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Cover Image

On the cover, a protestor wearing nitrile gloves and holding his fist, 31 May 2020.
Credit: Sicheng Wang | Daily Nexus.

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Message From the Editors

With great pleasure, we welcome you to the newest issue of the University of California Santa Barbara's *Undergraduate Journal of History*. Even during these uncertain and challenging times because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, *The Journal* continues to provide an engaging platform for undergraduate researchers to record and create history. We are delighted to be a space for undergraduates to share their historical scholarship and foster intellectual debate, dialogue, and curiosity. Alongside the rest of the world, our editorial team has slowly been transitioning to a more normal life, away from the video chat boxes in which we created our first issue. Our Fall 2021 issue marks the first time we have been able to work together on the UC Santa Barbara campus on an issue in person!

In this issue of the *Undergraduate Journal of History*, our historians have considered various topics that cross temporal and spatial boundaries. Among the nine articles published here, several consider the roles of politics and policies that blur boundaries. We begin with Ariana Cuevas' account of events that led to the Spanish Armada during the sixteenth century. This paper provided insight into the economic and political parallels between Spain and England that nuances our understanding of Anglo-Spanish relations during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Our second article by Jaqueline Isero examines the contagionist and anti-contagionist debates that shaped the epidemic policy in the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that resulted in a quarantine policy that was dramatically different from the European standard. Isero argues that the politicization of quarantine policy and the growing disregard of public health interests was rooted in concern about the economic success of the empire.

Our third paper turns to the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s. In her contribution, Winnie Lam traces the rise of cable television as a fundamental component of the increasing polarization that came to typify the American political sphere in the early 2000s. Her riveting analysis sheds light on how Fox and MSNBC were simultaneously the product of political polarization as well as a tool that perpetuated this very phenomenon. Sara Marcus explores how the rebuilding of the British Parliament and the seat of imperial power ushered in a debate about the best style of architecture to capture and exhibit that authority at home and across the globe. In tracing a web of imperial architects and their designs, Marcus shows how the Neo-Gothic architectural form came to dominate the literal building of the empire over the nineteenth century.

Taylor McLeod's "The Pandemic in the Immigrant Home: Oral Histories of First-Generation Los Angeles" is an exceptional oral history project that explores the lives of immigrant families in present-day Los Angeles. McLeod offers us a captivating history of the present that meditates how access to food and the interaction between culture and food shaped experiences of immigrant households in the earliest months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kayla Ouerbacher examines the witchcraft treatises of early modern Europe in our sixth article. She addresses how cultural influences shaped the legal scholarship of various demonological authors, notably how this led to the increased persecution and prosecution of women for witchcraft. Megan Tien explores the political work of Scottish reformer John Knox. She skillfully follows his journey, both geographically and intellectually, and how this growth enabled him to successfully work with political figures to accomplish his lofty reforms.

Our final two articles examine the women's movement in China as a forgotten facet of the Culture Revolution and the changing nature of English country houses in the nineteenth

century. As Zhen Tian argues, women's history has often been lost within the larger-scale mass class struggles of the Cultural Revolution. Tian then highlights the unsuccessful efforts of women's liberation and equality, asserting that they served as catalysts to the PRC's shift away from Maoist socialism to contemporary socialism with Chinese characteristics. In his article, John Young explores how the change in English country houses from sites of political power to private homes that consolidated and displayed wealth was not only paralleled the rise of the "new" aristocracy over the first half of the nineteenth century. Young argues this was connected to broader political and cultural shifts in the British metropole.

We thank you for reading and encourage you to submit your work to the *Undergraduate Journal of History*. We now accept submissions on an ongoing or rolling basis, and you can see the complete list of submission topics and guidelines on our website. The editorial team extends our thanks to our talented authors, skillful peer-reviewers, and instructors who helped us make this issue a reality.

We look forward to many more to come. And, please, do enjoy Vol. 1, Issue 2 of the *Undergraduate Journal of History*.

~ The Editors

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Freedom Cannot Be Given: An Analysis of the Significance of Women in the Cultural Revolution

Zhen Tian

Introduction

“It was a weird period, you know, in which many girls cut their braids and dressed up as boys, sometimes you can’t tell one’s gender at first sight. So, you would hear several screams in women’s bathrooms every day.” He Cuixiang, my grandmother on my mother’s side, said so when I asked her about her memories of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). At the turn of the 1960s, she had just graduated from a high school in Hebei Province and began actively participating in numerous campaigns. Zhang Fenlan, my grandmother on my father’s side, who grew up in one of the then poorest villages in Inner Mongolia, had a completely different story. “What Cultural Revolution? I don’t know such a thing. When I was young, I was the one who supported the whole family when your grandfather was working away in town, and that was not easy. I had to work in the fields while taking care of your father and aunts. Women in our village were all like that, we worked harder than men to earn work points, and that was highly encouraged.”

Familiar rhetoric in the two seemingly distinct memories caught my attention—there was a blurred gender expectation resulting from women’s masculinization. During the Cultural Revolution, there was an ongoing but never completed process of redefining gender roles. As He and Zhang suggested, many women—the “Iron Girls” who worked harder than men, for example—were encouraged to devote themselves to the process of becoming men and even their superior. Chinese women’s shifting gender ideologies in the Cultural Revolution appear as an interesting topic for further exploration. Yet, women were often forgotten in one of the most insignificant corners of history. After a series of feminist movements and the prospering of women’s studies in the late 19th century in the West, people started to examine women’s contributions and struggles. In the field of the Cultural Revolution—a relatively new field of historical studies—there was even less attention paid to women as a separate social category. Prominent scholars like Andrew Walder, who perceived the Cultural Revolution as a power struggle, emphasized the political center and reduced the common people to opportunists who took actions for self-protection.¹ Other scholars, who focused on the class struggle, incorporated both genders into a vaguely stratified society, implying that since all commoners lost their voices at the time, looking at women as a separation from men might not be necessary.

However, it was impossible to say that women and men had the same experiences. Even if one insists on arguing that the gender differences were relatively subtle, it is still worth asking why it was so. A lot of questions quickly emerged: Was it a universal phenomenon in the then PRC? Why did it happen? What was gender’s significance in understanding the Cultural Revolution? Also, what caused women’s masculinization? Was it the women’s movement? More so, was there even a women’s movement during the Cultural Revolution? Could examining women’s roles at the time bring about new thinking about equality and liberation or specific insights to understand the transformation of socialism within the PRC?

To answer the questions above, I examined news reports from the People’s Daily (*Renmin Ribao*) and articles from the dawn of the founding of the PRC to the mid-1970s, by which the Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius Campaign (*pi Lin pi Kong*) brought about moral

renewal movements for women to oppose male chauvinism.² Generally speaking, women's movements continued during the Cultural Revolution, which successfully created a shared consciousness of liberation. Yet, women's inferiority was only modified rather than eradicated. They were recognized as men's comrades and key labor force, but they were often "held to male standards," with their characteristics and needs ignored and even despised.³ A housewife was labeled as an unrevolutionary role, and women like the "Iron Girls" ended up being victimized and awkward—forgotten, and even denied their existence—position within the socialist society. As a result, instead of averting the degeneration of socialism, the unachieved women's liberation and equality became a catalyst that accelerated the nation's shift away from Maoist socialism towards the current Chinese socialism or capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

The Historical Roots of Women's Inferiority

Before analyzing the women's movement during the Cultural Revolution, it is necessary to address women's subordinate position throughout Chinese history to understand the Cultural Revolution's influences on women. About ten thousand years ago, humans began to transit from hunter-gatherer societies to sedentary societies. Men replaced women to become the primary source of production, marking the beginning of patriarchal societies. For thousands of years, ancient Chinese people were expected to fulfill their assigned roles in family and society in a strict patrilineal world shaped by Confucianism. For women, they were taught by countless government regulations, scholarly teachings, and practices to demonstrate their deference to the Three Obediences and Four Virtues (*san cong si de*) as well as the Three Principles and Five Norms (*san gang wu chang*).

The Three Obediences asked daughters to obey fathers, wives to obey husbands, and widows to obey sons; the four virtues required women to show proper ethics (*fu de*), speech (*fu yan*), visage (*fu rong*), and works (*fu gong*). Also, husbands were required to surveil and guide their wives (*fu wei qi gang*). Apart from the spiritual limitations, the painful foot-binding custom physically prevented women from leaving the household freely. For instance, in the Ming dynasty, only men studied Neo-Confucianism to discipline themselves as frugal and diligent, and women were asked to meet moral expectations by following the standards set by their male partners.⁴ Even women who surpassed male dominance, like Emperor Wu Zetian and the female leaders in the Taiping Rebellion, could not be viewed as adequate examples of female sovereign despite their high positions because they "only mediate the law" rather than possessing it.⁵

The veiled reason for such regulations was the shared belief that women were the most vulnerable to—or were the origins of—social and moral evils and thus needed to be constantly under men's control. Throughout ancient Chinese history, the juxtaposition of imposing female chastity and denying female virtues reinforced and justified the favored patrilineal system. As a result, Confucianism created a set of confinements for Chinese women, and such suppression was prolonged into the PRC newly established in 1949.

Marxist-Leninist Theory and Maoism Practice of Women's Liberation

According to Marx, "the direct, natural, and necessary relation of person is the relation of man to women."⁶ Therefore, it is natural and essential for men and women to view one another as comrades fighting for a common glory purpose. This set the ideological base of liberation that urges men and women to fight side by side against inequality rather than foster gender dichotomy. Marx believed that women were the essential force in the working-class struggle and suggested that labor was the most effective way for women to strike down gender

inequality. With Marxism as the theoretical foundation, Leninist socialism in the Soviet Union promised women political and economic equality by paralleling their liberation to that of the workers. Therefore, in a Marxist-Leninist society, women's emancipation must come about as part of a grand proletariat class emancipation, and women must unbind themselves from domestic works and actively participate in social works to actualize complete liberation.

Following Lenin's example, while holding a firm belief in the capability to incorporate Marxist-Leninist ideology of women's liberation into Chinese society, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao Zedong's leadership announced that the emancipation of women was to be accompanied by the emancipation of labor. Women could be truly emancipated only when the proletariat gained power.⁷ Following Lenin, Mao has put the Marxist theory of women's emancipation into practice in the PRC, hoping that incorporating women's struggle into the class struggle led by the proletariat would enable the CCP to continue walking down the path of socialism in his vision. In 1964, during his visit to the Ming Tombs Reservoir, Mao delivered a famous speech that said, "Time is different, men and women are the same. Women are capable of doing things that men can do."⁸ Around the same time, the phrase "women hold up half the sky"—recognizing women as the essential players in the proletariat revolution against feudalist oppression and capitalist exploitation—also became widely circulated.

When the Cultural Revolution was still in its nascent stage at the beginning of the 1960s, the concept of class struggle was intensified. In 1962, Mao reminded the people to "never forget about class struggle."⁹ In an article published by the People's Daily in October 1964, it was written that "the emancipation of working-class women, in general, is an important part of the proletarian revolution; the formulation and solutions of the women's problems must be subordinated to the interests of the proletarian struggle as a whole."¹⁰ The co-emergence of society's need for labor and women's personal need for value and acknowledgment made many women believe that once the proletariat class became strong, they would be freed as an inseparable contributor to its prosperity.

Women's Movement in the PRC: Definition and Limitations

The clarification of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideologies on women leads to another question: What is a women's movement in Marx and Mao's viewpoints? At the time, "women's movement" was the most frequently used term in news articles compared to similar expressions like gender equality, women's liberation, women's problems, and women's development.¹¹ Since the term is still commonly used, many people's direct understanding is derived from their knowledge of the women's movement of the 1960s in the United States when American women advocated for civil rights, equal pay, and reproductive rights. However, what happened in the PRC and the United States was utterly different, giving the Chinese "women's movement" a completely different definition.

The term "movement" itself has a notably different definition in the PRC than in Western ideology. In Western comprehension, a movement always consists of an intense series of public campaigns calling for liberating changes in certain groups' social, economic, and political status. The women's or feminist movement in the west was "a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men as a group within a given cultural setting."¹² According to the Cultural Revolution Dictionary composed by underground scholars and activists, a movement is a special working method or organizational form in China. It represents a large-scale mass class struggle and political action commanded by the monolithic party and government operation system and organized by the CCP Politburo cadre leaders to set goals, guidelines, and policies to mobilize the whole society to realize political and cultural revolutions.¹³ The essence of a Chinese movement was, in fact,

a total and unquestionable mobilization of the mass. Unlike how Americans were mobilized during the Civil Rights Movements as multiple different groups with separate political pursuits, the mass mobilization in the PRC forced the synchronization of Chinese civilians and aimed at the gradual elimination of any differences, such as the concept of class. Instead of emerging from the ordinary people's desire to let the state acknowledge their rights, all the movements in China were parts of a class struggle with the initiative belonging to the party.

As Mao explained, "the women's movement was not just a feminist movement, but a revolutionary movement that united other oppressed people in a common struggle for liberation."¹⁴ The women who participated in the women's movement in the PRC were not feminists. There was no need for them to fight for female rights in society because there was already a tacit approval that, by including women's movement in the proletariat class struggle, gender inequality was already eliminated. The party cadres were responsible for helping women with their liberation, "just like teaching a toddler to walk."¹⁵ In numerous news articles on *Renmin Ribao*, women excitedly thanked "Chairman Mao and the CCP" for "pulling them out of the abyss of sorrow." Therefore, the established consensus at the time was that The Messianic CCP generously bestowed Chinese women freedom.

During the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War before the establishment of the PRC, the country eagerly needed labor forces. By then, many women were encouraged by the state to take up the responsibility to participate in industrial and agricultural production, especially when men were fighting the war in the front. In 1946, the People's Daily reported incidents of women participating in textile production as examples of "self-reform," which enabled them to obtain higher status within family and society.¹⁶ In March 1949, the first National Women's Congress convened and established the All-China Women's Federation. At the time, the dominant rhetoric of women in major newspapers was that "only men should take charge since women do not count as people" should be eradicated. More and more women responded to the nation's calling by receiving education and participating in the production, and many put great emphasis on marriage freedom. Many of the CCP's provisions served as key factors to elevate women's status.

However, did the "given freedom and equality" really mean that all women suddenly began enjoying a satisfying emancipated life? First, it was still widely believed that "women were suited only for less skilled tasks."¹⁷ In the Maoist socialist society, the lack of productive power limited many women from gaining respect, not to mention equal treatment. It also implicitly blamed women for not being as strong as men, which resulted in the persistence of gender inequality. Second, Mao's emphasis on the importance of bearing class struggle in mind in the early 1960s was interpreted by many activists as approaching social problems solely in terms of gender was problematic. Discussions of "Why do women live" and "What are the standards for choosing a partner" were labeled as reactionary or capitalist because they deviated from the proletariat class struggle.¹⁸ After the Cultural Revolution was fully launched, these politically correct interpretations became highly influential. In 1973, major press like the People's Daily criticized Lin Biao and Liu Shaoqi for "making women the tamed tools that never ask about proletarian politics or care about national and world events." It reiterated that "it is wrong to deviate from the class struggle and line struggle to deal with the issue of women's problem."¹⁹

Summing up, the Chinese women's movement was directly organized and promoted by women's federations under the leadership of the CCP. It was closely linked to the fate of the party and the nation. By devoting their time and strengths to raising productions, the gender movement became an almost indistinguishable part of the working class-led movement. Thus, the central tasks and goals of the women's movement were following the

party's main plans, which was to be an additional force actualizing the party-led socialist modernization. However, despite the general improvement in women's conditions, the limitations of the women's movement made the liberating process never complete. Mao only thought in terms of the needs of the revolution from a man's perspective as a proletariat leader, and gender difference was minimized and denounced. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese women remained—or many have returned to—a socially and economically inferior position compared to men. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote:

Feminism itself has never been an autonomous movement: it was partially an instrument in the hands of politicians and partially an epiphenomenon reflecting a deeper social drama. Never did women form a separate caste: and, they never sought to play a role in history as sex. The doctrines that call for the advent of women as flesh, life, immanence, or the Other are masculine ideologies that do not in any way express feminine claims.²⁰

It was so for feminists and only more so for Chinese women at the time. Men led the struggle for women's rights within a larger class struggle, and women accepted men as the natural mentors in their pursuit of equality. Despite their different political stands, women were to become men's tools to achieve success. Consequently, after seeing men being in an ideal state of power, an increasing number of women began engaging in an unhealthy process of masculinization for self-emancipation.

Women's Movement during the Cultural Revolution

After a basic understanding of why the PRC's women's movement was an incomplete liberating battle for Chinese women, it is necessary to look at its significance in the Cultural Revolution. The critical question that needs to be asked is: What happened to Chinese women and their movements from 1966 to 1976? What inspired more and more Chinese women at the time to join the collective effort? The turning point for women to become politically active came with the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign in 1972. Before diving into further discussion about the campaign, it is important to briefly examine the years before it took place. In the first five years of the Cultural Revolution, there was little collective effort on women's problems, and the women's movement remained only a distant promise. Although the women's movement or mobilization in the PRC was promoted as a symbol of socialism, the violence that was going on at the time put nearly all effort on halt. Primarily influenced by the "either friend or enemy dichotomy" rooted in the class struggle, women's pursuit of equality became scattered only in subtle ideological forms.

Even worse, many forms of female activism, such as the women's federation calling for women's liberation through education and working, became the condemned targets of the revolution. In May 1967, in a directive speech to the Shanghai Revolutionary Committee, Mao criticized that "in the past ten years since liberation, we have been detached from the masses; the Youth Federation, the Women's Federation and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League are all just facades."²¹ In 1968, the Women's Federation became a victim of military control and surveillance (*jun guan*), and news reports featuring women experienced a significant decrease. Therefore, the continuing years of turmoil and Mao's direct criticism resulted in severe setbacks for women's sociopolitical advancements.

The turning point occurred at the turn of the 1970s. On September 13, 1971, Lin Biao, then the vice-chairman of the CCP and Mao Zedong's close comrade and successor, died in a plane crash in the People's Republic of Mongolia. Although the party cadres were reluctant and awkward in releasing information, the official explanation of the incident accused Lin of plotting an assassination against Mao. It claimed that Lin's family were on their way fleeing to

the Soviet Union. After Lin's mysterious death, the violent massive purge gradually faded, and Mao began openly criticizing Lin in multiple circumstances. In a conversation with Wang Hongwen and Zhang Chunqiao in 1973, Mao associated Confucius with Lin Biao and negatively labeled them as "driving history backward" and thus "has to be criticized."²² Under Jiang Qing's call, the Criticism Group of Peking University and Tsinghua University, in the pseudonym Liang Xiao (a homonym to Two Schools), compiled and circulated "Lin Biao and the Doctrines of Confucius and Mencius" in February 1974. The responses to Lin Biao's death quickly brought about a nationwide campaign to Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius.

Historians studying the Cultural Revolution have reached an agreement on the narration of the historical facts of the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign. The overall explanations and analyses of the movement are clear and coherent. The primary claim of the campaign starting in mid-1973 was to denounce the saying "restrain oneself and return to the rites" (*ke ji fu li*) that was suggested by Confucius and upheld by Lin Biao. It was widely believed that the Confucian mindset was counter-revolutionary because Lin wanted to use it to overturn the proletarian democracy and restore feudalism and capitalism. More subtly, the campaign led by the "Gang of Four" headed by Jiang Qing made then Prime Minister Zhou Enlai their real target. They tried to label Zhou "the present-day Confucius," yet their effort eventually fell apart in late 1974 when Mao disproved the "Gang of Four." Generally speaking, the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign—which lasted about a year—was a relatively short-lived movement in the ten years of turmoil from 1966 to 1976.

In the seemingly complete narration, women became an invisible element in general. There was more to the story. In most dynasties, Confucian thoughts have been used by courts and governments to justify and consolidate male supremacy while nailing the submissive and dependent position of women. Thus, the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign provided a unique opportunity for Chinese women to become politically active by criticizing Confucianism, giving rise to a series of women's movements. In 1972, the women's movement made a powerful comeback. As the People's Daily confidently wrote, "the depth and breadth of the women's movement have never been greater," and the results were also cheering—"women's political, economic, cultural and family life are given the same status as men."²³

Indeed, simply skimming through the news reports—the People's Daily, for example—and seeing the abrupt increase in reports on women could show that participating in criticizing Confucius conventions has created remarkably awakening and empowering effects on Chinese women. In 1973, the number of news reports of the People's Daily on women skyrocketed to an unprecedented level, particularly for the ones reporting stories of the "Iron Girls."²⁴ The "Iron Girls" and the "Three-Eight Working Units" were powerful proofs of women's unprecedented level of productivity in agriculture and industrial construction. During the same year, Beijing and Shanghai held the 6th Women's Congress to discuss women's future development directions. More and more women began learning Marxism and Mao Zedong's thoughts and preparing themselves for assuming leadership positions within the party. In general, women cherished every opportunity to reach gender equality. They believed that they needed to—just like the "Iron Girls"—continuously improve physical fitness and become even stronger than boys.

However, although an increasing number of women participated in different activities calling for liberation and equality, the so-called "women's movement" never belonged to them. For the Red Guards like He Cuixiang---my grandmother on my mother's side---in big cities, they often got carried along by the proletarian movement and never had the chance to have their voices be heard; for the "Iron Girls" and other hardworking women like Zhang Fenlan in rural areas, their efforts and devotion was mainly for the Party and the working-class people

rather than for women's betterment. Therefore, the women's movement hardly ever established any clear or independent political goal. After Lin's death, there was "disillusion, confusion, and cynicism abounded."²⁵ This had made the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign merely a part of the CCP's larger plan to restore people's faith in Maoist socialism.

The legacies left by the women's movement were very controversial. On the one hand, it has created more favorable conditions for Chinese women. Elisabeth Croll of the University of London argued that although structural constraints were working against women's further liberation in the campaign, the ideologies of breaking down male supremacy and redefining women's roles were vitalized.²⁶ On the other hand, it was viewed as a cruel lesson. According to Baidu, one of the most used search engines reflecting the public consensus of the modern PRC, the Criticizing Lin, and Confucius Campaign had no contribution to the nation's progression.²⁷ Following this logic, the women's movement as a part of the larger campaign was also a historical mistake that should be regretted and avoided in the future. Hence, the next series of questions awaiting answers would be: What was the meaning of the women's movement in the Cultural Revolution? Was it an empowering step forward or a traumatic setback? Also, were women just senseless tools used by the CCP cadres to defend socialism with no side effects?

The "Iron Girls"

As discussed previously, the women's emancipation movement during the Cultural Revolution gave birth to a group of women who trespassed the gender line both psychologically and physically. After Mao Zedong claimed that "men and women are the same," the "Iron Girls" began making their appearance on the historical stage as one of the most representative icons of the era. Therefore, analyzing the meaning of the experiences of the "Iron Girls" at the time would provide an insightful answer to the questions above.

The earliest use of the term "Iron Girls" in the People's Daily was in 1958. On 11 November, under the title "Iron Girls vs. Desolate Desert," the news article depicted how five teenage girls of the poor farmer class successfully changed the desert to fertile land available for farming. The farmland in then Jiahe of Shandong Province was almost dead dirt that made growing plants very difficult. Farmers must remove the sand on the surface by turning over the soil for at least two meters for their crops to grow. Five teenage girls, the oldest being only eighteen years old, were determined to contribute to the extremely challenging work. They "never moan about their sore legs, never complain about the cold weather, never stop working even in heavy snows, never cry even with their bones broken, and never call out for pain when bleeding," and were given the name the "Iron Girls."²⁸ Similar cases were reported sporadically throughout the following years, with the Dazhai "Iron Girls" of Shanxi Province being the most prominent figure. In 1963, 1966, 1968, 1972, and 1974, women in Dazhai worked nights and days to fight against floods and droughts.²⁹ Along with the rising tide of the Cultural Revolution, under the strong influence of Mao's teaching, more and more women were encouraged to walk out of the households, push beyond their bodies' limits, and participate in hard labor.

In 1969, the PLA Daily publicized Mao Zedong's newest slogan, "One, not afraid of exhaustion; Two, not afraid of death" (*yi bupa ku, er bupa si*). When the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign started, and the women's movement revived in the early 1970s, the "Iron Girl" figure—the living example of the slogan—fitted the political need at the time and experienced a large-scale publication in news reports. More and more women cadres gained power and were acknowledged as both the backbone and the forerunners of the production lines. Song Liying would leave her family's clothes unwashed for several days because she did

not want to interrupt the collective work; Guo Fenglian, who established the “Iron Girls Team,” worked in the fields all the time; Guo Ailian attended work for more than 290 days a year despite her three young children were at home; Jia Cunsuo had a heavy burden of housework, yet she still actively participated in the most challenging parts of the production. According to the People’s Daily, they all “worked as hard as men” all the time in all tasks and influenced many more women to join them with the ideology of “working for the proletariat revolution.”³⁰

The women’s movement was flourishing not only in agricultural and industrial production but also in the sociopolitical arena, in which they borrowed the spirits of the “Iron Girls.” One female cadre leader said:

In the past feudal society, we women were belittled as only being able to cook and raise children. After the liberation, many of us took positions as cadre leaders and participated in the revolutionary movements. This was the result of Chairman Mao’s leadership and the powerful critique of Lin and Confucius’ ways.³¹

Female leaders and working-class women participated in the women’s mobilization as a powerful force in the socialist revolution and construction. As an ordinary woman said:

In the past, women were victims of the Three Principles and Five Virtues. After the liberation, working class women were emancipated. The Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign further made us realize that all of our past struggles were caused by the exploitative structure of the feudal society.³²

Multiple news reports used similar phrasing like, “Under the CCP’s guidance, we must communicate and implement the lines, guidelines, and policies to the masses of women quickly and accurately.”³³ In numerous places, many Chinese women, who felt empowered by the “Iron Girls” accomplishments in the past decade, began criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius’ false slandering of women and the feudal rituals’ exploitation of the working-class women. They blasted the “men are more superior than women” (*nan zun nü bei*) and “women are useless” (*funü wuyong*) ideologies and rejected the Three Obediences and Four Virtues and the Three Principles and Five Virtues.

Through a series of mobilizing efforts, women, with the “Iron Girls” as the prominent figure, were assigned multiple important social and political roles as workers, farmers, leaders, and so forth. As a result, there were definite improvements for Chinese women, which set a seemingly promising future for socialism in the PRC. First, the newly legislated laws that adhered to the principle of gender equality unchained women from the heavy shackles of *de jure* inferiority. The Marriage Laws imposed monogamy and freedom of marriage and prohibited bigamy, concubinage, child brides, and many other derogatory traditions. Also, the Constitution clearly stated that “women have equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, social and family life,”³⁴ and further provided women with voting rights and labor protections. Second, like the “Iron Girls,” women realized that their potentials could be extended far beyond households to a broadened field of employment. Just as Marx envisioned, within a socialist society, women and men were no longer in opposition but could affirm an absolute sense of brotherhood beyond their natural difference.³⁵

However, the CCP-led women’s movement had side effects unanticipated by many cadre leaders, and there were two reasons. First, the women’s movement never belonged to themselves. Under the strong influence of the belief in the necessity to follow the line of class struggle, the women’s movement at the time appeared as a mass mobilization designed to consolidate a greater framework created by men. This might be one of the fatal limitations of Maoist socialist ideology and approach that forced women to only intervene by being in

concert with men and from a masculine point of view. Second, *de facto* inequality persisted, and women suffered greatly. After establishing multiple laws and policies and the well-known “Iron Girls” icon, many people firmly believed that equality between men and women had been achieved. Yet, the “Iron Girls” showed that the state only manipulated women as a tool for protecting socialism. The physical differences between men and women were ignored and criticized as survivalism (*huoming zhubuyi*) and even reactionary.

As Emily Honig pointed out, people believed that “as soon as a woman becomes an Iron Girl, other issues regarding gender roles in the workplace, including women’s domestic responsibilities, will be solved.”³⁶ However, the “Iron Girls” were relatively minimal in number, and their sense of freedom was attained by sacrificing their true self and making themselves men’s equal. The publication of their stories in renowned newspapers like the People’s Daily showed that the PRC’s attitude encouraged such sacrifice. Accordingly, women were taught to transcend the gender barrier and become men to “elevate” themselves “appears as a ‘real woman’ disguised as a man, and she feels awkward in her woman’s body as in her masculine garb.”³⁷ Many more women who failed to do so were disproved as weak or, more tragically, being on the wrong line.

By making the “Iron Girls” a mark of success, the CCP has created an illusion that the state-socialist system was functioning. However, due to biological and historical causes, women could never become men. They were soon about to find out the denials and suppressions of femininity in a disguised form of emancipation were doing them more harm. At the same time, many men complained that women’s emancipation was overdone. They charged the “Iron Girls” as women “devoid of femininity.”³⁸ They became increasingly dissatisfied with women’s defeminization and masculinization because many could not find a balance within their families. Therefore, the women’s movement changed the existence of gender inequality, which planted the seed for many people, both men and women, to willingly move away from Maoist socialism in the Deng Xiaoping era.

Jiang Qing

Apart from the representative revolutionary group like the “Iron Girls” in the PRC’s women’s movement, individual females, particularly those who rose to the top position of the CCP like Mao Zedong’s wife Jiang Qing and Lin Biao’s wife Ye Qun, also stood out. Briefly examining Jiang Qing’s experience during the Cultural Revolution could provide another angle of understanding the general limitations of Maoist socialism in liberating women. Yan’an, the holy land of the Chinese Communist revolution, was a male-dominated world before the establishment of the PRC, in which nearly all the Party cadres’ wives were “victims of the chauvinist attitudes of their husbands.”³⁹ Their responsibility was to support their husbands, and the realization of their revolutionary ideals remained mainly out of reach. After Mao divorced, He Zizhen in 1938, Jiang Qing became Mao’s fourth and last wife, only with a few conditions. One of the conditions required Jiang not to “show her face in public” (*pao tou lu mian*) and was forbidden from participating in politics for twenty years.

Jiang did remain a “qualified” wife supporting her great husband for the first twenty years of their marriage. However, when the women’s movement began taking root as part of the Cultural Revolution, she was no longer willing to remain submissive. Jiang rose as a political leader of the CCP and quickly became a living example of Mao’s words— “women hold up half the sky”—by being a vanguard of the class struggle and the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign. In 1974, Jiang began giving many public speeches. She paid high regard to powerful female figures like Emperor Wu Zetian and Empress Lü of Han as an expression of her determination to strike down the “men are more superior than women” ideology.⁴⁰

Following Jiang's instructions, Liang Xiao published an article titled "Wu Zetian: A Successful Female Politician," which praised her for leading a successful campaign against Confucianism and the conservative reactionaries.⁴¹ By saying that "Wu Zetian's historical role is not comparable to that of the peasants who drove the history of feudal society forward," the article subtly placed Jiang in a more advanced position than Empress Wu as a female proletariat leader in a socialist society.

However, Jiang Qing soon faced conviction and imprisonment as the head of the "Gang of Four" at the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was described as "the shattering of Jiang Qing's dream of becoming female Emperor." Discontent already appeared in 1974 when the Criticizing Lin and Confucius Campaign was at its peak from the top and the bottom of the power ladder. In a letter from Mao to Jiang, Mao commented that "Do not show up in public that often, do not sign documents that often, do not form a cabinet (and be the secret boss)...One should know one's place."⁴² An anonymous letter from one named "Red-heart patriot" wrote:

Empress Jiang,

Hundreds of flowers bloom in the spring breeze, all the living things perish in the cold wind. You have gone [obscenity] crazy and made our great country into this chaos. The harms and wrongdoings you did to the nation and the people have far exceeded Imperial Concubine Yang and Empress Zhao Feiyan...Stop showing off. No matter how many peacocks feathers a crow uses to dress itself, a crow is always a crow, never a peacock.⁴³

On the one hand, Mao's words revealed that, apart from his sincere concerns for socialism's path forward, he was very dissatisfied with Jiang gaining political power while he was losing control. As the highest leader of the PRC and Jiang's husband, Mao felt that his dominant position was seriously threatened. On the other hand, the anonymous letter showed an intense nationwide feeling that male supremacy was under humiliating attacks from women. Red-heart patriot's referring to Jiang as "Empress" and comparing Jiang to Imperial Concubine Yang. Zhao Feiyan signaled that Jiang was not regarded as a politician with sincere ideas about the proletariat revolution. Instead, she was no more than a beautiful woman who relied on Mao to "exploit her position," and her involvement in the Cultural Revolution was denounced as "wives in politics" (*furen zhengzhi*) that deserved to be blamed for the disastrous results.⁴⁴

In 1976, Peking University's Movement Office published a collection of excerpts of Jiang Qing's anti-CCP "black" remarks, criticizing her for being anti-CCP leaders, including Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Zhou Enlai, and Hua Guofeng, because she had the ambition to usurp political power. The evidence the collection relied upon included a significant amount of Jiang's comments on gender equality, for example:

Both men and women are participating in revolution and production. Women are able to do things men can do and are even capable of doing things men cannot do. However, when it comes to power, men always want to control everything and leaves women with nothing.⁴⁵

Although Jiang's many speeches were no more than stating the facts about women's problems, in the end, they were viewed as reactionary and were generally denied. This was a direct reflection of the limitations of the socialist society in Mao's ideal. Women's status was still not recognized as men's equal, but many of their images appeared as challenges against the deeply rooted male chauvinism. As a result, both men and women were dissatisfied and confused by the current state of society at the time. The unsolved women's problem became a powerful force that undermined people's trust and faith in Maoist socialism.

Conclusion

It was undeniable that the women's movement in the Cultural Revolution challenged the traditional gendered labor division and freed many women from the submissive societal position caused by feudal restrictions. However, the socialist society in Mao's dream only allowed women to advance without damaging the patriarchal authority.⁴⁶ The "Iron Girls" suffered physically and psychologically through being degenderized, especially when the degenderization happened in the form of deconstructing the idea of female selfhood itself. Despite the ongoing social turmoil, the expectations for an ideal Chinese woman to be a reproductive wife and a caring mother persisted. The "men and women are the same" motto made many women, only temporarily, believe that their true emancipation lay in being able to shape themselves to the standard of men. Instead of "being women" in the PRC, many women began putting their efforts into "becoming men." To be more specific, Chinese women during the Cultural Revolution wanted to reconfigure the "alluring, vulnerable, dependent, and inferior" labels,⁴⁷ so they began defying and even despising their biologically and socially set female body, identity, and responsibilities.

Yet, this was highly problematic because, first, women could never enjoy gender equality in this social structure. The seemingly promising transformation was, in reality, a manifestation of male hegemony. Second, since the movements were mobilizations led by the CCP cadre leaders, many people, especially women, lost the opportunity to pursue their own beliefs. Third, although the cadre leaders designed a series of policies and institutions to free women from housework, most women could never truly escape their traditional responsibilities. Even if some of them could peel off the label as a traditional Chinese woman, many men began calling for them to return home. Despite their completely different experiences during the Cultural Revolution, both He Cuixiang—the passionate Red Guard—and Zhang Fenlan—almost an "Iron Girl"—returned to their families and continued to "be women." From their twenties to seventies, the two women never again tried to "become men." Most importantly, although Chinese women at the time were defeminized and silenced in a man's world, they were never willing to be forever silenced and used as a tool. There were always women fighting to eliminate their deformed female identity—a product of patriarchal discourse—and trying to find their value of existence.

Women's suffering in the Cultural Revolution destabilized individual families as well as the socialist social structure. After many women gained inspiration through education and campaigning and still felt uncomfortable in their new way of "freedom," women started to call for attention to gender differences and women's protection. It would be interesting to investigate further how women in the Cultural Revolution became a factor that influenced the public to embrace Deng Xiaoping's "bring order out of chaos" (*bo luan fan zheng*) ideology, which may have led the PRC into a transition from Maoist socialism to socialism with Chinese characteristics, which was an alternative term of capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

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³ Gail Hershatter, "Chapter 1: Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and Gender Difference," *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*, (University of California Press, 2007), p. 46.

⁴ "Family Instructions," in *Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook, Second Edition*, trans. Clara Yu, ed. Patricia Buckley Ebrey (New York: Free Press, 1993), pp. 241-43.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex, Kindle Edition*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 1727.

⁶ Marx and Engels, *Collected Works, Philosophical Works*, Volume 6. Marx's Italics.

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- ¹⁸ Wanmuchun, “Zenyang Kandai Funü Wenti,” *The People’s Daily*, 28 October 1964.
- ¹⁹ “Jiji Peiyang Dadan Shiyong Funü Ganbu,” *The People’s Daily*, 1 February 1973.
- ²⁰ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 3060.
- ²¹ Huang, “Wenge Shiqi Nüxing Xingxiang Zhengzhizhuhua Yanjiu,” p. 84.
- ²² Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 367.
- ²³ “Laodong Funü Shi Weida de Geming Liliang,” *The People’s Daily*, 8 March 1973.
- ²⁴ Huang, “Wenge Shiqi Nüxing Xingxiang Zhengzhizhuhua Yanjiu,” pp. 62-64.
- ²⁵ Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, p. 204.
- ²⁶ Croll, “The Anti-Lin Piao and Confucian Campaign,” p. 41.
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