had by the early 1950s. Deng Yingchao goes beyond complimenting the formal, written advancements on gender equality policy, also crediting the communist movement with being able to change the hearts and minds of Chinese citizens by totally removing sexism and prejudice. These clearly overstated remarks did not reflect reality, but demonstrate that Deng Yingchao was more preoccupied with the perception of gender equality in China than the reality. She continually referenced the increase of women in government positions, like the increase to sixty female cadres who held positions in the Central People's Government. Simultaneously, she does not address the challenges and double standards these women in government faced. Deng also announced that agricultural reform had fixed the issues of gender inequality brought about by the old system in her article "Opinions on the Women's Movement at This Stage."¹³⁸ According to Deng, the party had completely succeeded in establishing gender equality both politically and socially, so any issues or conflicts women faced therefore must be their own fault, and not the fault of inherent sexism or apathy in the party.¹³⁹ This takes the responsibility off of the party for any transgressions, and places the blame solely on the women involved.

Deng Yingchao in her speech also noted that the growing number of female local officials meant that even rural women who stayed home had access to gender equality and the support of the government. "Through them, the suggestions and requests of every household

¹³⁸ Deng, Yingchao, 1935. *Opinions of the Women's Movement at This Stage* (对于现阶段妇女运动的意见). Shanghai: *Women's Life* (妇女生活). 2.

¹³⁹ Hershatter, 186.

reach the government.”¹⁴⁰ In reality, local provisions, like the Marriage Law passed in 1950 by the PRC, made progress on gender equality in marriage, by banning marriage by proxy and raising the legal marriage ages. However, such changes were not a complete solution to the oppression women faced, especially in rural villages. From the beginning it was flawed, the CCP initially enacted land reforms in keeping their promise to poor peasants that they would be able to afford to marry, the Marriage Law had the ability to threaten that promise, so it not vigorously enforced, as the support of rural men was deemed more crucial to party needs.¹⁴¹ Deng Yingchao herself worked on the Marriage Law. Despite her experience working first hand with peasant women and their struggles, the law still had multiple shortcomings that failed to address their needs. For example, it would not be until the Second Marriage Law in 1980 that divorce was liberalized, and female interest in distributing property and assets after a divorce would be protected. Many women went to get divorces only to find the local official was friends with their spouse, or possessed traditional notions about womanhood and marriage, and were sent home to angry husbands. The party was unwilling to really push for gender equality early on at risk of alienating rural men, and later ignored it in favor of working on consolidating power. From the beginning, Deng Yingchao represented the status quo that the party offered, not the revolutionary social change she and others boasted. Unlike Ding Ling, who took a hard stance against these discrepancies, Deng Yingchao sought to make changes within the party, seeking small, incremental, and stable changes over direct criticism.

¹⁴⁰ Deng, Yingchao. 1952. *Women of china build for peace: Report made at the reception in honor of the women delegates to the peace conference of the Asian and pacific regions*. Peking: All-China Democratic Women's Federation. 4.

¹⁴¹ Hershatter, 98.

Deng Yingchao's Personal Life and CCP Expectations

Deng Yingchao also faced and successfully navigated the female-specific expectations for her personal life that plagued other female cadres. The chapter on Zhao Yiman discussed how expectations of womanhood and motherhood shifted with the ideological waves within the party, and how these waves affected women within the party. The chapter on Xiang Jingyu discussed how women often got caught in between their feminist goals and the CCP's political agenda. Ding Ling's works illustrated the subconscious stereotypes and double standards against women. Deng Yingchao never fell into these traps that ensnared the previous women. In addition to nuancing her work with women without upsetting the CCP, she also managed to keep her personal life in line with expectations.

Deng Yingchao's relationship with her husband Zhou Enlai began and remained fundamentally strategic to their political careers. Zhou Enlai himself reflected that he "had become a firm believer in Marxism, and thus my need was for a lifelong companion who would share this devotion with me."¹⁴² The two had met years prior during their time in the Awakening Society, but had no romantic relationship at that time. It wasn't until Zhou Enlai was in France, and committed his life to Marxism, that he began a romantic interest in Deng Yingchao. According to her own account, Deng Yingchao felt she made her impression on him when she gave an impassioned speech at a gathering for the Awakening Society. Since both were quite likeable and attracted many friends, their relationship developed into more than just their union. It became a symbol for a communist couple who were equally devoted to each other as they were

¹⁴² Gao, Wenqian, Peter Rand, and Lawrence R. Sullivan. 2007. *Zhou enlai: The last perfect revolutionary : A biography*. 1st ed. New York: PublicAffairs. 43.

to the cause. In fact, devotion to political revolution was equally if not more the framework for their marriage than love or mutual affection.

After receiving approval from the Communist leadership to marry, Deng Yingchao was transferred to Guangzhou to be married to Zhou Enlai. The two had only been exchanging letters, and hadn't seen each other since 1919. Rather than going to greet her at her arrival himself, he sent an officer by the name of Chen Geng with a photo of her to pick her up for him. Once Deng Yingchao finally found Zhou Enlai at the headquarters of the Guangdong General Worker's Union, he was busy in a meeting and only gave her a quick nod and smile. After the meeting he failed to greet her at all. This interaction began Deng Yingchao's role as the wife of a prominent revolutionary.¹⁴³ It demonstrates the priority to communism that defined not only their relationship but all of Deng Yingchao's life.

Deng Yingchao never had a child, out of direct desire to maintain her revolutionary career.¹⁴⁴ Despite being married to Zhou Enlai since 1925, the couple never had biological children, although they did adopt.¹⁴⁵ Deng Yingchao, like many female revolutionaries during this period, had no interest in playing the traditional role of wife or mother.¹⁴⁶ Deng was a participant and survivor of the Long March, and both she and Zhou understood the necessity to avoid childbirth, putting the party before their family.¹⁴⁷ Their personal life reflected their devotion to the revolution. Unplanned childbirth plagued many female cadres, who then reconciled their unexpected children and subsequent responsibilities with revolution. The same ideology that motivated Zhao Yiman to give up her son in many early retellings of her life also

¹⁴³ Ibid, 46.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Encyclopedia of women social reforms volume 1 pg. 182

¹⁴⁶ Gao, 48.

¹⁴⁷ *Deng yingchao (1903–1992)*2007. Vol. 1.

motivated Deng Yingchao. Sacrificing a family for the cause fit the narrative and presented them as heroes who managed to put their own desires aside for the good of the group.¹⁴⁸ Deng Yingchao, despite what she may have personally wanted, decided that avoiding childbirth during the party's nascent period was what was best for the cause. Soon after their marriage, Deng Yingchao got pregnant, and used drugs from the black market to abort the fetus, which tragically left her unable to have children.¹⁴⁹ Later the couple did, however, adopt numerous orphaned children over the years, including the former Premier Li Peng. This sacrifice illustrates the seriousness of Deng Yingchao's commitment to revolution over herself.

As expectations of women changed over time, Deng Yingchao needed to change as well. When family and motherhood returned to fashion, their adopted family made the smiling couple a poster family. This made Deng Yingchao a truly communist mother, as she took in orphans of the revolution. This allowed her to fit the idea of mothers as mothers to the revolution. Later portrayals during her time as Chairwoman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference present her as a loving and attentive wife to Zhou Enlai, swapping her image as a hardened political leader for that of an ideal communist wife.¹⁵⁰ Images of Deng Yingchao doing household chores like sewing clothes evoked the family centric role.¹⁵¹ Deng Yingchao glided between these portrayals excellently. Just as Zhao Yiman's portrayals shifted with new expectations of women, Deng Yingchao's self portrayal shifted as well. Showing a survivor of the Long March and long-time political activist mending her husband's clothes appears on the surface to undermine her revolutionary bona fides. Yet her change in presentation was strategic,

¹⁴⁸ Lee, 221.

¹⁴⁹ Gao, 47.

¹⁵⁰ Bartke, Wolfgang. 1997. *Who was who in the people's republic of china: With more than 3100 portraits*. München: K.G. Saur.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

and illuminates her ability to follow the party's changing stance on women's roles in the revolution.

Deng Yingchao built a long and deep political career with the CCP, during which she never stepped out of line in her work on women's issues. In 1946, Deng attended the Political Consultative Conference as the representative of the CCP delegation. She was involved in the CCP delegation in Chongqing, Nanjing and Shanghai. In March 1947 she worked on the Rear Area Working Committee of the CPC Central Committee. She began working on women's specific issues in 1948 as secretary of the Women's Work Committee of the CCP Central Committee. While in her position as secretary she initiated and drafted the "Policies and Tasks for Rural Women's Work in Liberated Areas," as well as other policies related to women's issues.¹⁵² Deng attended the first Chinese women's national congress held in 1949, at which she was the Vice-Chairwoman of the First All China Democratic Women's Federation and additionally worked as deputy secretary of its leading Party group.¹⁵³ After the PRC was founded in 1949, Deng Yingchao's long political career made her a vital part of the revolution, and she was named one of the "Eight Immortals of the Communist Party of China."

Deng Yingchao and Zhou Enlai were required to make a number of compromises between political survival and their consciences. One such instance that Deng Yingchao later recounted to her biographer as incredibly painful was Zhou Enlai's investigation into Liu Shaoqi. Liu Shaoqi, who was originally groomed to be Mao's successor, fell out of favor in the early 1960s before the Cultural Revolution. Zhou Enlai was charged with heading the special investigative group to what he recognized were worthless and fabricated charges against him.

¹⁵² *Deng, Yingchao (1904-1992)* 2013. 65.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Although Zhou Enlai vowed to make no decision against his own conscience, influences from Mao pushed through, and, with a heavy heart, he agreed to expel Liu Shaoqi from the party. Liu later died under suspicious circumstances. Deng Yingchao recounted how heartbreaking this decision was for both of them, but ultimately they were left no choice if they wanted to maintain their political careers.¹⁵⁵ It is no doubt this decision weighed on them heavily, but it becomes another example of their ability to sacrifice personal beliefs for their political careers. It seems likely it was the same motivation that allowed Deng Yingchao to also sacrifice her ideology on gender equality for political power.

Deng Yingchao managed to remain in CCP leadership for her entire life. In the early 1960s Deng Yingchao moved into the Central Committee. She survived the power struggle of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). She remained involved after the death of Zhou Enlai in 1976 and became a member of the Politburo in 1978. Finally, she became the Chairwoman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference between 1983 to 1988.¹⁵⁶ All these positions solidified her legacy within the CCP and helped to protect her through the various ideological waves. Her ability to create this legacy relied heavily on her willingness to remain on the party's current political track, and not deviate for issues like feminism.

Conclusion

Deng remained a strong supporter of the CCP and PRC until her death, and remained consistently in good standing. As discussed, her push for survival within the party explains her

¹⁵⁵ Gao, 188.

¹⁵⁶ *Deng, Yingchao (1904-1992)* 2013. 66.

refusal to come out in support of rural women and other women's activists who called out the hypocrisy between claims of total gender equality under the PRC and reality. A final example of Deng Yingchao's commitment to the party of personal principles came during the Tiananmen Square Crisis of 1989, when she sided with the elder officials and supported using violence through military force on the protestors.¹⁶⁶ Once a student protester herself, one who even spoke fondly later in life about the impassioned struggle she undertook, she seemed to have held little empathy for the current generation of students, at least not enough to protest their mistreatment. Both Deng Yingchao and Zhou Enlai fit the role of ideal party member, and unlike the previous women discussed, Deng Yingchao navigated this thorny position successfully. Issues of gender equality never seemed to faze her loyalty and praise for the CCP, and whether this reflects her true feelings, we can never know. We do know that she followed her own priorities, and felt always that the CCP's success came first. Deng Yingchao remained in favor with the party until her death in 1992.

¹⁶⁶ *Deng, Yingchao (1904-1992)* 2013. 65.

Conclusion

In the nuanced and stressful work of CCP politics, it was difficult for anyone to remain in permanent good standing with ever-shifting ideologies. However, for women within the party survival was incredibly difficult, as they were burdened with both higher expectations and restrictions on what they could support regarding the liberation of their own gender. Each woman within the party dealt with the shortcomings of CCP policy on gender equality in their own way. There was no one format for how women navigated these rough waters; each reconciled their own conscience and political survival differently. Women like Zhao Yiman, who lost their lives early in the struggle for revolution had no say in how their image was used to promote the shifting expectation of women. Ding Ling chose to speak out despite antagonizing party leadership and while she suffered for it, she believed being true to her art and the experiences of women was more a priority. Conversely, Deng Yingchao consistently put political survival and incremental change before her own ideology or conscience, resulting in small change but a lifelong career. Her personal feelings about her and her husband's decisions were not a priority for her in decision making. Finally, some women like Xiang Jingyu tried their best to remain in political favor, but were unable to keep their personal lives in check with the difficult and often unrealistic shifting expectations for female cadres. Each of these women was clearly committed to communism, revolution, and the Chinese nation, but they dealt with the political battles around them differently. It is crucial then when examining this delicate period in CCP history not to treat women in the party as one entity. Rather, we must examine the numerous ways women survived and thrived during this period, and continued the fight for women's rights both socially and economically in China that extends even to today.

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Major: Bachelor of Science in International Affairs, Concentration in International Relations

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Experience:

Undergraduate research assistant | political science department | September 2016 - Present

- Research sources for first large-scale database to connect US federal regulatory policies to sources of scientific evidence

Marketing Intern | Penn State Study Abroad Office | August 2016 - Present

- Perform data analysis to determine strategic marketing strategies
- Assist in website development for new Global PSU website
- Plan and develop collateral including brochures, pamphlets, and digital media

Communications Intern | Leadership Arlington | May 2016 – August 2016

- Assisted in brand development including creation of rebranding materials, including utilizing Adobe Photoshop for design
- Gave presentations articulating overall project direction, updates, and outcomes
- Completed an extensive and strategically developed communications plan for 2016's "Giving Tuesday" fundraising campaign

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