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# **Representations of Professional Women in China**

**By**

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**A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts.**

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**August 1998**



**11 MAY 1999**

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**To my relatives and my friends**

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## Acknowledgements

Dr. Janet G. Townsend has helped me throughout this thesis. My deepest gratitude not only for her supervision but also for her encouragement in my personal life.

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## Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the changes experienced by Chinese professional women from 1986 to 1996 through changes in the representation of them in contrasting printed sources.

The thesis consists of two parts. The first part gives a personal outline of the history of Chinese women. It begins by using classic tales to display the position and place of Chinese women in Chinese history before the twentieth century. It then uses writings of the time to uncover and display images of women through the twentieth century and call attention to periods of dramatic change for women, particularly the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the Revolution and the Economic Reforms.

The second part is focussed on professional women, who have risen to prominence in the last fifty years in China and now generate much debate. The core of the thesis examines contrasting representations of professional women during the historic period of transition from 1986 to 1996, after the Economic Reforms. These are taken from a) articles from official journals published in China in Chinese, namely *Zhongguo funu*, *Xiandai funu*, *Funu*, *Zhiye funu*, *Guangming ribao* and *Wenhui ribao*; b) official journals published in English for readers overseas, *China Today* and *China Pictorial*; and c) popular journals published in China in Chinese, *Nubao*, *Funu zhiyou*, and *Funu shijie*. Articles were selected to demonstrate the range of representations of professional women, the contrasts between the categories and the changes over time. Both summaries and translations of the articles are used, and comments made on each.

The thesis centres on specific representations in China itself of professional women, set against both representations for foreigners and my own experience of the reality. Only brief reference is made to the impact of the United Nation Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 as this issue proved very complex. The scale of change since 1986 is nonetheless clear, although the consequences remain to be seen.

## CONTENTS

Page

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Defining Professional Women</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Representations of Chinese women in China</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Data collected in Beijing, China</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sources and Scope</b>	<b>7</b>
Official Journals	7
Popular magazines	8
<b>Chapter Outline</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORING IMAGES OF WOMEN IN CHINESE HISTORY (PRE-1949)</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chinese women before the May Fourth Movement</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chinese Women in 1919: The May Fourth Movement</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: IMAGES OF CHINESE WOMEN (1949-1996)</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>From Revolution to Cultural Revolution</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>The Cultural Revolution</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>After the Cultural Revolution</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN CHINA: ANALYSIS OF ARTICLES FROM OFFICIAL JOURNALS (1986-1996)</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Official Discussions</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Article 1: What are the rules for women in China today?</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Article 2: A professional woman's twenty-four hours.</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Article 3: Intellectual women in China today.</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Article 4: Where is my future?</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Article 5: I admire the women of Daqiu zhuang.</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Article 6: Why has another teacher suffered untimely death?</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Article 7: Famous business women talk.</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Article 8: A woman manager who came from the yellow plateau.</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Article 9: A regret from a woman manager.</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Article 10: Chinese women who participate in politics.</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Article 11: Women managers in Beijing.</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Article 12: Women's liberation, just for women?</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>69</b>

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH FOR FOREIGN AUDIENCES</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Article 1:</b> Women fight discrimination in jobs and schooling.	<b>72</b>
<b>Article 2:</b> Vast sky, heavy wings.	<b>77</b>
<b>Article 3:</b> The debate on jobs versus home making.	<b>80</b>
<b>Article 4:</b> A family of teachers.	<b>83</b>
<b>Article 5:</b> Chinese women writing herstory.	<b>85</b>
<b>Article 6:</b> Female bank presidents in Beihai City.	<b>87</b>
<b>Article 7:</b> Building rainbows for the City.	<b>89</b>
<b>Article 8:</b> Chinese women scientists.	<b>90</b>
<b>Article 9:</b> The development of women's literature in China.	<b>91</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: POPULAR MAGAZINES IN CHINA (1986-1996)</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Article 1:</b> If I could come back again ...	<b>98</b>
<b>Article Two:</b> Why I am a woman?	<b>99</b>
<b>Article Three:</b> Women, when you will start to enjoy yourself?	<b>101</b>
<b>Article Four:</b> Intellectual women in Shenzhen City	<b>103</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>110</b>



## Introduction

What does it mean to be a woman? I don't know at all. Sometimes I want to ask my mother. Sometimes I want to ask my father. But I have my own daughter. If my daughter asked me the same question, how could I answer her?... After I had been a teacher for many years, I realised what it was to be a woman (Chengduo, 1995:4).<sup>1</sup>

Why am I a woman? The question shakes my heart so many times. I raise my head and ask why do I have to be a woman?! (Zhang Junwen, 1995:6).<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1980s, thousands and thousands of professional women have entered a time of historical transition in China. Perhaps amongst all women, they are the group changing most conspicuously in this particular period. Their achievements, and the changing social values that these indicate, are demonstrated widely in China. A public debate is in progress about women's' status, the tensions between their work and their family, and the rapidly changing role of Chinese women, from city to village. The argument often relies on traditional ideals - how can a woman be a good wife and a loving mother in contemporary China? These are particularly exacting questions when it comes to the standards for a professional woman to be a good wife and a loving mother? Is it necessary to follow the traditional way?

### Defining Professional Women

In this dissertation, a professional is taken to be:

Engaged in one of the learning or skilled professions, or in a calling considered socially superior to a trade or handicraft (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1991, definition 3).

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<sup>1</sup>Chen Duo, "Why I am a woman?" *Funu shijie* (Women's World), March 1995, p.4.



A profession is here defined as:

A vocation or calling, especially one that involves some branch of advanced learning or science (The Oxford Modern English Dictionary, 1992, definition 3).

In China, in 1946, two definitions were presented in the short-lived Chinese journal *Professional Women*.

What is the meaning of 'professional women'? In a broad sense, a woman who does not depend on her family or her husband's support and offers for sale her mind and body, in exchange for a fixed income, and makes an independent living. In a narrow sense, a woman who has knowledge and skill, employed in a government office, or engaged in a profession. The common use is the latter definition.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis will use the English definitions given above, which would overlap to a large degree with the narrower definition from 1946 in China.

The topic of professional women and change in China is very broad, and stretches back to the emergence and development of professional women since the Western industrial revolution in the eighteenth century. In this MA thesis, I do not have the space to explore these early origins and development, although I do historically contextualise my study in the twentieth century. My objective in this research is to look at professional women and change in China since the beginning of the recent economic reforms in the 1980s.

I hope I can be in some senses an outsider looking at my own country, and write

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<sup>2</sup>Zhang Junwen. "If I come back to life, I would prefer to be a woman again" *Funu shijie* (Woman's World), March 1995, p.6.

<sup>3</sup>Lu Lan (a woman), writing in Chinese. "Talk about professional women." *Zhiye funu* (Professional Women), 2 (5), 1946, pp.9-13.

something which can reflect the lives of professional women there in order to let people outside China to know some details. That is the objective of this thesis.

### **Representations of Chinese women in China**

Women are an important part of China. The representation of women is always present in literature, history, sociology, and women's studies. The images of women in different eras have reflected women's status, women's value, women's social identity and the development of Chinese civilisation. To analyse representations of women with reference to women's issues can help people outside China know and understand Chinese women over time. This section will present a brief selection of images from China over time, some of which are taken up in more detail in later chapters.

It is first necessary to look back at Chinese culture. Throughout China's long history, women have been represented. For instance, Empress Wu was considered as a successful woman who participated in politics and helped make Chinese history. But according to Chinese history books, she became Empress of the Tang dynasty only because Confucian thought was not flourishing at that time. It used to be said that "A woman can not become a *Junzi* (a gentleman), but a *Junzi's* achievements rely on a woman". Chinese people have known for generations that when Zhou Wenwang's wisdom (when he was king of Zhou) was praised in *Shijing* (Poetry Works), his achievements were dependent on his good mother and his good wife. Such very traditional thoughts occupied the minds of Chinese people for thousands of years. In China, a women's virtue was always symbolic of their family's reputation to some degree. To achieve virtue, women had to work hard, humble themselves, sacrifice themselves and rely on men. From generation to generation, Chinese culture placed women below men in a traditional feudal society that was dominated by Confucian thought.

Lin Dayou is an example of the representation of women in literature at the end of the eighteenth century. Lin Dayou was one of the central characters of *Honglou meng*

(written by Cao Xiuqin, Qing dynasty). She typified many elite women of that time. Even if they did not have to worry about their food and clothes and lived in the palace, they were still at the bottom of society. She will be discussed further in Chapter One.

A great achievement for women's liberation in modern Chinese history came from the May Fourth Movement. New representations of the women were reflected in the literature of the 1930s, such as Xiang Linshao, a character in *Zhufu* (Blessing)<sup>4</sup> who was symbolic of millions of Chinese women who lived in the old feudal society, including their suffering. After the May Fourth Movement, the representation of women in literature changed. Examples can be found in *Shafei nushi de riji* (The Diary of Miss Shafei) written by a woman writer, Ding Ling in 1928.<sup>5</sup> Another example is *Shangshi* (The Past and the Regret), also written by Lu Xun (1925), in which a major character is the woman Zhijun. Both Shafei and Zhijun were symbolic of New Women who were encouraged by *Xinnu Xing'* (the new culture', or 'new idea of humanity) in the 1930s. Shafei was a New Woman who left her father's home, but she only gained the first step towards victory, for she was challenged by society which could provide her with no social environment in which to survive. Shafei and Zhijun both faced the same conflict between traditional society and reality. Traditional society criticised them as rebels and the reality of the social environment could not give them a chance to make a living. Men and women created civilisation together, but civilisation did not provide the same status for men and women.

A very popular slogan after 1949 in China was: "Women hold up half the sky". This metaphor was derived from ancient Chinese mythology, which said that the goddess Nuwa propped up the sky in order to save it from falling. The ideal situation portrays men and women as sharing equal responsibility in the affairs of the world. "Women hold up half the sky" encouraged Chinese women to participate more actively in society after 1949. An example of the representation of woman in that period was Li Shuangshuang. She was a model Chinese woman who gave herself to the construction of socialism, thankful to the Communist Party of China and Chairman Mao Zedong.

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<sup>4</sup>Written by Lu Xun (a pen name: his real name was Zhou Shuren). Taken from *Lu Xun quanji* (The Complete Works of Lu Xun), 1981, Vol. 2 (pp.5-23). Beijing renmin wenzue chubanshe.

<sup>5</sup>Written by Ding Ling, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (The Novel Monthly) Vol. 19. No.2

She gives an idea of what was thought to be an ideal Chinese women of that period. Articles in popular magazines such as *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese women) at this time described women drivers, women pilots and even women parachutists.

History changes sharply at times. The Cultural Revolution changed Chinese society again and changed women's position, and women's role. While change had been demanded and won during the May Fourth movement, most people now experienced it as unwelcome upheaval and change. Now there was not only "Women hold up half the sky", but "What men can do, women can". To some degree, women followed in men's footsteps. For instance, on the one hand, women hold up half the sky at work, on the other hand, women hold up more than half the sky at home (to be a good wife and a loving mother). Many women faced pressures from two directions, one being their own values and desires, the other the traditional social criteria. First, some of them, especially intellectual women, concentrated on their work. Their achievements were the same as men's, but they did not devote much time to their families. They were considered to be feminists in China and were criticised by men. Second, some sacrificed themselves to their family and were not good at their jobs. They felt sad that they had lost their own identities. The majority of professional women rushed both their work and their family duties.

A published debate about the tensions of professional women surfaced again in the 1980s, with discussions about intellectual women in *Guangming* newspaper over about two years. One representation of a professional woman in literature in the 1980s was the novel of the woman writer Kanrong, published in 1980, which described Doctor Lu's life in her *Rendao zhongnian* (When You Are Middle-Aged), to be discussed in Chapter One.

The economic reforms also brought their own stresses, and the specific problems of women appeared in the works of some women writers, for instance, in terms of women's awareness or sexuality. Literature can help people share and understand women's position through a character portrayed who is often symbolic of the era. In order to give some details which can reflect the lives of millions of ordinary Chinese

women, after providing a brief historical context, this research will focus on articles published between 1986 and 1996 for popular readership.

### **Data collected in Beijing, China:**

After discussion with my supervisor Janet Townsend about this research methodology, I flew to Beijing in December 1996 and collected a large quantity of data. In Beijing, after the World Women's Conference in 1995, many books about Chinese women were published in Chinese. Examples include *The Discovery of Women's History* (Du Fangqin, 1996);<sup>6</sup> *Women's health and Development in China* (Chen Zhiying, ed., 1993);<sup>7</sup> "*The Tensions Between Work and Family for Professional Women* (Tong Shaojun, 1993);<sup>8</sup> *The Growth of Leaders in China* (Chen Reisheng, 1995);<sup>9</sup> *Research on Urban Families in Contemporary China* (Shen Chonglin and Yang Shanhua, Eds., June 1995);<sup>10</sup> and *Gender in China* (Li Xiaojiang and Dong Xiuyu, 1994).<sup>11</sup>

In all these books there is some information about professional women in China after economic reform began at the end of the 1970s. The debate is about women's self-awareness, women's identities and social values.

I concentrated mainly on journals, and it took me two weeks to select articles from journals in Beijing Library, choosing articles from journals up to 1996. No-one can borrow magazines that run over more than a three year period at any one time, and there was a long queue to do photocopying. It surprised me that I had to wait a week for the 1988-89 issues of one journal (*Chinese Women*) alone. From a bibliography *Zhongguo funu chongshu yilan* (Women Issues Publications in China), I found the earliest professional journal *Professional Women*. When reading the original magazine, history seemed to be in front of me.

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<sup>6</sup>*Faxian funu de lishi.*

<sup>7</sup>*Zhongguo funu jiankang yu fazha.*

<sup>8</sup>*Zhiye funu jiating yu gong zhuo de zhang li.*

<sup>9</sup>*Funu gang bu de cheng zhang lun.*

<sup>10</sup>*Dang dai zhong guo cheng shi jia ting yan jiu.*

<sup>11</sup>*Xing bie yu zhong guo.*

## Sources and Scope

Starting my research at first, surprisingly, I found very few books, or even articles about professional women in China in English written by Western experts. I tried to inform myself by wider reading, for instance, on western feminism (such as Hummed, 1992; Peingle, 1988). I read western feminist geographers on the geography of gender such as *Women's Voices from the Rainforest*, by my supervisor Janet Townsend (1995). This book described women in the rainforest in particular, and described gender relationships there in geographical terms.

I did find a little about professional women in China in some parts of *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in 1980s*, by Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter (1988), which is about the socialisation of young women. It analyses a wide variety of issues, including adornment and sexuality, love and courtship, marriage, family relations and so on. In *Daughters of the Dragon: Women's Lives in Contemporary China*, by Christine Hall (1997), there are some lines about career women, but this is very brief. *Chinese women: Media Concerns and the Politics of Reform*, by Delia Davin (1996), has a chapter about work published in China and the political situation in contemporary China. *Chinese Women Through Chinese Eyes*, edited by Li Yuning (1992), describes women in Chinese history in terms of the gender roles they played, and particularly how Confucian thought controlled Chinese society.

An important source were various official and popular journals and magazines, and Chapters Three, Four and Five of this thesis will draw on the periodical press from 1986 to 1996. Summaries of articles with comments, will be used to present the material. The objective is to explore representations of women's lives both in their careers and personal lives. The journals and magazines that I used are listed below:

### Official Journals:

*Zhiye funu* (Professional Women) was the earliest journal for professional women in China and was published from 1944-1946 (Chongqing Press). This journal was only

published for three years.

*Zhonggou funu* (Chinese Women). One source of information was the official monthly magazine "*Chinese Women*" which has been published in Beijing since 1949. It is an official publication of the Chinese Communist Party, under the auspices of the All Women's Federation, and the articles always present the voice of the government. It often sets out state policy, and carries articles written by senior members (or their wives) of the Communist Party (such as Zhou Enlai's wife on one occasion). Many of the articles from this journal tend complacent about the situation of women in China.

*Jiating* (Family) Guangzhou (1995-1996)

Articles were also selected from *Guangming ribao* (Guangming Daily, Beijing) which is the second main newspaper after *Renmin ribao* (People's Newspaper). Most of the articles which I selected from this newspaper are connected with women's career lives. Both of these papers are essentially Communist Party organs.

*Xiandai funu* (Women in Modern Society) it is one of the earliest journals in China, published in Lanzhou (in the North-west of China) since 1949. *Funu* (Women) was published in Shengyang, Liaoning (in the North-east of China after 1949). The articles from these two journals *Xiandai funu* and *Funu* are written from different perspectives, including more critical stances, with some implying their dissatisfaction with the present situation. These were more 'popular' (*Funu*, for example, had many articles on heroic Chinese women), but were strongly influenced by the state.

Popular magazines:

These magazines covered a variety of issues and topics familiar to 'women's magazines' all around the world, including cooking, fashion, children and health. The popular magazines tended to be more western when compared with the official journals, but the articles were diverse. Some writers complain about the hardship of



being a woman, and how it would be better to be a man, some are feminist, some are anti-feminist. I searched for articles concerning professional women. The magazines listed below also come from a wide geographical area.

*Nubao* (Women's Reporter) is a popular magazine published after the economic reform.

*Women's Reporter* is published in Shenzhen Economic Zone (in the South of China), and reports the current situation much more critically. Unlike many other magazines, it sometimes addresses some of Chinese society's more challenging issues. It is one of the favourite journals for young people in China. The subjects of this magazine include sexuality, marriage, divorce and so on. In Beijing library some of this journal's covers were missing because it had been read so much.

*Banlu* (Companion) is published in Urumqi (in the North-West of China).

*Nusheng* (Women's Voice) comes from Cheng Du in Shichuan.

*Funu shijie* (Women's World) was published in Gui Lin Guangxi (in the South-west of China).

I also used a number of magazines and publications, which although aren't quoted in the thesis, helped me formulate my ideas about professional women in China. These were:

*Funu shenghuo* (Women's life) Zhengzhou (1995-1996). *Funu yanjiu luanchong* is an academic journal which was published at the beginning 1992, partly to prepare for the Fourth World Conference in Beijing. Some of the articles were written by the cadres of the Women Federation in different places of China. Some are University teachers, and a very few are specialists in Women's Studies. The articles discuss problems, and also report exciting findings from research around the world.

## **Chapter Outline**

### Chapter One: Exploring Images of Women in the History of China (pre-1949)

In Chapter One I shall look back on the history of Chinese women prior to 1949 through images familiar to hundreds of millions of Chinese women. The two main themes of this chapter will be the impact of Confucian thought on women for many hundreds, even thousands, of years through feudal society; and the upheaval and changes that followed the May Fourth movement, including for women.

### Chapter Two: Exploring Images of Chinese women (1949-1996)

This chapter explores the post-1949 period for women more generally in China. Three important periods can be identified - the consolidation of Communist rule, the Cultural Revolution, and the social, political and economic changes that have come with the period of greater liberalisation since the 1980s.

### Chapter Three: Professional Women in China: Analysis of Articles from Official Journals (1986-1996)

In Chapter Three I shall present articles written about professional women in official journals from 1986 to 1996 (see list below). These include official party journals, magazines and other publications. The representations of the experiences of professional women in factories, in companies, in banks, in research institutions of their stories at their families are instructive.

### Chapter Four: Chinese Journals in English for Foreign Audiences (1986-1996)

In Chapter Four I will look at selected work about professional women in China written in English to be read in the west, principally *China Today* and *China Pictorial*. This will be a selection of articles, with comments and comparison with writing in Chinese.

## Chapter Five: Popular Magazines in Chinese (1986-1996)

In Chapter Five, I will review the representations of professional women in popular magazines which I collected in China. By comparing official journals and popular magazines, I hope to show how women discuss the diversity of women's issues and problems, and see the world with their own eyes.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Finally the conclusion will consider the similarities and differences between the various articles and the representation of professional women in China from 1986 to 1996, and set them in their overall historical context.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis does not attempt to examine the academic or popular Western literature on professional women in China, or even on women in China. The thesis concentrates on specific representations in China itself of women on history and professional women 1986-1996, set against my own experience of reality. Only brief reference will be made to the impact of the United Nation Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995.

Starting my research, as a Chinese professional woman myself, when I selected articles from magazines, it seemed to me that their stories happened yesterday. I can understand how professional women spend twenty-four hours a day working and at home. The evening is a time when they are very tired. They may be too tired to help their child in his or her lessons, even though most only have one child, and even if they themselves are teachers for other children. Time is in great shortage for professional women. From the 1970s until the 1990s, I worked from early to late, in the Northwest of China, and the South of China. I am not saying that I represent Chinese professional women, but I will try to explain something from the real world which is like the stories which I selected from the journals in China.

# Chapter One: Exploring Images of Women in Chinese History (pre-1949)

## 1.1. Chinese women before the May Fourth Movement

Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past is really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities (Said, 1992:1).

This chapter will seek to give an idea of women's place in China up to 1949 by using illustrations from classic tales, history and literature, which are widely known today. China covers a huge geographical area and has the largest population in the world. It has a long history as a unified country with many ethnic groups. For thousands of years, until 1949, Chinese society was controlled by the teachings of Confucian thought, which is based on the idea of 'place' or 'position'. What is the place of women in Confucian eyes? The main doctrine of Confucius was that inequality of everything, and specifically the inequality of the sexes in society, was natural and necessary. The place of women was always at the bottom of the hierarchy no matter where or who they were. Even a queen's position was always subordinate, such as the Empress of Wu (624-705 BC). A classic book, *Suitang wudai shi*, includes an account of the queen's personal life before and after she became the Empress of the Tang dynasty (601-726 BC).<sup>1</sup> Wu Zetian was selected to enter the palace as a concubine and later became a minor wife of Taizhong, the King of Tang, at the age of fourteen. After King Taizhong died, she was persuaded to become a nun in the Ganyie Temple, where she had a hard life. Five years later, Wu Zetian was called back to the palace by the new King, Gaozhong (the son of Taizhong) to be his concubine. At that time she was

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<sup>1</sup>Fu Lecheng (gender unknown), *Sui tang wudai shi* (History from Sui to Tang Dynasty). Taiwan, 1957, pp. 98-99.

thirty-one years old. Wu Zetian was like every other woman, whose position was below that of men in feudal society even if they lived in the palace. But gradually, even through her husband was alive, Wu Zetian came to exercise more and more power, ultimately becoming effectively Empress of the realm. After he died, Wu was the first reigning Empress in Chinese history. Some history books suggest that Wu Zetian became an Empress not because of her ability and her political ambition, but because of the political situation. As Fu Lecheng (1957:98) argues.

If Confucian thought had been flourishing at that time, it would have been impossible for Wu to become the Empress of the Tang, because Confucian thought regulated the relationship between men and women in many spheres, and denied that men and women were equal. Women should be dependent on men, women had no rights to act in the men's world ... At the time of the Empress of Wu, Buddhism was flourishing, and dominated Confucian thought.

In some respects, not much has changed. The following lines are from the theme song of a recent TV series, *Wu Zetian*:

A man is like a mountain and a woman like a stream, and the stream goes around the mountain...

The following passage emphasises the continuity of the categorisation of women in China.

The trope that represents women as either good or evil operates by bifurcating her female functions-casting women as filial daughter and dutiful mother or dangerous seducer ... Seducers have been accused of using their sexual powers to destroy the empire (and male power) and have been blamed throughout history: the Tang Empress Wu, Yang Gueifei, Zi Xi. Most recently, Mao's wife Jiang Qing has borne far more excoriation than the three male members of the Gang of Four. In literary representations, the seducer often has no

children, the two roles being distinct (Brown, 1993:79).

Women's place is around men, like water around the mountain. It is hard to be a woman, and even harder to be a famous woman. It was claimed that the Empress Wu was considered very successful and very powerful. When she was Empress of the Tang dynasty she had to strive much harder than a King would have had to do yet, while she was in power, China was flourishing in both economy and art. Empress Wu exerted a great influence on Chinese politics and was a crucial figure in Chinese history.

After Empress Wu, Empress Cixi (Qing dynasty, at the end of the eighteenth century) and Jiang Qing (Mao Zedong's wife) were also pivotal figures in Chinese history (Lee, 1994:1).

However, with the exception of outstanding women like the Empress Wu, the position of women was low for thousands of years. Many popular sayings and proverbs which I know confirm this place for women. A few of these include:

- Women have long hair and short intelligence.
- The right place for a woman is inside and the man's place is outside.
- To be a woman means to submit.
- Man is like the sun and a woman like the moon who only reflects his light.

One very famous novel in Chinese literature, *Honglou meng* (The Dream of the Red Chamber) was written by Cao Xueqin in the Qing dynasty (it was also known as *Shi Touji*, or the Story of the Stone). This has a reputation comparable to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The book described upper-class life in the Qing dynasty. Of the one hundred and twelve chapters in the book, the first eighty chapters were written by Cao Xueqin, the rest by Gaoer. There are four hundred and forty-eight figures in it. The book describes life in two mansions *Ningguofu* and *Rongguofu* over about nineteen years. Jia Baoyou is a central character in the book, the only son of the house, and the only one who had inheritance rights in one of the mansions. But he was required to

obey the rules of the family, which meant going the way of the scholar, the position that was considered the best and right way for upper class men in Confucian eyes. Jia Baoyou could not be accepted by his father because he refused to obey the rules as a noble. He and another central character in the book, Daiyou, fall in love with each other. Despite their hopes to marry, neither of them could escape the family's rules. Daiyou heard of Jia Baoyou's parents arrangement for him to marry his cousin and wasted away and died after he married. Jia Baoyou wanted only to marry Daiyou, and was cheated at his wedding into marrying the other woman. When he found his bride was not Daiyou, he left the Jia mansion to be a monk, ending the story in tragedy. The author, Cao Xueqin, showed sympathy with women, describing them as like water, pure, and clean, while men in his eyes were polluted like dust (because the scholar way involves ambition and struggle). Cao Xueqin wanted women to achieve greater social freedom from a corrupt society, and his dream of a free and happy life was based on equal rights between men and women. Nie Gannu (a male writer in the 1940s) wrote a great deal about women and society in his book 'White Snake and the Tower'. He felt that:

Honglou meng is a great novel in China. It was the first love story to be written, the first time someone had written against feudal thought, the first time life was viewed from a woman's perspective (quoted in Shu Wu, 1993:222).<sup>2</sup>

Much evidence can be found in Chinese history which indicates that Confucian thought was used as a policy by the ruler to control the whole of society in many ways. It completely legitimated the domination of women by men. A husband's word was the law; he was the head of the family. One saying runs: 'If you are married to a chicken, obey the chicken; if you are married to a dog, obey the dog.' 'Three obediences and four virtues' was the discipline for women. A woman's three obediences were owed to her father, her husband, and her son, demonstrating how women were taught from childhood that they must be subservient, and sacrifice their

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<sup>2</sup>Shu Wu (a man), writing in Chinese, *Huita zhede shengyin lun Nie Gannu de funuluan* (The Voice of a tower destroyer-on Nie Gannu's view on women) in *Zhongguo funu jiankang yu fazhan* (Women's Health and Development in China), Chen Zhiying (ed.) 1993.

needs to those of men. The 'four virtues' meant that as a woman you are nothing, you cannot be independent, and must instead depend on a husband and other male relatives.

A poem from the *Book of Odes*, (Hu Shih, 1991:3) runs thus:

When a son is born,  
Let him sleep in the bed,  
Clothe him with fine clothes,  
And give him jades to play with.  
How lordly his cry is!  
May he grow up to wear crimson  
And be the lord of the clan and the tribe!

When a daughter is born,  
Let her sleep on the ground,  
Wrap her in common wrappings,  
And give her broken tiles for her playthings.  
May she have no faults, nor merits of her own;  
May she attend well to the food and wine,  
And bring no discredit to her parents!

As Li Yuning (1991:4) notes:

This frank partiality to sons and neglect of daughters does not require any apology or comment, it is simply a sociological and anthropological fact that womankind has always had to face in every part of the world. It is against such a hostile background that woman has had to struggle and slowly win her position in the family and in the larger world.

Confucian thought was a system of belief accepted as a part of Chinese culture from generation to generation. For example, it included injunctions that a woman should



serve mother-in-law, husband and children. 'A woman without talent is a virtuous woman', and 'an educated woman is bound to cause trouble' are popular proverbs even today. The saying that a woman without talent is virtuous can be found throughout Chinese history, even up to the present.

Chinese women's sufferings under feudal society have been documented from the Tang dynasty (the Empress of Wu Zetian 624-705BC) till the Qing dynasty (Cao Xueqin, and Honglou meng 1613-1908 BC). Women received their education from their parents, the main theme being how to achieve the obedience that Confucian thought demanded. Until the early nineteenth century, when China opened its doors to Western technology and some Western influence, the attitudes of more male scholars to women's issues started to change.

Male reformists, such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qicao, writing in 1898, were influenced by western ideas (Xiao Li and Xiao Yu, 1986:10).<sup>3</sup>

First, more male scholars suggested that women were born with the same rights as men. Second, they recognised the need to change the treatment of women, especially such extreme and cruel customs as foot-binding and widow suicide. Third was the need to educate women so that they could make a bigger contribution to the strengthening of China. This was the first time that arguments over women's rights emerged in Chinese history. Lee (1994:7) suggests that:

If the energies of women, half the nation's population, were liberated and enlisted in production, the increase would help to make China richer. If Chinese women continued to be ignorant and superstitious, the children they raised would never be the kind of citizens who could build a stronger China.

Xiao Li and Xiao Yu (1986:10) detailed the rise of magazines for women:

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<sup>3</sup>Xiao Li and Xiao Yu (genders unknown), writing in Chinese. "Three debates on women's liberation in Chinese modern history", *Chinese Women*, July, 1986, pp. 10-11.

When the Chinese Alliance Organisation was founded in 1905 in Tokyo, it attracted a group of people such as Qiu Jin, Chen Jifan, He Xiangning, Tang Qinjing, Lin Zongshu and Chair Hui ... During that period women's magazines in Chinese included *Jin Tianfan* (a woman's name), established in 1903, *Nusheng* (Women's Liberty), *Funu shijie* (Women's World) and *Zhang Zhanyun* (a woman's name), established in 1905. *Beijing wanbao* (Peking Women's Newspaper), *Qiu Jin* (a woman's name) established in 1907 and *Zhongguo funubao* (Chinese Women's Newspaper) were amongst the first to raise issues of equality in education for women at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **Chinese Women in 1919: The May Fourth Movement**

The twentieth century has undoubtedly been the most important period of change for women in China. The women's movement has pushed women's emancipation to become a concern of the whole of society. Women's participation has been raised to a new level, especially for intellectual women.

Throughout the early twentieth century, whenever Chinese intellectuals struggled to develop a vision of a united, strong, and free China, they criticised the oppression of women as a major obstacle to the realisation of that vision. During the May Fourth Movement of 1919, intellectuals attacked Confucian thought and social organisation as the major cause of China's inability to defend itself against Western imperialism. In the course of the movement they invoked the unequal status of women in the Confucian family as a symbol of everything in Chinese culture that kept the nation weak. But for patriotic young students, the subordinate status of women was more than a metaphor; their personal lives were a testimony to the struggle against Confucianism. They refused to enter marriages arranged by their parents, publicly discussed the nature of love, attended performances of Ibsen's 'A Doll's House', and generally sought to remake their private lives to accord with their image of modern society (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:2-3).

For Mao Zedong (1983:189):<sup>4</sup>

The May Fourth Movement was against imperialism and feudalism. It was the first time the Chinese people acted throughout the whole of Chinese history.

The account which follows is my recollection of what I was taught in middle school, during the Cultural Revolution, which is how most Chinese of my generation see the May Fourth Movement.

The May Fourth Movement set out to fight both western imperialism and Chinese feudal thought. On the 4th May 1919 over three thousand students from different universities in Beijing gathered at Tian Anmen square to protest against imperialist aggression and the government of the Beiyuan warlord. Their slogan was “Down with imperialism! Down with the warlords”. At first those in the movement were mainly students and intellectuals, but later workers and businessmen joined the strike. During the movement two sides emerged, Zhuoyi (the Left) and Youyi (the Right). The leaders of the Left were Li Dazao and Chen Duxu (who later became leaders of the Communist Party).

Writers from the Left included Lu Xun, Yu Dafu and Mao Dun. The leaders of the Right were Hu Shi and Hu Feng. The Left's argument was that revolution was the way forward, to make the country strong, while the Right argued that what the country required was reform. The movement was extremely influential in Chinese modern history. It included three aspects. First was the awareness of the need to achieve freedom as a basic human right. Second was democracy, and the demand to be treated equally in politics. The third centred on science, and the need to challenge old feudal and religion thoughts, and to accept a new culture: progressive, rational democracy.

Chinese books commonly summarise the May Fourth Movement through its slogan: *Minzhu yu kexue* (Democracy and Science). In terms of its political achievement:

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<sup>4</sup>Mao Zedong, *Xin minzhu zhuyi lun* (About New Democracy) The Complete Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. 7. Tokyo Press. 1983, p.189.

The May Fourth Movement was the revolutionary watershed from the old to the new democracy, a great beginning to the practice of the theory of Marxism and Leninism in China (Hua Gang, 1953:154).

At this time, women started to criticise feudal ideology. Although most women's knowledge appeared less than that of men they were not rejected or discriminated against, but were respected and supported by men (Qing Yan, 1946:2).

Such men included the Marxist, Li Dazhao, and the leading writer, Lu Xun (pen name), both seen as pioneers of democracy at the time (Hua Gang, 1953:154). In their writings and speeches they supported women's emancipation. The position of women was a major social concern, and their problems were openly discussed. Women's issues were still mainly written about by men, such as Lu Xun, Shu Wu, Zhou Zhuren or Wu Xi, who represented the voice of the majority of women and intellectuals.

For instance, Lu Xun wrote a short story *Zhufu* (Blessing), which was published in the 1930's.<sup>5</sup> The title of the story 'Zhufu' was based on the Chinese New Year's Eve, when people receive their ancestors' blessing and then give thanks to their ancestors. It is a very solemn ceremony, and very traditional in old China. During the ceremony only men can represent the family to receive the blessings. The story concerns a woman called Xiang Linshao. Like most Chinese women she was controlled by the political authorities, her husband, her clan, and supernatural authority. After her first husband died, she escaped from her mother-in-law's ill-treatment and became a servant at the Lu house. She worked hard and did not care about food or hardship when she was working. Even as a servant in the Lu House, she felt happier than before. But soon, she was captured and returned to her mother-in-law's home and forced to marry a man who lived deep in the mountains. After two or three years, her second husband died of an illness and her son, Ah Mao, was killed by a wolf. Her husband's brother drove her out of the house. Having nowhere to live, she went back

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<sup>5</sup>Written by Lu Xun (a pen name: his real name was Zhou Shuren). Taken from *Lu Xun quanji* (The Complete Works of Lu Xun), 1981, Vol. 2 (pp.5-23). Beijing renmin wenzue chubanshe.

to the Lu House. On New Year's Eve, because she had had two husbands who had both died, in the end, she was considered an unlucky woman by the master of the Lu House, and not allowed to touch anything during the preparations for the ceremony. She went out of her mind, and could not stop worrying about what would happen when she died if everyone became ghosts. Because she married twice, what would happen when her ghost met those of her two husbands? If there were ghosts, she would be punished again, even when she was dead. She died tragically of cold and hunger on New Year's Eve, and went into another world just when every family were receiving their blessings. Xiang Linshao was a docile victim of feudal society and the patriarchal system, and the slave of a man.

This story is used as teaching material in both junior school and some universities in China today, as both history and literature. As a child in middle school, reading this essay for the first time, I could not understand why Xiang Linshao had such a fate. I was also frightened by the ceremony. After school, I asked my grandmother what life was like in the old days and what was she like at my age. She told me that at my age (between twelve and fourteen), she was learning sewing and preparing to marry a man whom she had never met, my grandfather. My grandmother always told me stories of what happened in the Qing dynasty, and encouraged me to study well in order to have a bright future, which was to have a good job and marry a good husband. Again, we see how the past is threaded into the present. But, about five years ago, I was teaching in a middle school and asked my students what they thought of the story. Some said it was a history essay which described the old days, but most of them could not imagine the reality of such a history.

Even if this woman had no food, not enough even for one meal when she was alive, she would have accepted the punishment of being sawed asunder into two pieces which could be given to the two husbands when she died, just because she was a woman. A wife belonged to her husband; authority could not be changed (quoted in Shu Wu, 1993:156).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Shu Wu (a man), writing in Chinese, *Huita zhede shengyin lun Nie Gannu de funuluan* (The Voice of a tower destroyer-on Nie Gannu's view on women) in *Zhong guo funu jiankang yu fazhan* (Women's Health and Development in China), Chen Zhiying (ed.) 1993.

Lu Xun once wrote:

I read overnight, whole pages written on “kind-heartedness” twisted and deformed, but I could not understand even one word. It was very clear that there was only one word, ‘slaughter,’ on all the pages” (Lu Xun, 1981:422).<sup>7</sup>

His article implied that feudal society was slaughter, and he attacked Confucian thought and social organisation in his work. He called on society to pay much more attention to women's liberation and pointed out the many problems that women faced in Chinese society. For instance, Lu Xun wrote one article entitled "What happened when Nora leaves her home?", based on a story written by the Norwegian writer, Ibsen. In Ibsen's story the central character was a girl named Nora, who sought freedom and a happy life, and left her husband's home. This escape was seen as successful and followed by many young women. Lu Xun gave a speech in Beijing Teacher's University, saying that the consequence for Nora here in China was a choice between going home or sinking into the depths. Because she had no economic independence, she had no autonomy despite her awareness.

Economic independence is very important for women's liberation, meaning not just change for a few but the economic reform of the whole society ... It is very difficult to carry through reform in China. Even when we move a table, or mend the stove, the answer is bloody repression. Without being flogged, China can't be changed (Bao Chang and Qiu Wenzhi, 1997:199-200).<sup>8</sup>

Lu Xun implied the very difficult political situation which was controlled by the feudal society at that time in China. He described how even a small thing like moving a table or mending a stove was not easy. This was symbolic of the fact that reform faced a very big challenge in China. Lu Xun's ideal was influenced by western thought.

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<sup>7</sup>Lu Xun, *Kuangren riji*, (The Diary of a Maniac) in *Lu Xun quanji*. (The Complete Works of Lu Xun, Volume 1). Beijing. Renmin wenzue chubanshe. 1981, pp.422-433

<sup>8</sup>Bao Chang and Qui Wenshi (1997) *Lu Xun nianpu, shang juan*, (Lu Xun's Biography, Part One), Tianjin. Renmin chubanshe.

The importance of Nora in Lu Xun's writings to later thought has also been identified. The legacy which he left is still widely influential among the young in China. Lu Xun was seen as a leader of Xin Wen Hua (the new culture), while the May Fourth period has been called the 'Renaissance of Chinese culture'. *Baihuawen*, "writing of Chinese in simple way" transformed Chinese writing from this time.

The new ideas of that time caused another social problem, as pointed out in an article by Lu Lan (1944).<sup>9</sup> Before the Second World War, Hitler ordered that 'all professional women must go back to kitchens and bedrooms to be fertility machines, and to be good wives and loving mothers!' In China almost at the same time some street men shouted out 'Nora should go back to the kitchen to be a good wife and a loving mother!' What happened was that German women had kitchens and bedrooms where they could go, but Chinese women had nowhere, which caused unemployment even during the war. So Lu Xun argued "What will Nora do when she leaves her home?" (Lu Xun, 1981:158-165).<sup>10</sup>

In his book *Shangshi* ('Regret for the Past', October 1925), Lu Xun poured out the conflict between feudal society and the freedom to love. Zi Jun and Juan Sheng were young lovers. In the early stage of their relationship, Juan Sheng and Zi Jun, like thousands of other young Chinese in that period, had much to share with regard to the new and exciting changes they recognised and anticipated in their society. Zi Jun was a new woman seeking freedom to love, and she refused to enter into marriages arranged by her parents and sought a new life. Zi Jun had broken away from the confines of the traditional family, the one man in her life turned out to be Juan Sheng, her husband, mentor and intellectual partner. She said "I belong to myself. they have no rights over me". She was very brave, did not care about the jeers of others and left her father's home. Zi Jun and Juan Sheng remade their private lives according to their dream of a happy and a free life. At first, they had a wonderful time and felt their marriage was very successful, but it was very short. Because of the social

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<sup>9</sup>Lu Lan (a woman), *Lun zhiye funu* (Talk about professional women) in *Zhiye funu* (Professional Women, 2 (5), 1944, pp.9-13.

<sup>10</sup>Lu Xun, *Nora zouhuo zenyang* (What will Nora do when she leaves her home?) in *Lu Xun qiuanji* (The complete work of Lu Xun, Volume 1). Beijing renmin wenxue chubanshe. 1981, pp.158-165.

environment, their life was very hard. They had financial problems, and after they ran out of money, Zi Jun's husband could not get a new job. Finally, they did not even have enough food to eat. Zi Jun realised their love was doomed, left her husband and went back again to her father's home, where she died. This was a tragic story in which neither could escape from the reality of feudal society.

As for Zi Jun, she was a New Woman in this book. She was a Chinese Nora betrayed by the impossibility of a leading a different life. As a leading writer, Lu Xun's work was very much an open challenge to society, arguing here that women's emancipation was strongly connected to economic and politic independence. Lu Xun's work showed how some (male) intellectuals thought about women during that time.

It is hopeless to ask for free marriage based only on equality between women and men without seeking the liberation of the whole society (Bao Chang, Qui Wenzhi, 1979:270).

In the period after the May Fourth Movement, in the 1920s and 1930s, representative women writers included Ding Ling, Xiao Hong, Bing Xin, Lu Yin and Zhang Ailing, who began to express their own feelings in some of their writings. This was a transitional time for *Nuxing Wenxue* (Women's Literature).

It is also an initiation into a transitional period when writers who had been "romantic" or "realist" in style and temperament were forced to make political and literary choices that generally placed them somewhere to the right or left of centre within literary circles (Larson, 1993:58).

I shall not analyse how writers and critics aligned themselves politically, but shall now focus on representations of women and women's issues. These sad tales will tell us how women suffered and strove for their rights, in the voices of the time.

Ding Ling wrote of the legacy of the early twentieth century. In *Shafei* (The Diary of Miss Shafei, 1928), Ding Ling described the problems of a 'New Woman', Xin Nu



Xing, after leaving her father's home. Shafei, like thousands of young girls of the time, had been encouraged by the spirit of the times to leave home very young and make a living for herself. She left in search of freedom and happiness, depending on the understanding of society. Sick and suffering from serious insomnia, Shafei lived as a stranger in a strange land, desperately bored. Sometimes she would boil her milk three or four times just to fill her time. If there was no milk to be boiled or newspaper to read, she sat by the fire feeling angry with herself. Shafei was only nineteen years old! What about her future? The reader could only wonder why she did not go back to her home where her parents could look after her. The main point of the story was that, alone and proud, she hated the idea of being a hypocrite. Even when very ill, she never thought of going back to a home dominated by Confucian, feudal thought. Shafei rebelled against the traditional feudal family, but she was very poor and very miserable.

People compared Shafei with Lin Daiyou in Cao Xueqin's *Honglou meng* (see pp.14-15). Shafei and Lin Daiyu were both very sensitive, but although Lin Daiyu was a rebel against feudal society, she was a woman of delicate upbringing, from the Rong mansion, who suffered and strove for love. Shafei was a new young woman who had experienced the May Fourth Movement, although she could not liberate herself from her problems, reflecting the times. Six years later in the *Continuing Diary of Miss Shafei* (1933), Shafei had been liberated and had entered into a new life, helped by a young man in the Communist Party. Shafei had improved herself and triumphed, becoming truly a new woman. Leading critics of the time, such as Mao Dun, reviewed the story and recorded its author as the first Chinese woman writer to speak out about the dilemmas of the liberated women in China. Mao Dun describes Ding Ling's early works as distancing women from the old kind of serenity and refinement (Mao Dun, 1939) *Nu zuojia Ding Ling*, (Ding Ling a female writer). However, Ding Ling still bore the brand of May Fourth ideas in this story, and still wrote solely about the psychology of women.

This was a bold description; at least for a Chinese woman writer of the time, it is bold. Shafei represents the liberated young women after May Fourth, and

their psychological contradictions in sexual love (Mao Dun, 1933:253).<sup>11</sup>

One argument about women writers in the 1930s is that

the New Women could not present women's real voice. Women writers presented men's voices, their own voice was very, very low (Du Fangqin, 1996:39).<sup>12</sup>

The status of women was a concern of the whole of society. Women's place reflected the social development, social values and ideology of Chinese civilisation. The way women are portrayed in the media reflects the ideology of women in society. The image of a woman may be symbolic of hundreds of thousands of ordinary Chinese women. Women writers during 1930s and 1940s discussed how women struggled for their rights.

After the May Fourth Movement, women's magazines underwent a great change, for some writers realised that women should have the same rights as men. They woke up from their sleep. A famous women writer, Bing Xin, once wrote in the 1940s,

First, you must know you are a human, then you know that you are a man or a woman (Duo Fangqin, 1996:38).

The earliest Chinese Marxists, like Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, suggested women's liberation from the Marxist point of view, which was very influential for women in China. Honig and Hershtatter (1988:3) report:

The young founders of the Communist Party inherited the May Fourth legacy; from its inception in 1921 the Party advocated the liberation of women .... Campaigns to end wife-beating and ban arranged marriages had to be carefully

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<sup>11</sup>Mao Dun (a man) *Nu zuojia Ding Ling* (Ding Ling, A Feminist Writer) in *Ding Ling yanjiu ziliao* (Research Materials on Ding Ling) Yuan Liangjun (ed.) 1982, pp.252-256. Tianjin remin chubanshe.

<sup>12</sup>Du Fangqin (a woman) *Faxian funu de lishi* (The Discovery of Women's History). Tianjin, shehui kexueyun chubanshe. 1996, pp.37-41.

weighed against the need to win the support of peasant men. Through the Party did succeed in modifying family power relationships in the rural base areas, increasingly it emphasised bringing women into the paid labour force as the key to their liberation”.

The Chinese Communist Party used a Marxist theory of revolution which provided women with opportunities to participate in the construction of socialism. As everybody knows in China, under communism there is (theoretically, at least) no exploitation, no oppression, men and women are equal, and everybody shares the same right on the earth. The next chapter looks at women in the Communist period in China.

The Great May Fourth Movement ended, or at least seriously challenged, Chinese feudal society which was dominated by Confucian thought for nearly two thousand years. Many Chinese women were woken up to the conditions of their lives. The splendid track which they left in Chinese modern history encouraged women's emancipation and opened up a new road for the Chinese people. The pioneer spirit pushed democracy widespread in China. This political movement fired the quiet China. Chinese women realised they should be treated as equal to men. They had the same abilities and value as men. If the social environment provided them with the same conditions, they could do the same things as men. A group of excellent intellectual women grew up after the May Fourth Movement. This was a great jump and a great success in the perspective of Chinese history.

The May Fourth movement in 1919 was extremely important for the whole Chinese people. Especially for women the slogan of the May Fourth movement was 'democracy and science'. During that period people came to think about women's liberation from the old feudal society, and not only women, but also men. So women writers expressed their own feelings and represented the thoughts of many women.

## Chapter Two: Chinese Women (1949-1996)

In May 1949, Mao Zedong stated the following at a Policy Consultation Meeting:

From now on our nation will enter into a family where there will be peace and love, with all nations together, and we will work hard to create our own civilisation and happiness, while advancing peace and freedom on the earth. Our nation will never endure humiliation. From now on, we shall stand up. We have gained a great revolutionary victory, with the sympathy of the whole world. Our friends are all over the world (Mao Zedong, 1949:5).<sup>1</sup>

### From Revolution to Cultural Revolution

When the first red flag with five stars was raised in Tian Anmen Square on 1 October, 1949, the Chinese people were brought into a new era. Chinese people call this new, historic time of transition '*Xin Zhongguo*' (New China). What happened for Chinese women after the People's Republic of China was founded? Chinese women experienced three very different periods: the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the period until the Economic Reform. In this chapter, I shall concentrate on tracing the issues for Chinese women in general from the Revolution to 1996 through representations of women. This will set out the background for succeeding chapters, which will focus on changing representations of professional women, particularly over the decade 1986-1996. Here the phrase which describes me and is well-known to my generation is "*Wo zhang zai hongqi xia*" (I grew up after the red flag was raised). I shall write what I was taught as a citizen of the People's Republic of China, illustrated by writings of the time and by comments from foreign academics.

In the past the position of women in large parts of Chinese society was lower than most other societies, past or present, world-wide. The 1949 Revolution

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<sup>1</sup>Mao Zedong, *Zhongguo renmin zhanqi laile* (Chinese people stand up) in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (The Complete Works of Mao Zedong) Vol.5. Shanghai Press. 1977, p.5.

(the 'Liberation') acknowledged women's equality and gave women equal rights in theory and to a large extent in practice. This enormous jump from 'no worth' to 'equal worth' has probably not been equalled by any other event in history world-wide (Hall,1997:3).

I agree. This change must be seen in the context of the Revolution as a whole. From the beginning of the New China, when the Communist Party came into power in 1949 seeking the communist ideal, the government tried to work for national wealth and power and to reduce the gap between poor and rich. This is the primary goal of the Communist Party: to wipe out the system of inequality between people. This socialist and communist thought was taught by the Party and well known by the whole nation.

The promulgation of a New China and new, socialist ideals in 1949 certainly marks the beginning of a new era. Of course, the divorce from the past was not total - many of the forces at work in the last thirty-odd years still have their roots in the past ... Nevertheless, post-1949 China is qualitatively different. Its government is the most powerful one China has ever seen. It is able to assert the nation's sovereignty, avoid defeat, wipe out the grossest forms of social-economic inequalities, and mobilise human and material resources on a large scale- problems that had been the course of earlier regimes (Pong and Fung, 1985:3-4).

A male writer, Sima Wenshen, wrote in *Zhongguo baogao wenxue* (Record of Chinese Literature) of how thankful people were to the Communist Party of China and to Chairman Mao Zedong at the beginning of the People's Republic of China:

Chairman Mao Zedong said:

This is the great victory of Chinese people during the last five thousand years, this is a victory of the Chinese people! After five thousand years we Chinese people for the first time become masters of our own soil, we have our own

political authority now (Sima Wenshen, 1981:39).<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of the Republic of China, articles described the Party leaders sharing equality in social status, even for women:

When we went into the Empire Palace, we saw people's delegations, coming from fifty-six different ethnic regions of China. We saw heroes, Captain Chen Yi, Captain Lu Becheng, and Captain He Long . We saw a textile worker, Fan Xiaofeng, who became a textile worker when she was only twelve years old. An old mother of a soldier, a wife of a peasant, Xi Guanxiu, and Li Xiuzhen. A special grade battle hero, Wei Xiaotang, who wore a white towel on his head (Sima Wenshen, 1981:40).

A textile worker, an old mother of a soldier, a wife of a peasant are model women at the beginning of the New China. As Chinese women, no matter what their class, from the Liberation women had the same position as men. For the first time Chinese women found their identity, and owned their own land (Sima Wenshen, 1981:41).

Looking at women's images in writings of the 1950s, peasants and workers were represented with the same social status as those in high positions. The saying '*Fan shen dao qing*' (how people suffered in the old days, how much thanks we give to the New China) is the theme of all articles.

For instance, a revolutionary image of a women which was often shown in drama and film between the 1950s and the 1970s can be found in *Bai mao nu* (The Girl with the White Hair). The story took place in the North East of China. Xier was a young girl with black hair, the only daughter of Yan Bailao who made bean curd for his living. Father and daughter depended on each other. Life was hard but even so they were

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<sup>2</sup>Sima Wenshen (a man), *Hongshe de shiyue* (The Red October) in *Wei gongchanzhuyi shiye xianshen de renmen* (The People Who Devoted Themselves to the Communist Revolution), 1981, pp.39-50. Beijing Press. The original writing was published in the Record of Chinese Literature on 28 Sept.1949.

quite happy. Xier's fiancé was their neighbour's son, Wang Da Chun. One day before New Year's Eve, Xier's father left his home in order to escape the debt from the landlord, Huang Shiyin. For three days, he stayed in a cave, cold and hungry. Three days later, the creditor, landlord Huang came to his house for the debt. The custom is if he has no money for the debt, he must pay by giving his daughter instead. When Yang heard the sad news, he couldn't accept what had happened, and because he had no other choice, he killed himself and died at the gate of the landlord's house. Da Chun, Xier's fiancé, after hearing that Xier went as a payment for her father's debt, ran away from his home. Xier, after her father died, suffered terribly in Huang's house, fighting for her life and violently raped by the landlord. Finally she escaped from Huang's house, hid herself in an old temple outside the village and stole food from the temple for such a long time that, without the salt her body needed, her hair turned white. Xier hated the landlord very much. When she was pregnant, she even hated her body. When she gave birth to his son, she said "This is a dog's child, the baby is the spawn of the landlord." She refused her milk to the baby, which killed it. The story ended with Da Chun becoming a Communist party member. He came back to the village with the Army and found Xier, the White Haired Girl. Xier told of what she had suffered. This story was turned into a film by Shui Hua and Wang Bing, made by Dong Bei Dian Ying Zhi Piang Chang (the North film studio) in the 1950s. It was also produced into Baleiwu (Shanghai Ballet Institute). It was one of the Eight Model Plays during the Cultural Revolution (see below).

Women symbolised the oppressed. Xier's action, escaping from the landlord's house, was symbolic of the 'anti-landlord struggle'. The basic idea of this story portraying Xier is to show how the exploiters, such as Landlord Huang, made the people suffer in the old China. This is what I was taught in primary school. The teacher told us:

In Old China we had hundreds and thousands of landlords who were like Huang Shiren. We will never forget the class struggle. As Chairman Mao told us: 'Never forget class struggle'. For the happy life everyone has now, you should give thanks to the Party and Chairman Mao Zedong.

This is what was taught before and after the Cultural Revolution. Images of women were held up as good examples for others in the 1950s, as symbolic of women's emancipation in the New China. Most women had suffered badly under the old society, with no chance to demonstrate their value and abilities to the state. Therefore they appreciated what they now had. They were amongst many who felt that Mao Zedong was the saviour of the whole Chinese people. Women heroes were created in terms of the current political situation, and Chinese women were encouraged to work hard and build their own country in the New China.

From 1950 to 1952 was the period of Land Reform, when widespread and profound land reform distributed land on the basis of the numbers in a family. Before 1949, women did not have equal rights with men in land ownership or inheritance. This was the first time they could have rights in land, although ultimately the land belonged to the government. This fundamentally altered the economic status of women. It was widely accepted that the establishment of socialism would automatically result in the liberation of women.

A comical story, *Li Shuangshuang xiao zhuan*, was later made into a film. The book was about a very capable woman, Li Shuangshuang, who was a commune leader and very enthusiastic about her work. Her husband, Sun, was 'backward' (meaning that he did not like to do extra work for the commune, only for himself), so he always complained about his wife, Shuangshuang. His wife often helped him in political awareness as she was a party cadre, and her political awareness and ability was much above that of her husband. With Shuangshuang's help, Sun made much progress in growing awareness of the party authority. The theme song of the film ran:

Li Shuangshuang, Li Shuangshuang,  
She is a good example of our women.  
She devoted herself to the Commune (Ji Ti)  
Never fearing hard work  
The first thing in her mind is the Commune (Ji Ti)  
She puts herself second



Images of women during the 1950s show women as gaining, in theory, equal rights and status to men. A vital expression of this change was that women were now encouraged, even required, to go out of their homes and enter the labour force.

In the post-Revolutionary period, though, women were primarily mobilised less to fight for gender equality than to contribute to socialist construction. It was widely accepted that the establishment of socialism would automatically result in the liberation of women. But even though the public discussion of gender issues became muted, conflicts over the role of women continued to shape the course of revolution in important ways (Honig and Hershtatter, 1988:3).

Li Zhiyun wrote critically in the 1980s of this period:

We should realise that, from the beginning, there were obstacles to letting women be equal to men, because that means letting women follow men. Men are the goal. For instance, women were required to work in heavy industry. In order to join the fight, women are proud of being equal to men in character (Li Zhiyun, 1994:429).<sup>3</sup>

A report of the 1950s, republished in 1981, illustrates women's situation then:

When Xun Fenglian first came to Dandong textile factory in October 1958 she was only sixteen. In her white uniform, she felt very happy and was proud of being a textile worker. She remembered from 1953, when she was a little girl, listening to her teacher telling Hao Jianxiu's story (Hao Jianxiu was a textile worker and model woman after the Liberation). From then on she made up her mind to be a textile worker when she grew up. She worked very hard and

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<sup>3</sup>Li Zhiyun, "Cong nuzuoqia zuopin kan zhongguo funu yishide juexing" (Observing women's awareness from Chinese women writer's work). In *Xingbie yu zhongguo* (Gender and China), Li Xiaojang and Dong Xiuyu (ed.), Beijing: Shenhua dushu xinzi shanlian shudian, 1994, pp.486-513.

devoted herself to production. After work she always helped people who had difficulties at home. For example, she helped old and sick people with their housework, and did good deeds for others. Once she had an abortion, and according to the doctor's advice, should have rested for fifteen days. But she did not tell anybody, and insisted on working. One day, after she finished her work she was too weak to say a word and lay down in bed. She never thought her husband was not in a good mood, and he quarrelled with her. She cried the whole night (Even her husband did not know his wife had had an abortion in the hospital) (Chen Juyun, 1981:222).<sup>4</sup>

*Chinese Women* is one of the official journals published in China before 1949 (see chapter Three). At this time, it showed women contributing to socialist construction, devoting themselves to their work, and although they were less educated than men, they worked hard and did well. In 1950, the Marriage Law was promulgated and in part implemented. This offered more rights to women (including the prevention of wife sale and polygamy). Women's role changed dramatically, for women now had opportunities to demonstrate their abilities in many areas. *Chinese Women* reported that women's status changed greatly because of the policy of the Communist Party which meant men and women were equal and could do the same thing in the same workplace. Women heroes emerged at that time, such as women drivers, women parachutists and women dispatch drivers. Although women's basic skills and education were lower than men's during that time, they were still positive. Official articles described model women and how they devoted themselves to socialist construction. Women were represented in agriculture and industry, they were Party members and Youth members. Women tractor-drivers were also frequently represented at that time. These model women devoted themselves to the socialist construction of New China.

After 1949, most writing on women closely reflected current party policy

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<sup>4</sup>Chen Juyun (gender unknown) *Ta xianshen yu shehuizhuyi jianshen shiye* (She devoted herself to the Socialist Construction) in *Wei gongchanzhuyi shiye xianshen de renmen* (The People Who Devoted Themselves to the Communist Revolution) 1981, pp.210-222. Beijing Press.

(Davin 1978; Stacey 1983). Policies for women did undergo change and development over the years, but in most periods writing on women's issues was stereotyped and predictable in its focus, shifting in accordance with changes in broader party concerns rather than women's specific needs (Davin, 1996:93).

Women's stories were told in terms of their contribution to socialist China, especially in terms of thinking more about others, less about themselves. Here is a working woman's story from this time, also published in 1981, which is like the stories I read as a child.

Hu Ashu was a worker in Shanghai tooth paste factory after 1949. She was industrious and thrifty. When she died in 1981, she gave her bank savings of 10000.00 yuan to the country. But when she was alive, she lived a very simple life. In 1955, she retired and had a pension of 40.23 yuan from the government. She suffered greatly from the old society, and was very thankful to the Party. She always told people, "I was very satisfied with my life, the money which I use now is all given by the government, I will save the money for this country". She always bought something cheap to eat and seldom bought new clothes, often mending them again and again (Chen Juyun, 1981:178).<sup>5</sup>

Looking through the official journals, one finds that Chinese women's liberation was shown to be connected with China's political system and the economic change determined by state policy. The representation of Chinese women was mainly controlled by official attitudes. In the 1960s, it seemed that women had no gender, especially during the Cultural Revolution.

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<sup>5</sup>Chen Juyun (gender unknown) *Ta liuxia yike jinzi ban de xin* (She left her golden heart with us) in *Wei gongchan zhuyi shiye xianshen de renmen* (The people who devoted themselves to the Communist Revolution). 1981, p.178 Beijing Press.

## The Cultural Revolution

The Eight Model Plays occupied the whole media during the Cultural Revolution, when they dominated Chinese literature. For instance, in *Hong Dengji* (The Red Lantern), three special characters are portrayed in one revolutionary family. Grandma Li was a brave lady, a widow whose husband died for the Revolution. As she said, she already given her life to the revolution. Li Yuhe, an unmarried son of Grandma Li's, was a worker, who devoted himself to the Communist Party. Li Tiemei was an adopted daughter of Li Yuhe whose parents had also died for the Chinese Revolution. This was a revolutionary family. Images of women at that time described how the pioneers gave their lives for the Chinese Revolution. *Hongse niangzijun* (The Red Women Soldiers) portrayed the central character, Wu Qinghua, who was exploited by the local tyrant, Nan Batian. She was saved by a soldier named Hong Changqing, escaped from the Nan Batian and later joined the army. The whole context of the play expressed how she hated and accused the old society, and how the Communist Party of China saved her from her hard life.

*Shajia bang* (Shajia Village) is another Model Play, whose central character is an old woman, Grandma Sha, with no husband. The play describes how she looked after wounded soldiers. With comradeship, she treated them as her own sons, cooking, doing laundry, and mending for them.

During the Cultural Revolution, women had no femininity. Women were the same as men. Women even dressed like soldiers. Everything was symbolic of revolution.

But as the Chinese social context changed rapidly in the 1980s, the discussion was carried along with it. Revolutionary comradeship was no longer mentioned as an indispensable element of marriage; it was replaced by notions of as a compassionate partnership managed by an emotionally sensitive wife. Adornment and sexuality became matters of public concern to a degree undreamed of in the 1950's. (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:7)

The Cultural Revolution lasted for over ten years (1966-1976). At the beginning of the Revolution all the newspapers announced, 'This revolution will challenge everyone's souls.' The whole nation was involved in political struggle and the people suffered from the Revolution as class struggle took precedence over all other issues, including those of gender equality.

Serious disagreements among China's leaders about how to build socialism, as well as long-standing fictional conflicts, combined with popular social resentments about the persistence of old elites and emergence of new ones after 1949 (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:3).

In the 1960s and 1970s, articles in *Chinese Women* that reflected women's deeds concentrated on outstanding personal achievements rather than simply their hard work.

Compared with articles from the 1950s, among representations of women in *Chinese Women*, the ages of women represented tended to increase. In the 1950s, images of women focus on younger women, but by the 1970s, the achievements of older women were more in evidence. The content during that period mainly described how these women strove (Feng Xiaotian, 1992:18).<sup>6</sup>

### **After the Cultural Revolution**

In 1976 Mao Zedong died. The 'Gang of Four' (Mao's wife Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyua, and Wang Hongwen) were arrested and the Cultural Revolution ended. China started its economic reform from the early the 1980s. A variety of the changes and experiments happened after the new leaders took into power. Deng Xiaoping himself urged political reform. Hu Yaobang and Zhao Zhiyang were bold reformers who reopened the debate on political reform.

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<sup>6</sup>Feng Xiaotian, a man, "Changing images of women: analysing women's images" *Chinese Women*. July. 1992, pp.16-18.

Although reform of the organs of party and state in China in the 1980s was superficial and hesitant, there was a significant growth in alternative sources of power, influence and information in the form of a free press and publishing industry, the establishment of private companies, voluntary associations, private schools and other institutions as a result of what are usually referred to in China simply as 'the reforms' (Davin, 1996:93).

The new policies increased women's opportunities in the society.

The effects of the economic reforms on women generated an enormous amount of discussion, both in personal conversations and in the press. Women's private lives became the focus of public debate in the 1980's for several other reasons as well. A number of problems that had been building for over a decade were of pressing concern to policy-makers and citizens like (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:5).

Women writers could tell stories with 'women's voices', and the numbers of women writers mushroomed in the 1980s, including Zhang Jie, Kan Rong and Dai Ho Jing. A new life was suddenly given to the world of Chinese literature. They wrote of ideas, dignity, values and the role one should play in society.

In later chapters, I shall describe representations specifically of professional women in journals and magazines between 1986 and 1996. This section continues to look at women more generally. Earlier, in 1980, Kan Rong's famous novel, *Ren dao zhong nian* (When you are middle aged) described professional women's tensions at work and in their family, and was made into a film. The novel described Doctor Lu Wenting's career and daily life, in my view reflecting professional women's lives around that time. Doctor Lu's excessive workload harmed her health. Every day she rushed between work and family. She would put down her surgical knife in the hospital and pick up her vegetable knife at home. She would take off her white clothes in the hospital and, within fifty minutes, put on a blue apron at home. In the

end she was very ill and couldn't get up. As she lay in bed in the hospital, she recalled her many working experiences in the past. Years ago, when she graduated from Medical University and had got a job in a hospital and was very happy. For many years she worked very hard, and contributed her whole youth to her work and her family. Doctor Lu's experiences in the novel, to me, represent many professional women's lives by the time they were middle-aged in contemporary China, but only for the last twenty years has it been possible to publish such images of women's lives.

Zhang Jie was the first woman writer to write women's characters from an internal psychological perspective in her novel *Fangzhou* (The Ark, 1983). This described three suffering women figures. All had a terrible lives, both in their careers and their personal lives. Liang Qian was a film director but her colleagues did not support her, because she was a woman. Although her father was a government official, she was pale and shrunken, and her hair dishevelled. She had barely reached forty and yet she already had the look of an elderly woman. She did not divorce her husband because of her father's authority. Liuquan was harassed by her boss at work and stigmatised by her colleagues; she was very sensitive and emotional. She divorced her husband because of his sexual abuse of her. Cao Jinghua suffered because she could not bear children, so her husband treated her badly and she got a divorce. At work she was persecuted for expressing her political views. These three women's lives were hard and monotonous, as they faced much pressure from their neighbours and their colleagues. What on earth made these three women have such hard lives? Zhang Jie described how hard it was for women who want to get their real freedom. These three women finally realised that women's liberation couldn't just rely on the protection of the law. 'Women and men are equal in politics and economically independent', but their confidence in social values and their self-awareness were very important.

Zhang Jie's novel was regarded by the critics as unusual because it focused on women, their lives, and desires. She tried to explore the relationships between love and marriage, between individual and social environments from a woman's point of view. Her heroines repeatedly say: "Women's true emancipation comes not only from the attainment of political and economic status but also from their confidence and

drive to realise their value of existence". On the other hand, she emphasised the dynamic spirit of the women who defy tradition and brave hardships in their voyage to freedom. However, her exploration of women's life did not go far as she was trapped in idealism and unable to go beyond realising the social value of women.

When the novel *Fangzhou* was first published in 1982, two women, Yeping and Zhigu were amongst the many ordinary people who wrote to the *Wenhui ribao* (Wen Hui Daily) on 27 April, responding to the novel. They said that Zhang Jie was too critical and her work emphasised the dark side of life too much. Sheng Yin, another woman who wrote in, said:

The writer is much influenced by Western ideas. It seems that she is most enthusiastic when she writes about someone being disappointed, unsatisfied, lonely, angry with society. When she writes about reality, she gives little hope.<sup>7</sup>

Honig and Hershatter (1988) agree that the press became an important forum for debate:

Since the late 1970s, the press has carried lively discussions, and sometimes acrimonious debates, about everything from female adornment to the role of women in the workplace. These discussions are not confined to the pages of newspapers and magazines; they permeate private conversation and visibly affect public behaviour, especially in the China's cities. Not since the May Fourth Movement of 1919, when iconoclastic students challenged Confucian norms for women, has gender been so visible as a subject of controversy and category of analysis (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:2).

Chinese economic reform changed the whole of society. Women's problems were an issue that concerned many in society, and there was considerable debate on the new role women played at the work and in the family. What social identities should

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<sup>7</sup>*Wenhui ribao* (Wenhui Daily), 27 April, 1982.



women recreate in the new era of social transition? In China the discussion of women's problems was not only by women writers, but also by ordinary women. For example, The Intellectual Women's Forum was organised by *Guangming Daily* in 1992 and lasted for about two years. Some discussions were in official journals, some are in popular magazines.

### **From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s**

Honig and Hershtatter (1988) explained the situation in the 1980s very well:

China in the 1980's was not a society silent about its social problems. Chinese writers attributed the inferior status of women to three main causes. The first was what they called "feudal remains" - traditional attitudes that caused people to look down on women, and women's internalised notion of themselves as inferior. The press offered an upbeat solution to these problems: women should depend on the law and the Party to chastise discriminators, and never lose faith in their own abilities. Behind this advice was an assumption that it was just a matter of time until these feudal remnants disappeared. This analysis overlooked inequalities that were preserved or actively generated in the new society. It paid little attention to the persuasiveness of discrimination, or the difficulty of believing in oneself while being socialised to think that one was inferior (Honig and Hershtatter (1988: 338)

Problems in marriage are a special challenge to society and women's problems are drawn to the attention of many people. This is specifically a women's problem, it is the problem for liberated women. The achievement for this period is that women could talk about women's problems from their own point of view.

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995. The conference influenced women's issues and women's studies. It helped to push women's emancipation forward not only in Chinese society but also outside China. The conference played a very important role in China in the 1990s. The NGO

reported in the newspapers. The conference definitely provided an opportunity for Chinese women to see different things and to understand women from other parts of the world. It gave Chinese the ideal of speaking their minds freely.

The following explains the United Nation's Women's Conference in Beijing well:

The conference not only contributed to the processes of change with the ACWF [All Chinese Women's Federation], but it also encouraged the growth of more autonomous women's organisations, articulating new demands, bringing fresh perspectives, and sowing the seeds of a feminism from below (Howell, 1997:249).

### **Conclusion**

After the Republic of China was founded in 1949, Marxist policy was implemented in China and state policy promoted women's participation in the paid labour force. Chinese women entered the workplace from their homes, and most could now work in the same places as men. Women were in theory liberated from the home, but in practice they usually carried the burden of home and work now. Nevertheless, it was a big step for Chinese women.

During the Cultural Revolution gender issues were subordinated. Class struggle was the first thing in Chinese society. It was the most important thing in people's daily life. Women had to follow the national ideal by losing all femininity. Women were told through the media by which means they could 'overcome their natural limitations'. Images of women through the Eight Model Plays shows that women could hold up the 'whole sky'.

In the 1980s and 1990s professional women were pushed onto the centre stage in Chinese society. Discussion of women's problems in Chinese publications are now more detailed and much more critical. They inquire into what they face and how they are challenged by being a successful woman? This is discussed in Chapter Three.

## **Chapter Three: Professional Women in China: Analysis of Articles from Official Journals (1986-1996)**

### **Official Discussions**

Women's issues have attracted an enormous amount of attention in post-reform China in all types of publications from the most popular magazines to serious academic journals. What is striking about this writing is its great diversity. Some is complacent about the present situation of women in China; much is quite critical. It is written from many perspectives, some feminist, many which are not and some which are clearly anti-feminist (Davin, 1996:93).

This chapter will explore articles about professional women in official journals, and will show that they are as diverse as Davin shows writings on women's issues to be overall. One of the most controversial topics in the study of women in contemporary China is that of professional women. Since the economic reforms implemented in China in the 1980s, professional women have become much more noticeable. For instance, women scientists, women managers, women teachers, and women engineers are very conspicuous in different social environments. What draws people's attention here is professional women's problems, professional women's achievements, professional women's influences in society. This study will illustrate the outcome of the economic reform for them, especially the improvements in women's self-awareness, their problems of tensions at work and in the family, their conflicts between idea and tradition. There are large numbers of articles which describe how Chinese professional women devote their lives both to their families and to the economy.

At the beginning of the economic reform (by the end of 1970s), women's problems became a concern of the media. Discussion of women's problem began not only in women writers' work but also in different journals and magazines.

The situation of women in the 1980s, and public debate over what their social role should become, was shaped by the past but was not a re-enactment of it. The world of pre-1949 China, and the role that women played in that world, was gone (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:6).

The economic reforms gave Chinese professional women a wide stage to demonstrate their abilities in the 1980s in different parts of China. As Honig and Hershatter wrote:

China has a state-controlled press, and issues about the lives of women appeared in that press at least in part because they touched on areas of concern to the state. But official concern did not imply that government and Party officials had a clear-cut set of policies they wanted to impose (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:9).

China had changed since the May Fourth Movement in 1919 (see Chapter One). This was the second time when Chinese women could openly discuss women's problems. Compared with the past, there had been a great change in official attitudes since the economic reform began. Before the economic reform, or, in other words, from 1949 to the late 1970s, the articles in official journals were all stereotyped. Everything was good, no dark side was reflected in official articles. Nearly all representations of women were heroic. If they had some personal problems, they could give up their own will and devote themselves to construction of socialism.

I have selected articles published in official journals, in Chinese, from 1986 to 1996. The official journals changed in the mid-1980s from the old pattern to the new. *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese Women) is particularly important as the voice of the Communist Party for women, and began a landmark debate in 1986. The debates themselves were new in this journal, which began to present a range of voices in about 1985.

In 1986, *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese Women) started a discussion about "What is the standard for Chinese women, what is the standard to be a good wife and a loving

mother?" This was in a new section "Debating Forum". The debate was intense. Some said "a virtuous wife and a good mother" was a feudal concept, and that women in contemporary society cannot follow the traditional rules. Some said that to be a virtuous wife and a good mother was a woman's natural role, or that to be a virtuous wife and a good mother was a good moral code inherited by Chinese women. The articles which follow here are good examples. I shall present them with the gender and language of the author, and shall describe them or translate sections, as appropriate.

### **Article 1:**

Feng Yuan (a woman), written in Chinese, "What are the rules for Women in China Today? In the contemporary era professional women are facing the impact of new ideas". *Zhongguo funu*, (Chinese Women), May 1986, pp.4-6.

Because of the development of the women's movement many women were brought to a new stage. They are not just at home but enter society. So a new ideal "Superwoman", still a virtuous wife and a good mother, was created. Simply, women not only think about what people eat and drink but create the wealth of society.

### *Conflict Between Idea and Tradition*

It is traditional to evaluate women through traditional discrimination, passed from generation to generation, in for example, selecting women cadres, choosing group leaders, encouraging, rewarding and promoting. A woman was being accepted not because of her ability but because "she is a woman". It seems that women may have been selected not for their contributions and service to the nation, but because society sympathises with 'the weak'.

### *Conflict Between Idea and Reality*

A woman writer, Xiao Hong, in the 1930s sighed with feeling:

“The sky for women is lower, and women’s wings are too heavy... I want to fly, but I am afraid of falling down”.<sup>1</sup>

Although professional women in China today are not so sad, yet they are still overburdened. Do not conclude that women’s emancipation is complete, because they leave their kitchens and participate in society ... In fact, the forces of production are low in our society. Women have to do more work which increases tensions at work and in families. The increase in work for society creates a contradiction with domestic work. Women can not manage the double roles, the roles are too hard to bear.

### *Conflict Between Idea and Idea*

Women’s thoughts relate to the era, they want society around them to pay much more attention to them. The difference between men and women is that men still use their traditional thoughts to judge what women should be. The standard for “a good wife and loving mother” is for husbands to hope their wives will not spend much more time at work than at home. So 'a super virtuous wife and mother' needs to be accepted and understood by men. This is women’s dream come true.

### Comments:

Such a debate would not have been published in the 1970s. The main theme of the debate was the value of women in the 1980s, and the discussion showed that the ideal had changed over time. “Women are not at home but enter society” .... “Women not only think about what people eat and drink but create the wealth of society” ... “Women are the same as men, they have their right to demonstrate their values to society”. Discussion about women’s problems is now presented as the concern of the majority of women. For instance, Huang Minshu, the chairwoman of All the Women’s Federation in Hunan Province wrote:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted on p.6 of the article.

<sup>2</sup>Huang Minshu (a woman), in Chinese, “ Is it the criteria for Chinese women to be a good wife and loving mother?” *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese Women), July. 1986, p.8.

A woman should be a virtuous wife and a good mother. First, a good wife has good abilities and a high moral standard. Second, women themselves have natural ability, this should be respected by society. Third, the moral standard is improving. Fourth, it is good for women's emancipation. Fifth, it can encourage women to demonstrate their abilities.

Luo Ping, a lecturer in Philosophy at Xiang Tan University<sup>3</sup> gave the opposite opinion and wrote:

Was it a good moral standard to be a virtuous wife and good mother, or a burden? I confirm that it was a burden. Because to be a virtuous wife emphasised women's responsibility to the family. The rules demanded responsibility of the wife, not the husband. The ideal of a virtuous wife and good mother hindered a woman entering society, strangled a woman's abilities and asked a woman to sacrifice herself to her husband.

The articles above show that, in 1986, women's problems were discussed in public. Their freedom to speak in *Zhongguo funu* demonstrated that official attitudes had changed.

## **Article 2:**

Qiu Yulan (a woman), written in Chinese, "A professional woman's twenty-four hours". *Chinese Women*, July 1986, p.13.

Illustration: A design with a clock in the middle, a pot and bowls in the kitchen, children's clothes hanging, a woman on a bike, and a portrait of a woman who is opening her eyes.

I am "*Yige buhuo zhinian de zhongnian funu*"(a middle-age professional woman). I

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<sup>3</sup>Luo Ping (woman), in Chinese, "Is it the criteria for Chinese women to be a good wife and loving mother?" *Zhonggou funu* (Chinese Women), July. 1986, p.9.

have a happy family. I want to talk about how I spent my twenty-four hours. After the clock ended my dream, I got up at half past six in the morning. I put on my clothes in a hurry and went directly to the kitchen. After half hour's playing a special 'symphony' with a pot, a pan, bowls and spoons, breakfast was ready. Three bowls of boiling noodles were on the table, my husband and my son were both smiling. Looking at their smiling faces, I was proud of being a good wife.

My son went to school happy and gay, my husband went to work humming and I had to strive. I combed my hair, washed my face and I found my socks in a mess on the bed. Then I started eating my breakfast. When I looked at the clock Oh, dear, half past seven, it is time for work. Immediately, I ran quickly. It is not far from my home to the factory. A few minutes later, I arrived at my office. People were waiting for me outside. I tried my best to work well. To be patient, to be a good office worker.

At half past eleven, a radio in the factory sounded loudly. It was lunch time. I worried about my home where there was a mess in the morning. I must get it in good order before my husband comes back. Otherwise I would feel embarrassed if he comes back with his friend. I hurried home and tidied my room as fast as I could. Half an hour later, lunch was ready. A slow husband came back just in time, and my son came back after school. During lunch, a message came from my mother that she was very ill. She needed be sent to hospital. It is my duty to look after young and old. Immediately, I left home by bike.

At half past one in the afternoon, I was in my office, my head covered with big drops of perspiration. I worked till I completed my work. After work, I had to bargain in the "free market", then prepared to cook a tasty dinner for my husband and my son, otherwise they would complain. After dinner, my husband left home. I finished doing all the washing up, then helped my son with his homework while I was washing clothes, for I wanted to be a loving mother. Someone knocked at the door, in came a friend of my husband. My husband was not in, so, as a host, I should receive a visitor. After the visitor left I was so tired that I went to bed.



Often I think there are twenty-four hours a day, one thousand, four hundred and forty minutes. Not including the time for eating, drinking and sleeping. Not even one minute belongs to me for studying, enjoying. Not one minute controlled by myself. I hope I have a happy family, I hope I do well in with my work, I hope I become a good professional woman conforming to Chinese moral standards. However, day by day, I feel tired, tired.

Comment:

This article is a personal voice which represents women's own story. I think from my own experience that it shows professional women's real life. What is the moral standard for Chinese women ? What is the rule for women to be a good wife and loving mother? It is a critical article. But it reflects life and I think it is extremely true.

This was a big change for Chinese women, presenting women's stories and women's problems in the official journals. There were no party political reasons for this. Women are tired, professional women are tired. How to solve their problems, their tensions between their work and family? Is the best way for them go home to be a virtuous wife and loving mother? Some agreed with the suggestion to let women go home and come back to the original *Nangeng nuzhi* (Men works in the fields and women weaving and sewing at home) position, but most were against this suggestion.

**Article 3:**

Jing Hua (gender unknown), written in Chinese. "Intellectual women in China today". *Chinese Women*, July 1987, pp.2-5.

Illustrations: There are four pictures in this article. One is of three women who are working on their computers in their offices. One is a woman who is speaking on the telephone. One woman is writing. Last, two women are working outside.

For many years, we used to generalise people's work from two aspects - mental and

physical. It tends to be abstract when we categorise, evaluate, manage people in this way. To different degrees, we ignore people's personal characters, wills, thoughts, abilities, needs, and the elements of physiology and psychology.

This article emphasises intellectual women's status, environment, psychological characteristics, and features of their jobs. A measure is advanced of how people make a balance between work and family, exclusive of 'housework'.

### *Evaluating the Social Status of Intellectual Women*

Intellectual women account for four in every thousand women (4/1,000) in our country. Compared to intellectual men the women are seen as inferior not only in quality but also in ability. The ability of intellectual women is evaluated as much lower than that of men. Statistics in 1984 from the Chinese Social Institute showed that 1,270 were praised for their academic achievements. Out of 4,423 candidates, 1,190 were women who accounted for 26.9 per cent. In the end, 410 men were selected as the best for their contributions, which accounted for 12.8 percent of men who were doing research. But only 12 women were selected, which accounted for 1 percent of women who were doing research ... Because very few women participate in politics, women accounted for less than 5 percent of women cadres. Women are employed in high positions even so. Men's will and judgement play very important roles in our society which demonstrates that men dominate the whole society. Intellectual women have very few chances to make an important decision, even if it is connected closely with their academic work. This reduces women's opportunity to contribute to society.

### *Intellectual Women's Environment*

#### - Family

The members of intellectual women's families score high in education. Questionnaires from 1,400 women scientists in 1985 showed that their husbands' education and jobs were usually as the same as theirs, and both of them could think

about their work and study at home.

#### - Social Environment

Men and women can not be equal in real life. Statistics from the Shichuan Science Institute in 1986 showed that according to 5,778 questionnaires from women scientists, 57.6 percent of women agreed that they were dominated and despised by the cadres from their community. Only 5 percent of them were supported by their community ... It is claimed that women's ability is lower than men's which is the conclusion of the majority. This demonstrates that social environment and public opinion are not supportive for women in developing their abilities.

#### Comment:

Economic reform provided women with an opportunity to think of their position, and to find a place in contemporary society. For the second time in Chinese modern history, women's problems were the concern of society. But the cultural background still produced conflicts between women and men. The situation was different in 1919, for that was not a Party political movement. However, when women discussed their problems and spoke their minds, that showed they were looking for high ideals, a successful career, and a beautiful life. I feel that there are things many women wanted to say, that these women represented the majority.

Chinese economic reforms also caused problems and the question arose how to solve the social problems, and what women's position will be in the future, especially for professional women.

#### **Article 4:**

Li Jing, (gender unknown), written in Chinese, "Where is my future?" *Chinese Women*, January 1988, pp.6-7. Letter in the debating forum.

Dear Editor, I am thirty-seven years old. I am a professional woman with much

education. During this economic reform, I lost my work. Why are other colleagues and I unemployed now? I can't understand the policy? Where is my future? I have two children. Because they are often ill, I have to ask for leave and look after them. Now the factory wants to increase economic returns, so the women who are unemployed in our factory could get 80% from their salary, and go back home .... Women like me got together. Some said: "What is the economic reform for? Is the purpose of the reform to let women go back home?" Others said "the economic reform was good for the others, but to us it tastes bitter." Old friends went away. Sometimes neighbours will say "Why do you not go to work? Oh, you are unemployed". Anyway, when we are back home, no one can understand us. I feel very uncomfortable ... I am writing to you, for myself, and for others. We hope people can understand us, and we can find a new future.

Comment:

In 1988 as in 1986, *Chinese Women* published discussions about women's future. The discussion began with the women of Daqiu zhuang.

Daqiu zhuang (Daqiu village) is located in the suburbs of Tianjin City. There, it was said, 85% women preferred to go back home to do housework. The reasons given were, first, there were heavy industry factories in this village, for instance, steel rolling and casting so the work was not very suitable for women. Second, industry also needed social support, so if women went back home this reduced the costs. Third, women in this village entered the workplaces encouraged by a political movement (for example, the Great Leap Forward), not of their own will. This discussion about *Women's Future* lasted for about one year. Some people said that one hundred women have one hundred choices, if women in Daqiu zhuang prefer go back home to sacrifice themselves to men that is their choice. Some people said perhaps there were only two choices for them, one was to take the heavy work in the factory, the other was home, so they chose the second. Women in Daqiu zhuang went back home from their workplace. Compared with women who have difficulties even in getting food, this

was much better, but it was not a good way for women's liberation.

The economic reform challenged not only the factory women in Daqiu zhuang, but also professional women, who read these official statements about them. Professional women needed to look to their new position and the new future. China changed the 'permanent job for everybody' policy, so that instead you were looking for a new job according to your ability. "Where is my future?" and "Thinking about Daqiu zhuang women" raised many arguments in society.

#### **Article 5:**

Tian Shufan, (a woman), written in Chinese. "I admire the women of Daqiu zhuang". *Chinese Women*, March 1988, p.9. (Debating Forum).

After I finished reading the discussion articles about Daqiu zhuang women in *Chinese Women*, I thought much about the past. At the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the great majority of women went out of their home and entered society. Some said this was a symbol of women's emancipation; some said this was equality between men and women, and economic independence. This definitely was a great success for women entering society. But women's loads were redoubled - women's life is like a clock which goes round every minute ... If the income of my family could stay at keep the same level, I would prefer to stay at home rather than to get one more penny. I admired the women in Daqiu zhuang. Imagine when children come back from school, Mummy's smiling face in front of them, how sweet the children feel! Mummy talking with children about school life, helping them with homework ... If the situation gave children this, perhaps crime will be reduced. But I had to work from morning till night, not only housework but also my work. Day by day I felt very tired, I hope the beautiful day when women are liberated from being overburdened will come soon.

#### Comment:

These official discussions about "Women's future" admitted a big social problem. Was it the right way for Chinese women to face the future, go back home or not? The

problem was a big concern of the media, because it connected with everyone's fates. The economic reform made some people feel happy, to some it tasted bitter, some were hesitant. What was women's position in the changing society? This was the challenge for five hundred million Chinese women.

**Article 6:**

Tang Xun (a woman), written in Chinese. "Why has another teacher suffered untimely death?" *Chinese Women*, September 1988, pp.4-7.

Why has another teacher suffered untimely death? For someone who understands me, will worry about me, for someone who can not understand me will think, what am I looking for? Why? This is yet another woman who went in a hurry ... Recently I received a letter written by forty-three teachers and signed together. After I finished reading, tears ran down from my eyes, for another middle-aged teacher whom I knew intimately had died. She was only forty-five.

Wu Meiqi, was a teacher of Beijing Ritan Primary school. She became a teacher in 1962, and devoted her youth to the children ... In 1987, it was confirmed that she had problems with her heart at her health check in hospital and the doctor told her she needed an operation. Wu agreed with the doctors suggestion that she needed an operation.

In fact, she would not have died if she could have paid a deposit of thirty thousand yuan to the hospital for the operation. It would have saved her life. When teachers of that school told me the details with tears in their eyes. Unfortunately she could not pay for that, even the school where she worked had not enough money. Because the fee for the operation was delayed while her husband borrowed the thirty thousand yuan, it was too late for her. She was sent to the hospital, and the next day she died.

"She worked for this school for over twenty years, but she died of no money for the operation. The students of the school and all her colleagues cried."

Comment:

The position of “teacher” is a job called holy in China. Confucius was the first teacher, who was respected and had a high reputation in Chinese history of education. There are many sayings such as:

To be a teacher, is to be like a candle. It gives light for others, and destroys itself. This is holy and noble. Some are respected as teachers, perhaps the only benefit. Teachers are always *Qingpin* (clean and poor).

Again, such reports were not previously published. Before the economic reforms, such tables were documented by the government for community leaders, head teachers etc., but not published. The Economic Reform also challenged schools, teacher’s salaries were always low. This made some teachers do part- time teaching in the evening, which was very tiring after working a long day in school.

Five years later, an official discussion on 'Intellectual Women' in *Guangming ribao* (Guangming Daily, also an official paper), in 1993, lasted for about a year. The content of the discussion was based on women’s achievements in many areas. Still some articles in that forum were very *Qianpian yilu* and *Zhengtong* (politically acceptable and stereotyped: see next chapter). Although some problems were pouring out, yet to some degree, it was not real. This forum on 'Intellectual Women' was an expression of government policy to display women’s problems. I think that it was because the United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women was to take place in 1995 that this forum expressed specific political views and the articles were carefully prepared to this end

Let us come back to the women managers in the 1980s and 1990s. Among professional women, it is women managers who get the most attractive representations, in both official and popular journals. Some articles describe their personal experiences, how they suffered, what they faced in their successful career; others describe their problems after success. When people see flowers and applause

for these women managers, behind their successful experiences lie much struggle, sadness and regret. One article expresses this so vividly that I want to quote much of it here:

**Article 7:**

Shang Shaohua (a woman), written in Chinese “Famous Business Women Talk about When They Realise Themselves to be Women” *Chinese Women*, November 1988, pp.4-6.

Illustrations: There are seven portraits of women in this article, some are smiling, some are serious.

Although I met them only once, yet the impressions stay in my mind. Their abilities, personal characters, successful careers are obviously attractive to the people around them. But when I talked with them during the National Sixth Conference, and asked them “when did you realise you are a woman?”, their emotions were very complicated. Their stories of what happened in the past were genuine, gentle and soft, with a little bit of sadness; they are full of many amazing pictures in their lives, of moments which made them realise that they are women, which they will never forget.

An Baodong: When I am in adverse circumstances, supported by the women’s federation, I realise that I am a woman.

An Baodong is a director of an ornaments factory in Beijing, and a vice-director of the Chinese Enterprises Association. During the conference she said little, but what she said was very powerful. Journalists all turned on their recorders and raised their lights; her frank speech and abilities were full of attraction. As she said:

“I will never forget the day of 23 December 1980 all my life. That day, *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), with twenty other newspapers in China, published news which reported the things that happened in our factory. It said that “Factory in serious breach



of financial discipline, squandering bonuses, sack all cadres!". You cannot imagine what it means in China, what it symbolises, when the news that you have been sacked is published in the newspapers (Probably, you have no such experiences in your life). We wanted to change the system of management, but we lacked experience, indeed we had some problems when we changed the system in our factory, but I still thought that these were the problems of a factory in transition. The reason why I was sacked was because I disagreed with what the newspaper said. After I was sacked, I worked in another factory ... I remember very well how, in the Conference in 1984, ten more journalists wanted to interview me, but, when they heard the news which had been published in 1980, immediately they left. From then on, when someone wanted to interview me, the first thing I told them about myself was: I was sacked from my post in the factory and it was in the news in 1980. One article called 'Feminist' told of my successful career (it was by Zhao Jianguo in *Renmin ribao* (Beijing Daily)). After that, I was accepted by society."

Peng Bin Ru: When men and women are not equal I realise myself to be a woman.

Peng Binru was born in a traditional peasant family. She went to Chengdu Textile College in 1958, but, because the college closed, she had to go back to her home. She married a good peasant man, and has four children. For almost twenty years, she worked from sunrise till sunset. Now, she is a director of a condiment factory. Looking at her, you cannot believe that she used to be a peasant, for there is no trace of a peasant in her.

"The thing which I did, the job I chose, was to make a living. My husband died in September 1981. I owed a debt of five thousand Yuan. Looking at my four malnourished children and my parents, over seventy years old, I made up my mind to earn money. One after another, I went to Yunnan, Guangdong, Hunan, and Hubei provinces to trade in peanuts and clothes. I worked very hard, with layers and layers of padding on my shoulder, baskets broken one by one. But my money increased from one hundred and fifty-five yuan to thirty thousand yuan. I paid all my debts, our life changed to one even much better than before. In September 1985, I collected money

from three peasant families, I tried to organise the Meishan Sesame Oil Factory. I hated anyone who looked down upon a woman. So, when men and woman are not equal, I realise that I am a woman ... I applied for credit in our county, but I could not get it, for I was a woman. Comparing our factory with the others, they were at the same level as ours, but they could get the credit because the managers of the factories were men. It was thought that, 'She is a woman, she can't be successful'. I applied for credit everywhere. Some of money was obtained through social donations. The interest was higher, but we expanded our production. Now, there are over fifty products in our factory, and more than one thousand enterprises in twenty-five provinces of China are selling the products produced by our factory. We will create an output worth over 10,000,000 yuan this year ... I do hope that the economic areas won't be all occupied by men.

Chui Shuying: When my achievement were above men's, I realised that I am a woman. When I couldn't hold my tears back, I realised that I am a woman.

Chui Shuying looks delicate and pretty, when she talks to people she has an open smile on her face. Looking at her, I am touched. For it is not easy to be a director of Shenyang Aluminium Products. Her husband died in an accident in 1967 when he was only thirty-two years old. She lived with three young children and she looked after her mother-in-law who was seventy-eight years old. But when her elder son grew up, he suddenly died of an acute disease. Fate is unfair to her, but she kept trying and became a famous businesswoman.

"I was promoted a director of Shenyang Aluminium Factory in 1984. As soon as I was in the post of a director, I realised that, 'I am a woman'. For if men become directors, there are congratulations from their friends and relatives. But when I was promoted to director, my friends and relatives suggested that I give up. Because of the sufferings and the unusual experiences in my life, most of my friends and relatives suggested to me that I should enjoy myself for the rest of my life. Some even attacked me satirically, 'Even men can't do it well, how can a woman?' Yes. The circumstances in our factory at that time were bad. Four years later, great changes have taken place in

the factory, and the economic situation in our factory is much better than before. It created foreign exchange of about thirty hundred thousand Yuan. The welfare of the staff and workers improved, and the salaries of all staff and workers have been increased. I keep renewing my knowledge and have written two books with others ... When I filled a post with credit, and I did better than men, I realised that I am a woman. I am proud of being a woman ... But sometimes I am weak, I can't control my feelings. For example, an old member of staff died, and when we went to see his wife, she cried and I cried before the other cadres of our factory. At some minor accidents of the workers and the difficulties which I met, I couldn't hold back my tears. Often I think that when men directors meet this kind of thing, they can control their feelings. At such moments, I realise that I am a woman".

Jin Lihui: When I am full of feeling for the staff and workers, I realise that I am a woman.

Jin Lihui is a manager of the Business Building of Fuzhou. The business in this building runs in good order. Jin Lihui is famous for her management in that direction. She has a college certificate, she looks smart and she speaks with a Fuzhou accent.

"Women should have women's tastes ... I think that a woman is rich in feelings which are natural. I am strict with my work in the Business Building. People used to call business woman 'Feminists' and 'Iron woman', as if businesswomen have no feelings. Unfortunately, because we are women, we are full of feelings. So when I am full of feelings to my staff, I realise that I am a woman. I helped with their problems six couples who lived apart separately in different places. I solved problems for staff, such as accommodation. I am concerned about the lives of the staff with a woman's warm heart, and look after women when they are pregnant, and I also give them enough time to breast-feed their babies."

He Dachuan: When a woman controlled a woman, I realised that I am a woman. When my children grew up, and their achievements are solaced with themselves, I am proud of being a woman.

We just talked for a while, and tears ran down from her eyes. It was said that He Dachuan and her colleagues created the first recycled oil in China. If there are any problems in the factories in China, people will say: "Please ask for He Dachuan." She has a name like a man's, and, before I met her, I imagined that she might have a very uncaring personal in her character, but in fact, she is very kind and sensitive. After talking with her, I respect her.

"At the beginning of this year, I was selected as one of the ten famous, most reported persons in our city ... I do not regard this as an important honour, but when I have good achievements, I realise that I am a woman. I think that a woman who can strive for herself is a great woman. I have three children, two of them went to University, one is in a high school. They are very good at study. Once, one of my children wrote a composition which was praised in the city, when I watched TV seeing my child receive praise, I felt that I was a woman and a great mother of my children ... When a woman is controlled by a man, I feel sad. Once, I went to a fashion shop, and looked at a very nice garment, I like it so much. I asked the shop assistant for it, but the answer was, 'Who will wear this garment?' When I said that it was for me, she looked at me and said 'This one is not suitable for you'. Then she showed me a very cheap one instead. This is a trifle in real life, but you can see this everywhere in China. I feel sad. At such moments, I realise that I am a woman. Eighty per cent of the staff (80%) are women in our factory. It is said that more women gossip more, so I stipulate that those who gossip will have pay deducted. Women have women's shortcomings, we need to overcome them. In this way, we can be independent. However, I am proud of being a woman.

#### Comment:

In this article, five successful business women managers and directors' experiences and their attitudes to life in terms of women's awareness are shown to have been improved. Nearly every successful woman's history is of courageous striving, of challenge. The development of the women's awareness was based on women's independence.

Women managers realised that they are different from men. They separated from the traditional ideal which was dominated by men. Their successful careers demonstrated that they depended on themselves. They depended on their ability and hard work. The stories which are told by them are full of amazing events. Their career lives represent to me the modern characteristics of Chinese professional women in this era. They illustrate that women's success depended on their self-awareness, and their confidence as women. This is a new kind of confidence and independence not seen before the economic reforms which is now used to represent professional women.

Professional women had been famous in the past. Now, new views of their experiences were again related to the changes in Chinese society. For instance, an article by Xie Yanmin said this:<sup>4</sup>

Chui Shujing was a director of Shenyang aluminium factory. Her personal story makes people feel that she had a miserable life. When she was nearly fifty years old, she became a director of this factory of one thousand workers. She was very successful in her career, but she suffered a lot in her personal life. Her husband died after they had been married for thirteen years, leaving her eleven year old son and four year old daughter. Very unfairly, her son died when he was only twenty six.

The publication of sad features of the lives of successful people was a new idea in the 1980s. Chui Shujing's story emphasised how she concentrated on her work and thought about others. This was the model in the 1980s for Chinese professional women who grew up under the Communist Party of China. In China, there were a group of great women with the same career spirit as Chui Shujing. Their sacrifices reminded people of their strong background belief, which was Communism.

#### **Article 8:**

Wang Hengzhen (gender unknown), written in Chinese. "A Woman Manager Who

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<sup>4</sup>Xie Yanmin (gender unknown), in Chinese, "Zhongliu jishui", *Funu*. November, 1987. pp.4-6

Came from the Yellow Plateau". *Xiandai funu*, May 1989, pp.32-33.

Illustration: Design with some foreign visitors and local products.

Wang Hengzhen (actually, Wang Yu is her name in Han), comes from the Zhang minority area (her name is Jiga in Zhang). She has been a saleswoman since the age of her sixteen. Now, she is a manager in Gansu Native Products Company (a state company). There are eighty counties in Gansu province in the north-west of China, a province rich in local products. Wang is a native products manager who knows much about the geography in Gansu.

Shenzhen city, as a new economic reform zone in China, first opened a window to all the cities inland. Wang Yu once worked there with her colleagues. As soon as Wang Yu arrived in Shenzhen, she was very much shocked at the gap between the inland cities and the economic reform zone. The market in Shenzhen was flourishing. She went to the market to investigate the trade information, and when she saw some native products in this city were very expensive, she was surprised. For example, nourishing medicine and melon seeds were very much cheaper in Gansu than in Shenzhen, and the price in Shenzhen was twenty times that in Gansu.

Because Gansu was poor, backward, poorly informed and disadvantaged by distance, there was a big gap between the coastal areas and the inland cities. When Wang realised the problems which existed in Gansu, she organised a meeting in 1986 which exhibited more than two hundred local products. At the same time, she expanded her trade information and signed contracts with foreign customers. From then on, Gansu Native Products Company was known not only to the people of China but also in foreign countries.

#### Comments:

This article may seem nothing special to some people and is 'old-fashioned' because it does not mention personal problems. But when I selected this article, it was unusual for me, for I once worked in Gansu for more than ten years. I heard her story and I

knew of her from a friend of mine. Perhaps, because it is backward, there are very big gaps between Gansu and Shenzhen. There are many native products in this province, but the people in the villages there are still poor. When a policy permission came to open a window in Shenzhen, so many people went there, but very few people could get a job. China's economic reform first started from Shenzhen. From this article we can see that women live in areas which are very different in terms of geography. Compared to the coast area, the economy in Gansu was not flourishing, Wang Yu's successful career was based on her being the first to realise the problems in Gansu and being brave and confident.

From 1988 to 1989, *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese Women), *Xiandai funu* (Women in Modern China), one official and one semi-official journal, were discussing 'Women's Future' for more than a year. The debate was very interesting, and included the articles selected above. This was not a political movement, but a use of women's problems to promote government policies. Representations of women during this period of time showed clearly that professional women played very important roles in Chinese society. The debate between 1988 to 1989 demonstrated that not only women in Daqiu village feel overburdened, but also professional women in many areas. In my view, these are the real voices of women themselves.

#### **Article 9:**

Zhang Dan (gender unknown), "A regret from a woman manager". *Chinese Women*, February 1990, pp.26-27.

That day, I interviewed Zhang Dan, who was a manager of Shandong Ajiao factory with a high reputation. It surprised me that when I opened my notebook and waited for her quietly, she said:

I really feel regret about my achievements, if I had known what I know today, I would have chosen to be a good wife and a loving mother. What made her feel so sad? As she told me her story, I heard a feminist voice with feelings like an ordinary woman.

Because she was busy, she had no time to care about her son's study. Her son's examination was the worst in his class. She remembered how, one night when she came back from her work at midnight, she found her son in the middle of the yard, on a very cold winter night. When she asked her son, he seemed to be in a dream. It was very dark in the room, he was too frightened to go in. When Zhang Dan told me, her voice was trembling. Her daughter sometimes lived with her grandparents, sometimes with other relatives. When she took her back home, it was very difficult to communicate with her. She felt sad with her daughter. One day when she went to send her daughter to University, there was a stranger in front of her. Her daughter had a boyfriend already. But she knew nothing.

Comment:

This makes me feel that when a woman's achievements are the same as men's, they have suffered more than a man would have. This is a woman manager's story. It is a woman's story. It is a successful woman's story, but she felt guilty about her children. She had a bright career, but she lost a very important thing in her life. (In China, if children have sex when they are teenagers, this is often considered as the parents' fault and sometimes it is criticised by the people around). The saying in Chinese is: "*You soude, biyou suoshi*". (When you get something, at the same time you lose something). Career women are in a very difficult position. Now, they can say so in official journals.

The next article I selected is about politics. Women who participated in politics were not new. For instance, Cai Chang, Zhang Qinqiu and Deng Yingcao were among the top leadership in 1949. All three were elected to the presidium in September that year to plan the formation of the new Republic, as well as to the central People's Government. Cai Chang had been a member and Deng Yingcao an alternate member of the CCP Central Committee since 1945. In 1949 Zhang Qinqin was appointed Vice-Minister of the Textile Industry of China. The official Women's Federation called them 'Model Sisters'.



When Chinese women think about women's emancipation, they always relate it to women pioneers during the Revolution, because they set a very good example for Chinese women.

**Article 10:**

Xiang Zhi (a woman), written in Chinese. "Chinese Women Who Participate in Politics Through Men's Eyes". *Xiandai funu*, No.44. May 1990, pp.5-8.

Some radical feminists are always against men when they mention women's emancipation, as if men are murderers. Often I am drawn by this concept. Sometimes other ideas perplex me with the same question. In real life we have contact with men who are very friendly, especially to women, they try their best to show how gentle they can be. On the earth, who suppresses women? It is very difficult to declare it: perhaps the question itself is not clear. Anyway, I insist that gender inequality exists in society, which shows not only that women are not perfect but that men are not either. If the pressure makes women suffer a lot, yet men can not get their own happiness either. From the historical point of view of dialectical materialism, we can see clearly that concept of inequality for men and women was not the original concept for human beings ...

That afternoon, it was not very sunny; it was spring and a little windy outside. I went to the Great Wall Hotel to interview linguistic experts from this province. They were all men, but I felt relaxed talking with them. Not only were they all friendly, but also they are all experts. I realise that intellectual achievements can make people wise and tolerant. This was our discussion.

*Journalist*: "Women's participation in politics is getting worse and worse. Moreover the original percentage of women cadres and leaders was very low, but it has declined in recent years which has drawn people's attention to this."

*Professor Shui Tianmin* (University of Lanzhou): "The percentage of women participating in politics was higher during the Cultural Revolution. Perhaps the

figures were not true. That probably was very common during that period of time. The percentage is coming down now, Participation in politics is not just about understanding politics but also shows one's basic quality and ability. No matter whether they are men or women, all depend on their abilities".

*Journalist*: "Women account for half the human population. It is very important to have women's voices in important decisions".

*Hu Daiun* (Northwest University for Teachers): "We have a long way to go to women's emancipation. Men and women are equal but this can only come true in certain economic, cultural and historical circumstances. Chinese women are half illiterate. This will influence the improvement of their basic quality."

*Journalist*: "This sounds very sad. We can not accept the negative reality from history. We will try our best to change the situation now."

*Professor Ma Zhijie* (Lanzhou University): "Even if there is a woman chairman in China, can women's problems be solved? There is no chance for women's participation in politics if the economic situation and the education of women's basic abilities haven't been improved. Benazir Bhutto is the premier of Pakistan. Are all the women in Pakistan liberated?"

*Journalist*: "Although women's basic quality is lower than men, yet participating in politics is better than not participating. We still have some who are excellent".

*Professor Ma Zhijie*: "Women's participation in politics is 'Biaozhi' or 'baizhe' (symbolic) (and all the experts there agreed with him). He also said that some women cadres are ornaments. He told a story: A woman manager in a company could not manage at all, yet she always went to restaurants to drink and accompany the guests. At last she could not bear it and gave up".

*Professor Wei Qunming* (University of Northwest Minority): "Even an ornament is better than nothing. Perhaps it will push women's participation forward".

*Journalist*: "It is unfair to cut down the number of women who participate in politics in some places. Actually, women participating in politics will push the whole society to improve greatly. But for women themselves the work is an excessive burden. The life is very hard and they suffer a lot. There is a story about a woman deputy secretary. She felt it was very difficult for her to report to her leader. It is considered to be normal when women talk to women, and men talk to men, but all her leaders are

men. When she talks to them, normally she keeps the door opened. If she closed the door, someone would gossip. She felt much pressure when she talked with her boss. At last she gave up her job and worked in another place”.

Professor Shui Tanming said that not only women suffered from this, but men too. A 'joke' ended the talk: “All is clean if the earth has no women.”

#### Comments:

The article above is selected from *Xiandai funu*, published in Gangsu province in the Northwest of China. Although women's participation in politics in China started early this century, the article shows in this open, public discussion how Chinese men there and elsewhere still think about Chinese women who participate in politics. This discussion is new because it writes in terms of much greater freedom of speech.

#### **Article 11:**

Yan Qi (gender unknown), written in Chinese. “Women Managers in Beijing”. *Chinese Women*, April 1993, pp.28-29.

Meng Shuhui was the first woman manager to own a private company in Beijing in 1985. When many people hesitated over the policy of the state, she invested twenty hundred thousand Yuan and set up a company for selling arts products. Wang Zhiling, another owner-manager said:

“If I want to be a virtuous wife and a good mother, I can depend on my husband and live a very comfortable life. My husband's income is more than ten thousand Yuan, I can buy any clothes and jewellery I want. But I do not like to depend on men, I prefer to get everything by myself, so I decided and went out of my family and set up a bar.”

#### Comments:

Women managers are very much criticised. When people see them appearing in

luxury places occupied by rich men in the past, someone will say, it is too 'liberated' for them. When they are holding a mobile phone, and own their car, people will gossip about them as too luxurious. When they bravely accept what they love, and what they hate, and break out of the traditional conception, someone will gossip about them. In the articles, we see some praise, and some criticism which was symbolic of the era. The success of women managers, and the existence of women managers indicated the progress of the Economic Reforms in Chinese society.

#### **Article 12:**

Wu Zhongjian (a man), written in Chinese "Women's liberation, just for women?". *Chinese Women*, May 1995, pp.16-17.

Men benefit from the traditional cultural background. But sometimes they are also in the opposite position. For instance, men are required to be deeper persons yet cannot express themselves openly. The result for them is that they live not in a relaxed way, but in a depressed way under much pressure. Some statistics show that men's death rate is much higher than women's, but many women only see the world from the point of view of their own gender. They only think about themselves, how they suffered and how difficult it is to be a woman, and forget it is also difficult to be a man. Many people think it is very important to solve women's problems in society. Men's problems should come later. Here I call on society "to protect women in society, men should be protected too, at the same time." Some women cannot bear this: "Men are stronger than women. Do they need to be protected by others? We implement laws for women's protection, there is no still no law protecting men. This does not protect women".

Women lack understanding of men. Society lacks protection for men. This makes men ignorant of women's problems. They think women's liberation is just for women, not for men ... There was an article published in 1986. The author of the article used a pen name, "Nian Zhi". The title of the article, "Adam's difficulty", indicated that women's liberation should be given a new definition...

My experience in the middle of 1980s was I started studying women's liberation theory. From then I was often laughed by men. Often I was introduced as an expert on women's studies. Men think women's liberation is only for women. This can be accepted. But why do some women think women's liberation is not my business? Some even asked my wife, "Why does your husband do research on women's studies?". Some women scholars have asked me, "Do you understand our women? I think only women can understand women".

### Comments:

In this article, I think the fresh ideals and arguments for freedom are influenced by the United Nations World Conference scheduled for 1995. The article presents women's liberation as the concern not only of women but also of men. This is a Western idea, whether or not this article derived from Western writings.

### **Conclusion**

Representations of Chinese women in official journals 1986-1996 to some degree reflected official attitudes. Since 1949, representations of women had been of workers and peasants, and the context of the articles mainly discussed how women devoted themselves to socialist construction. During the Cultural Revolution, representations of women were revolutionary. As the Economic Reforms began towards the end of 1970s, women's position was challenged by the changing policy, and women were represented more in terms of feminism. The difference from the past was not for any political reason. Now, women's problems could openly be discussed in official publications. This was a big change which had never happened before. This is different from the May Fourth Movement, for it is not against the government, nor was it called up by the Communist Party of China.

In the articles about professional women which I have selected, some of the women can tell their true stories, free from political pressures. I think these are the real women's voices in the Economic Reforms and represent great change.

How are the changes of the 1980's affecting the status of Chinese women? No clear-cut answer presents itself; it is impossible simply to say that women's position is either clearly improving or unequivocally deteriorating. The changes are too complex, and too recently begun, to permit such a judgement. Yet the lives of women have been changing more quickly than at any time since the early 1950's (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:335).

## Chapter Four: Publications in English for Foreign Audiences (1986-1996)

The Chinese Government, as we have seen, publishes journals in Chinese which are read mainly in China. It also publishes journals in foreign languages which set out to expand knowledge and understanding of China. These are for readers outside China, although they are available in China, very few people there can read magazines in foreign languages. Those in China who do read them (such as teachers of English like me) are probably interested in what is being said to foreigners rather than in the actual content. Some university students read magazines in foreign languages which they are studying, often to learn the language but not for the content of the article itself. This is because most of the articles in this kind of journal are very '*Zhengtong*', or 'politically formal' (almost, in the Western phrase, politically correct but in the terms of the Chinese Government) and the written style is '*Qianpian yilu*' (formal and stereotyped). To me, the best kind of description of such writing (as it was known to many people in China in the past, during and after the Cultural revolution), is '*Kan kaituo jiu zhi jie wei*' ('when you have read the first paragraph, you know the end', or 'the first paragraph tells you what it will say').

The articles which I have chosen to use in this chapter are from two sources, in their English versions *Zhongguo jianshe* (China Reconstructs), and *Zhongguo huabao* (China Pictorial). *China Reconstructs* was published monthly, but changed its name to *China Today* in 1989. The magazine was founded by Song Chingling, the wife of Soung Ye-Tse, the founder of the Guomintang and published in several languages around the world. It was never a journal specifically for women, but described many aspects of daily life in China and was one of the first Chinese magazines published overseas. I selected articles from 1986, there was one article each year on women's position in Chinese society and on their problems, always on 8th March, International Women's Day; we shall see that for three years this was by the same person. *China Pictorial*, another source for this chapter, is published in two languages, Chinese and English, and distributed widely outside China. In this journal articles about women

appeared not only on 8th March, but also at other times.

In this Chapter I shall summarise selected articles published in English in official magazines for overseas readers from 1986 to 1996. From these I shall try to show women's problems are viewed in different ways. Are the articles still *Qianpian yilu* (stereotyped)? What are the changes? How are they different from articles published by the Chinese Government in Chinese, for Chinese women? Are women's issues discussed differently? Which women are represented to foreigners during this time of historic transition in Chinese society? Unless otherwise stated, all the quotes are taken from the respective articles.

#### **Article 1:**

Tan Manni (a woman), written in English. "Women fight discrimination in jobs and schooling". *China Reconstructs*, March 1986, pp.34-41.

Illustrations: There are three pictures in this article. The first is of Prof. Li Lin, a physicist, working with her colleagues. The second is of Zhang Yayong: "She represents the Tianjin Science and Technology Commission in talks with a Swiss company". The third picture is "Zhang Runxia (middle), a woman mayor of Tongling, Anhui province, a college graduate of the 1960s." All are professional women.

In this article the author analyses women's opportunities in terms of employment, promotion, and education. She claims that discrimination against women existed at the beginning of the People's Republic of China and is nowadays even more complex (as demonstrated by the publication in *Chinese Women* of a series of articles reflecting the inequality of women in China).

A case study is given from 1984, of a young woman from Jilin province. As one of 45 people who took an examination for employment, she did quite well but was turned down. She wrote to the All China Women's Federation, arguing that "the Constitution stipulates clearly that women are equal to men. It is inhuman,



unreasonable and unjust to treat us this way.” She asked, “Why can’t this be stopped? Is there no redress when women are unfairly denied employment?”

In the past thirty years, says the author, from complete suppression under the old ideal, Chinese women have made remarkable progress in social, liberation and economic emancipation. But there are still great inequalities. She details this as follows.

### *Equality of Employment*

At the beginning of the People’s Republic of China, young people could look forward to employment after graduation. During the Great Leap Forward, millions of housewives were brought out of their subservient status and entered society.

### *Less Chance for Promotion*

Women, she says, have less chance of promotion.

Women make up 32.1 percent of personnel with technical (including medical) training. In medicine they are 59.97 percent, and they are 21.11 percent of teachers and researchers in colleges and universities. These figures show that women have become an important force for modernisation. But they still face discrimination when it comes to promotion and opportunities for advanced training.

About 43% of technically trained women said that they had no chance of further study, or less chance of study than men. From a survey by the Human Resources Research Institute, women get poorer degrees than men. The proportion of men to women among technical personnel is 2:1; at the rank of engineer or equivalent the proportion is 4.4 to 1, at the higher rank including senior engineers, research associates, 7.6 to 1. The fourteen women on the Academic Committee of the Chinese Academy of Science are only 3.5 percent of its membership.

## *Creators of Society*

Some units, writes the author, are reluctant to hire women because they may have long maternity leaves (they have 56 days legally, but some units will give them longer leave). This affects women's performance at their work and may have an economic impact on some enterprises. This was not considered as a problem during the 1950s and 1960s, because old people had no jobs and could stay at home to look after the children and a large number of people in the cities were willing to do domestic work.

Nowadays in China there are many crèches for child-care, because of the opening up of education and employment to women and the shortage of people willing to look after children in the cities. If the young woman wants to hire someone for this work, they must be brought from a countryside and it will cost 80% of her wages.

## *Careers versus Housework*

The argument in China about careers versus housework is still very widely debated. The author says, that women's ability and creativity cannot compare with men's. Women's role is to stay at home and work in child-rearing and their own housework. The Human Resources Research Institute study found that "technically trained women still spend an average of four hours a day (six on Saturday) on housework and children".<sup>1</sup> The figure is probably even higher than in a worker's family, because the husbands of 87% of these women are themselves intellectuals, who themselves are very busy. What causes these problems? "The reasons are lack of pre-school care, unsatisfactory primary education and poor social services, so that the housework is still a lonely private battle".

The essential solution to the career-chores contradiction lies in the improvement of social services and modernisation of domestic equipment, says the head of that city's Federation (the city is not named). Nowadays washing machines and refrigerators are

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted on p.40 of the article.

widespread in urban China. More services have been set up, such as washing, cleaning, cooking and cheap restaurants. But still the problem has not been solved.

### Comments:

This is the annual article on women for *China Reconstructs* in 1986, making an annual statement for International Women's Day. The author, Tan Minni has, we are told, worked for over 30 years and has managed to combine her career as a writer for *China Reconstructs* with her life as wife and mother. She was a veteran writer for *China Reconstructs*.

This article illustrates the stereotyped, official tone of the overseas publications. By comparison, the articles in 1986 in *Zhongguo funu* (Chinese Women) showed that the debate about the value of women was a very hot topic. The discussion there focused on how to be an ideal woman, on what are the roles for women in China today (see pp. 44-47). The articles in Chinese wrote of the conflict between idea and tradition; idea and reality; idea and idea; they showed that women's problems were the concern of society and challenged old ideologies. All the writings for 1986 from *Chinese Women* discussed in Chapter Three make readers feel the issues are real. The reason is that they speak their minds, as this author does not.

Tan Minni reports in terms of the *Zhengtong* stereotype. Although she is pounding out some problems in the article, yet the article is narrow and cannot represent the whole voice of that year. For example, a young girl was angry about unfair treatment in her examination. Tan Minni could report this, demonstrating the new liberty in expression, but she did not discuss why the problem could not be solved, because she could not speak her mind due to her position.

In this article, the author described the situation as much better than before. For instance, services had been improved. But domestic work is still a serious problem, and she does not say why. I think that few people are willing to do it because the pay is so low. Professional women are paid little. Basically, there is still much poverty in

China, but Tan Minni could not mention it.

In 1986, a foreign book was published in New York with the same title, *China Today: Her Ancient Treasures* (Cohen and Cohen, 1986). This is a coffee-table picture book, but the following pictures could explain the situation to you clearly, much better than this article. I speak from my own life, my own knowledge of Northeast, Northwest, and south China and of Hong Kong and the UK.

The caption of the first is:

Shopping with Grandpa in the People's Market, Peking. The government provides both day and night nurseries to ensure women's full participation in the work force, but many children are cared for by their retired grandparents. The little girl here, munching on deep-fried bun similar to a cruller, rides in a Chinese style perambulator. The shopping bundles will be put into her carriage.

The second:

A line of nursery-school children at the Peking University Nursery School, Peking, where University employees can leave their children in good hands during work hours. Each toddler keeps in line behind the teacher by holding onto a handkerchief tied to the child ahead.

And the third, of a very charming boy:

A little boy with a popsicle waits in a Chinese-style perambulator at a market in Loyang, Honan province.

When I read this book and saw the picture, it took me back and made me think of the past and the 'real pictures' which I saw in real life. Since the economic reforms changed the standard of living in China, many kindergartens have been opened.

Services have been much improved in China. But the problems have not yet been solved. Discriminations in jobs and education still exist in Chinese society. Some rural areas are still backward. Elizabeth Croll, a British academic, described the situation I remember very well in the early 1980s:

Current policies which make specific reference to the employment of urban women can be categorised into two types: those which call on women to make a more skilled contribution to production and those which call for a reduction in sexual discrimination and institute equal opportunities. Urban working women have been exhorted to increase their managerial, productive and technical skills and productivity ... In the late 1970s interested bodies in China published evidence to show that although women have made great progress in urban China in terms of entering new types of employment and acquiring new skills, they still suffer a great deal from discriminatory practices (Croll,1983:45).

## **Article 2:**

Tan Manni (the same veteran woman writer), written in English, "Vast Sky, Heavy Wings", *China Reconstructs*. March, 1987, pp.13-16.

Illustration: There are three pictures: of a woman painter, a top-ranked woman engineer and a woman director surveying the market. Again, these are professional women, successful women, used to represent professional women in China.

Again, International Women's Day is said to be the time to take stock of women's progress and problems. Economic reforms have changed society and provided more jobs and opportunities for Chinese women than ever before. The world has opened to women, she says, but 'although the reforms of the eighties have provided us with a vast sky in which to soar, our wings are too heavy'.

Women's roles have been changed not only through their rights but also their

economic independence. Today, 40% of the industrial workers are female and women are playing very important role in Chinese society. The policy of opening to foreign investment had provided more opportunities for women in the New Economic Zones than in other parts of China. Between 1987 and 1985, 130 women had become heads of their enterprises in these Zones. With the women's entry to the labour market, domestic work has caused problems in their families. Who should take care of the house and who look after the kids? In the old, feudal society people's values were based on Confucian values. The only ideal a woman was taught to aspire to was to be a virtuous wife and mother. Women were expected to obey their fathers, then their husbands, and finally their sons if their husbands should die.

What is the ideal to struggle for in Chinese women's liberation today? There are three contradictory views from social researchers, she says. The first is that women should do well in both their careers and their families, to become ideal women as seen by men. This means that women must look smart, be professionally capable and devote time to children and housework: the superwoman. The second view sees women's jobs as not very important when compared to men's (their husbands); if a woman is successful in her career, she also should help her husband to achieve in his work. Meanwhile, she has to keep some balance between work and family responsibilities. Some suggest that if domestic work is too heavy for women, women should give up their careers and stay at home to look after their family. The third view is that husbands and wives should share their domestic chores. "It is unfair to ask women take on both a full-time job and home responsibilities".

#### Comments:

Tan Minni was also the author of the one article on women in *China Reconstructs* in 1986, and repeats some of the same themes and issues. Here, she also analyses the situation in the New Economic Zones, saying that women have more opportunities in the industry here. The Special Economic Zones were established in 1979 in southern China, and Economic Development Zones were set up in fourteen coastal cities in 1984. Industrial reform appeared as co-operation with foreigners in a large number of

joint ventures, and many Sino-foreign enterprises were set up. The Party encouraged private entrepreneurs to undertake many activities, including the operation of small restaurants and so on. This definitely provided opportunities for women in China.

However when we compare this with the article from *Chinese Women* written by Jing Hua, "Intellectual women in China today" (pp. 49-51), in which the author evaluated the social status of intellectual women. compared to intellectual men, there too women are seen as inferior not only in skills but also in basic ability. Many intellectual women's families score high in education. But in reality women are seen as biologically unable to be equal to men; Jing Hua gave the statistical evidence. Or take Xie Yanmin's article in *Chinese Women*<sup>2</sup> in the same year as that just outlined: she told the story of a successful woman, Chui Shujing, a director of the Shen Yang aluminium factory, who had a successful career and a miserable life.

Comparing the articles from *China Reconstructs* with articles for women in China, the former, as in the article above, seem to want just to display the policies, not to show women's specific needs, which is a concern of the latter.

I am interested in the title of this article, "Vast Sky, Heavy Wings", as it echoes a description by Xiao Hong in the 1930s.

The sky for women is lower and women's wings are too heavy...I want to fly,  
but I am afraid of falling down.<sup>3</sup>

This was cited in an article in *Chinese Women* (see Chapter Three, p.46) which argued that women's emancipation is not completed by getting out of the house if low incomes still prevail. In my view, although professional women are not so sad in China today, yet they are still overburdened. In the 1930s, the social environment provided few opportunities for women, whose economic situation and social status

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<sup>2</sup>Jing Hua (gender unknown), "Intellectual women in China today", *Chinese Women*, July 1987, pp.2-5.

Xie Yanmin, (gender unknown), *Funu*, (women) Liao Ning, Nov. 1987, pp. 4-6.

<sup>3</sup>Xiao Hong, a radical Marxist feminist writer in the 1930s. This has been quoted in many articles.

placed them at the bottom of the society. So the sky was too low. Women's position in the 1980s still needed to be raised which meant that women's position in society was still too low.

### **Article 3:**

Ma Lizhen (a woman), written in English, "The Debate on Jobs versus Home making", *China Today*, 1989, pp.66-68.

Illustration: There are three pictures in this article. First, Zheng Lizhen, a deputy manager of Tianshan Ceramics Ltd. a Sino-U.S. joint venture is discussing technical details with foreign colleagues. Second is Zhou Xiangdang, one of the fourth generation of female pilots trained in China. Third is Zheng Xiaoying, from China's first women's orchestra; she is now senior conductor of the Central Theatre in Beijing. Again, these are all exceptional women with professions, pictured as representations of typical Chinese women.

The article opens saying that the question of women's employment outside the home, long thought to be a settled issue in socialist China, has in the last few years, become a hot topic of discussion. The following is a preliminary report on the arguments offered on each side, along with some thoughts on the subject by the author.

In this article the author emphasises the debate in 1988 on the future of women, and refers to the article discussed on pp.51-52. This was written by a woman worker who described how she lost her job and felt depressed. She could not accept the fact. She said that she has lost her work because of her children. She was very sad.

The second article the author refers to is the article which described how the women in Daqiu zhuang returned to their homes as housewives because of their very heavy work; because their husbands could earn enough money to support their families (see pp.51-54). They were willing to go back home. The debate in China had gone back and forth for some time that year.



As the author reports, women's employment rate has been higher since 1949 in China than before, and higher than in certain economically developed countries, but now ceased to overcome the problems caused by the under-employment, low salary, low efficiency situation in China.

It is estimated that, nation-wide, at least 20 million employees, of whom over 60 percent are women, have paid jobs but little work to do.

Particularly puzzling to many is the behaviour of women of the village, where 84% percent of the married ones have happily gone back home.

The following paragraph is as the same as the article from *Chinese Women*. One of the women in Daqiu zhuang (Daqiu village) said:

We used to rise before dawn, young and old women like to go to the fields. We worked like men, carrying heavy loads. When we finally got home at night, our men could throw themselves down on the brick bed, but we had to cook, look after our old people and children, wash, mend, feed the chickens and pigs. Now things are much better, the men can earn enough. And someone is really needed at home. We are glad to come back to an easier life.

A woman worker wrote to the magazine and said:

If I could guarantee my present standard of living, I would be willing to go home, too.

However, some women who devoted their whole life to women's liberation said they found it difficult to understand this. Some even said if all women follow in the footsteps of Daqiu zhuang women, how will there be equality between men and women? Opposing views appeared in the debate on jobs and homemaking.

'Returning home' was against accepted views. 'Returning home was considered to be a step backwards. For many events from history showed that women's economic position was connected with women's liberation. Women's exclusion from society depends on women's economic status.

Returning home means taking the old road of becoming dependent on others once more. Therefore, social employment is the best option for women in a socialist country.

Women leaders from the Women's Federation, for instance, Kang Keqing and Luo Qiong, are strongly against women's return home.

The opposing view is agreed by many women, from government officials, cadres from factories and enterprises, women who are middle-aged, young married women and men. They claimed that women's return to the home has benefits for both society and the family. The chores made women even more exhausted, rushing round between home, bus, workshop, bus, home, day in day out without a moment to spare. The situation for women is very important. The problems include latch-key children, care of the sick and the elderly, and the crowded transport.

Comment:

*China Reconstructs* changed its name to *China Today* from 1989. The discussion in this article is about women in Daqiuzhuang, a concern of the media in Chinese society. Women's role aroused arguments in official journals both in overseas publications and in China.

This is another *Zhengtong* article. It is the annual article on women's work. The interest of this article is that the change in official attitudes can be seen. For instance, it is the same story as the story as the article in *Chinese Women* in 1988. The difference is that she wrote one year later than the article in *Chinese Women*. She claimed that the debate on women's future was a passionate debate where letters and

comments were published in 1988, but gave few details about the argument. She said women leaders from all the Women's Federation such as Kang Keqing and Luo Qiong are strongly against women return to home, because many historic events demonstrated that women's economic situation connected with women's liberation. But what caused the social problems? She does not examine this.

#### **Article 4:**

Editor of the journal (gender unknown), written in English. "A Family of Teachers", *China Today*, 1992, pp.16-17.

Illustration: There are two pictures in this article. On page 16, the picture shows Ding's family of four; again she is a professional woman. On page 17 shows Ding Shuqing working at home.

A veteran primary school teacher, Ding Shuqing, talks about her career in education and devotion to teaching that is shared by every member of her immediate family.

Ding started her teaching career in a Primary School in Beijing in 1960 and has been teaching the Chinese language for about thirty-one years. She said that she likes her job because she feels that to be a teacher gives her a high, noble mind. Her father was a teacher and her husband as well. When her son and daughter grew up, they both became teachers.

It is fair to say in recent years teachers have had larger salary increases than people in many other fields.

In 1966, when Ding got married, the total income of the family was only 80 yuan a month. Life was not very hard, but it was simple. As she described "Every time I went shopping, I would carefully select cloth .... I have been lucky not to miss any of the pay rises that have been given to our school staff over the years since my first rise in

1971". There is also an extra 10 yuan per month for those who have been teachers for twenty years. Ding compared today with 1966, when she got married and could only afford a couple of quilts and a set of pillowslips. Her dowry was simply two beds and a desk with two drawers. Ding said that her whole family's monthly income is 900 yuan, including her son and a daughter. She said "we can look forward to pensions when we retire". Her son is a physical education teacher and her daughter a music teacher. Ding said:

At midnight, when the others have gone to bed, I pour myself a cup of coffee and concentrate on my writing. My husband keeps telling me to watch my health and not get overtired. Meanwhile, he takes increasing charge of the housework. I feel uneasy about this, but it seems it won't be until I retire that I shall be able to take care of him.

#### Comments:

Ding Shuqing was a model teacher praised by the author. Her hardworking, simple life is indeed representative of many women's lives in the 1960s. Actually there are many teachers who work in Primary Schools or Middle Schools as hardworking as Ding. A saying is quoted in this article "As long as you have two *dou* of grain to support your family, why bother to be a king of children?". This is another article in which the author seems complacent about the situation of teachers in China. The article from *Chinese Women* in 1988 (see Chapter Three, pp. 54-55). "Why has another teacher suffered an untimely death?" gives another point of view which I think is very true. It describes the tragedy arising from the women's poverty and that of her school.

There is another important article from *Guangming ribao* (Guangming Daily), on the 25th August 1993. "Teacher, you can't be away". This article reported that many teachers who worked in primary schools and middle schools had changed their careers in recent years. Statistics from 1992 showed that about 21,000 teachers in primary schools and middle schools changed their careers in China.

In another article in the same paper on the same day, the title of the article “Shanxi province used four methods to solve the problems delaying payment of teachers’ salaries”. It claimed that delay in paying teachers’ salaries was across the whole country. This was even more serious since this spring. By the end of this May, the total was about 6914.12 yuan, with the longest delay in payment for teachers’ salaries being about twelve months.

Much evidence about teachers’ real lives can be seen in China. So this article in *China Today* in 1992 failed to present the teachers’ situation in China. The headline in this article said “It is fair to say in recent years teachers have had larger salary increases than people in many other fields”. I think it is unfair to say the teachers are satisfied with their salary increases and the author never mentioned the inflation or the economic situation in the market. This article is absolutely the same style as in the Cultural Revolution which suggests that it does not tell the truth.

Compare this article with the articles from 1990 to 1992 in Chinese which I selected, we find Zhang Dan, “A regret from a woman manager” (see Chapter Three, pp.63-65); and Xiang Zhi, “Chinese women who participate in politics through men’s eyes” (see pp.65-67). Those articles are very critical. “A regret from a woman manager” shows that a successful woman manager whose life is not perfect. Behind her achievement, there are things for which she feels regret. This is a change which can also be seen in the article, where “Chinese women who participate in politics through men’s eyes”. Four young university students were interviewed by the author. Their point of view about women who are engaged in politics is new. The different statements showed their attitude to politics, and the publication of different opinions on many topics was allowed. In the past it was impossible to give a different point of view on politics.

#### **Article 5:**

Yi-Da (gender unknown), written in English, “Chinese Women Writing Herstory”,

*China Today*, 1993, pp.35-36.

Illustration: There are three pictures in this article. Cui Shuying, a director of Shen Yang Aluminium examines product quality in Liaoning Province. Second, Lin Jiagui “Deputy director of Nuclear Energy Research Institute of Qinghua University, was honoured as an outstanding woman in science and technology”. Picture three was of Ding Xuesong, the first female artisador (sic) and member of the Chinese People’s political Consultative Conference.

Staff Reporter Yi Da focuses on women and how the new reform is shaping their lives and society

Chinese economic reform has opened the door to women. It provided opportunities for many women in different ways. For example, a newly focused female potential has made many women successful business entrepreneurs. Yu Xueying’s story was described as ‘dramatic’ in this article, the story indicated that great success is based on hard work and more knowledge.

The reform has caused an interesting new social phenomenon. Young, educated, urban women are seeking work opportunities in foreign ventures. As the author emphasised in this article:

Contemporary Chinese women are willing to risk everything for self-realisation. By maximising their talents and potential they have entered a new historical era.

Shi Meng is a good example. She gave up her job in a state institution and got a job in a foreign venture. “She needed more challenge”, the author reported. She said “I am not afraid. I can always find a new one”.

Shi Meng represents many young and educated urban women in China. Bright and inquisitive, they are stimulated by the tide of reform. They desire an

exciting life with constant challenge and progress.

Comments:

The three illustrations in this article showed three successful women, but was nothing about them in the article. For instance, Cui Shuying, a director of Shen Yang aluminium in Liaoning Province.

In the article in 1988 “Famous businesswomen talk about when they realise themselves to be women” (see pp.56-61), where Cui Shuying said that when her achievement were above mens she realised that she was a woman. When she couldn’t hold her tears back, she realised that she was a woman. This article for foreigners lacks the detail, the realism of the other. I think this article’s title “Chinese women writing herstory” should have the same content as the article in Chinese. But there is no depth.

This article is also *Zhentong*. The purpose of the author is to let people outside China know that the policy in China is to announce it more openly to the world. For example, working in a foreign venture was considered as a new thing in China. People still hesitated to give up their steady jobs in a state unit. Many who took the jobs in the foreign ventures were young people.

**Article 6:**

Wang Xiaoming (gender unknown) written in English “Female bank presidents in Beihai City”, *China Pictorial*, August 1995, pp. 24-25.

Illustrations: Four photos of women: one is holding two telephones in her hands at the office, two are out at work, one at home with her family, with her husband in uniform.

In Beihai City in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, of five bank presidents, four are women. They are regarded as outstanding financial personnel by the mayor of Beihai City. All are over forty. The article not only describes their success, but reports their problems with “society’s traditional prejudice against women” and “the tensions between work and family”. Yang Simin, President of the People’s Bank of China in Beihai, said:

When I was transferred to the city to the post of the president, I could clearly feel that some of men were uncomfortable. Some even said how could a woman become a manager. At that time I felt some pressure at work, but had no intention of giving up.

Tan Meiqing, president of the Bank of China Beihai Branch, felt that she was a lucky woman. Her husband had to do all the household chores. She is presented as a good wife and a virtuous mother who had no trouble at home because her husband fully supported her work.

For Chen Pinghua, physical problems at work are mentioned. Now President of Beihai Branch of the Construction Bank of China, in the mid-1980s she did tests at recurrence sites under the intense summer heat., went to airports, went out to sea, and so on. Being overburdened, she had several occurrences of a gastric disease but she still stuck to her work. Chen Pinghua said, "if woman wants to take up a major leadership post, she must perform more exceptionally than others [men] and put in more effort."

Li Yuqun, president of Agricultural Bank of China Beihai Branch, was not as fortunate as Tan Meiqing as her husband could not understand her work. This was a time for great change. Many times she could not hold back her tears at not being understood. She could only seek her pleasure from work. The mayor of Beihai City called Li a gutsy woman president.

Comment:



Women managers are a concern in the media. Some are considered to be feminists. In this article the author reported on five successful business women managers, on their status, their social environment, their positive point of views, and their personal characters as they reflected the changing of society. The economic reform pushed women's issues in a diversity of fields.

The situation in 1995 was a very important, historic time for women in China. The United Nations Fourth World Conference for Women was held in Beijing. The state paid much more attention to women's problems and prepared heavily for this Conference. The media were much concerned with the NGO Forum. The Conference played an important role particularly in research in women's studies. Many books were published. Many articles were written in different journals on women's issues in Chinese for the preparatory meetings.

Jude Howell described this well:

The conference provided an opportunity not only to share the research findings but also to engage in debate with women from all over the world, learn about different theoretical perspectives and become more familiar with the issues being discussed outside of China (Howell, 1997:247).

Articles in official journals in Chinese included Wu Zhongjian (1995) "Women's liberation, just for women themselves" (see pp.68-69). This article I selected showed women's positions, and showed how the majority of the people were concerned about social values.

#### **Article 7:**

Yi Li (a woman), written in English, "Building Rainbows for the City", *China Today*, March 1996 p.19.

Illustration: Two pictures, one is a portrait of Luo Ling standing in front of the Flyover. The other is "Xi bian men" Flyover, part of the "Xixiang" project.

Luo Ling, a municipal construction designer and nearly 55, is deputy chief engineer of the Beijing Construction Institute. She devoted herself to her work for 30 years, always working hard and fulfilling her tasks and was known for her leadership in designing 70 flyovers. Yet she faces challenges at work and with her family. She said:

The worst time in her life was in 1986. That year, after her husband had an operation, he had weak eyesight and was sometimes conscious and sometimes delirious. Her two twin sons and a daughter were preparing for university entrance exams. Her mother also became ill and needed help.

At the same time, a task came in for the construction of the *Dabeiyao* Flyover (which is Three Circle Road in central Beijing). As she said “If possible I would spare some time to go home to take care of my husband or to look after my mother at the hospital”. She was extremely busy. The article says that her successful career proves that Luo Ling kept renewing her knowledge.

#### Comments:

Lu Ling’s life can represent many women who devoted themselves to their families and careers. Their achievements played very important role in their lives. Their contribution can be considered as representative of women in the 1950s and in the 1960s. The difference in this article is that women in the past were represented as never complaining about their hard working conditions. This innovation came earlier in Chinese language publications.

#### **Article 8:**

Song Honglei (a woman), written in English. “Chinese Women Scientists” *China Today*, March 1996, pp.14-17.

Illustrations: Two photographs show women scientists in positions of power, one an

academic, one in a factory.

The article describes women scientists, emphasising the presence of women in “high-tech fields, such as high-energy physics.” The Chinese government has worked hard to train women scientists [and] ... has tried to improve their working and living conditions”. The Vice Minister of the State Science and Technology Commission, said that in 1949 there were 500 women who were scientific workers and now the number has exceeded eight million, which accounts for 35 percent of the country’s scientific staff ... 27 percent of graduates from universities of engineering ... and 10 percent of the total number of professors in the country are also women. The proportion of Chinese women scientists is evidently higher than in the developed countries. In 1955, Lin Qiaozhi, a gynaecological and obstetric expert in Beijing Union Hospital, was the only woman academician in China. Since then 46 more women have been granted the title. The scientists described work in nuclear physics, oil geology, computer science, satellite technology, electronics, missiles. There are ten women scientists are described in this article. These women’s successes are described to demonstrate that women scientific workers have won the recognition and respect of society. For example, He Zehui, a nuclear physicist, is the first woman to participate in China’s nuclear research programme. While in Germany she discovered the phenomenon of elastic collision. Hao Yichun spent her childhood in the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945). She made a great contribution to the development of the Daqing Oil Field.

#### Comments:

This article reported on women who are in 'high-tech fields', with their achievements and their contributions to the nation. It is an official article, with no detail about their lives.

#### **Article 9:**

Da Gan (pen-name), written in English, “The Development of Women’s Literature in

China”, *China Today*, March 1996, pp.16-18.

Illustrations: two photographs. One is “Bing Xin in her eighties”. This shows Bing Xin in her office with a middle-aged lady showing her some pictures. The other is a portrait of “Xu Xiaobin, a prolific young women writer who has risen in recent years” - again, professional women.

The article discusses the development of women’s literature in the twentieth century in China. Chinese literature has witnessed two periods when women writers were most active. The first period was in the 1920s and 1930s after the May Fourth Movement in 1919. The representative women writers of this period were Ding Ling, Xiao Hong, Bing Xin, Lu Yin and Zhang Ailing. In some of their works they began to express their own feelings. In the *Diary of Madam Shafei*, Ding Ling successfully portrayed a woman struggling against the deep void felt by both her body and soul. The second period was at the end of the 1970s, when the Cultural Revolution ended and China started to reform and open to the world.

Chinese women writers mushroomed and a new life was suddenly given to the world of Chinese Literature. They wrote of ideas, dignity, and values and the role one should play in society. As women writers, they mostly wrote about the type of women they were familiar with. But these writers lived in a time when most Chinese people were not accustomed to facing themselves squarely and were more interested in public affairs than in themselves because of the influence of the traditional Chinese value of selflessness and the education. Several of them would even not allow the word woman to be used before their title, considering such identification as something to be looked down upon and despised. It is indicated that Chinese women were at a low stage of intellectual enlightenment despite attaining progress in political and economical emancipation.

During the second period, many women writers came to the fore. Four of them are described in this article. Zhang Jie tried to explore the relationships between love and marriage, and between oneself and social environment from a woman’s point of view.

Her heroines repeatedly say, "Women's true emancipation comes not only from the attainment of political and economic status but also from their confidence and drive to realise their value of existence". However, her exploration of women's life did not go far as she was trapped in idealism and unable to go beyond realising the social value of women.

Can Xue from Hunan Province is unique. Regardless of the general notion of aesthetic standards, she tells of dirty, ugly, and evil scenes. Her novels touch upon a broad range of subjects including women's experience, the cultural context they were trapped in and their families.

In recent years the emergence of women writers like Chen Ran, Lin Bai, Xu Xiaobin, and Zhao Mei has raised the internal type to a higher level. They are not satisfied with representing women who reject men's favours, and defy the traditional notions of good women and chastity. Pointing directly to feminism, they are set on creating an artistic world of their own with distinct cultural identity and a strong awareness of themselves as trailblazers. These women writers touch the bodies and souls of their own sex.

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995 provided a stage for Chinese women, who evaluated themselves and presented their glamour. A glimpse of it can be seen in activities and achievements in literature. A third of the members of the Chinese Writers' Association are women. They have become a vital force in the world of Chinese literature. Their brilliant works have tremendously contributed to the treasury of Chinese literature and art.

#### Comments:

Often writers represent their thoughts in terms of the era. Bing Xin wrote: "the May Fourth movement is like a thunder, it wakes me up to be a writer".<sup>4</sup> The economic

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<sup>4</sup>Fan Beiquen and Zhang Huapeng, *Bing Xin zhuan* (Biography of Bing Xin), Beijing: Shenghuo dushu, chubanshe, 1983, p.17.

reform truly provided women writers with opportunities to speak their mind to the world.

In the 1990s the economic reform brought China its own stress, as shown in articles from *Chinese Women*. The very hot debate was *Xia Gang* (middle-aged) women and men. In the 1990s, discussion about professional women's "Xia Gang" was a alive issue in the Chinese media, in official publications, newspapers, interviews on TV. There were many arguments about professional women's "Xia Gang". Xia Gan means to encourage women (and men, but not very much) to retire early and find a new job. The age for professional women is Xia Gan was from 35 to 45. Some statistics shows that "from 1985 to 1995, during this ten years, there were 80,000 women who needed to replace their jobs. It is very challenging for the total of 200,000 women in Shanghai". (Zheng Chenying (ed.), 1996, *Chinese Women's Movement*, October, p.12).

In Shanghai, for one job as an air hostess or there were one hundred applications. There was an interview about it in 1996 on CC TV. Here is a voice from the "Xia Gang" women. "Wo zhenxiang xiagang, wo haipa xiagang, keshi wo danxin wujia shangzhang" (I really want to "Shang Gang") (find a job). I am scared of "Xia Gang". I am worried about the price going up". She was forty years old. She said: "When I was young, the time for me went to University, I was sent to the countryside. When the time came for getting married, there was no place to live. When I came back from the countryside, there was no Dan Wei (workplace) to accept me. Now the factory has reduced the investment, I have joined the Xiagang group. I have no special skill, no strength, I am not beautiful and who would want to accept me?"

In Shenyang city (in the north east of China), there were many middle-aged women in the "Xia Gang group" in the street, some repairing bikes, some selling vegetables, some even cleaning shoes for others. As they said "We can't depend on our husbands and the factory, we have to find our own way". *Nanfang zhoumo*, January 1997, (South Weekend Newspaper).

That was a very big problem in the 1990s in China. Many people are facing unemployment. Some arguments were very much challenge. But the overseas publicising just showed the problems which existed in Chinese society a long time ago, as the articles above suggest.

## **Conclusion**

Comparing articles from *China Today*, *China Pictorial* and *Chinese Women*, a big difference can be seen. Overseas publications are mainly for people outside China. The things reported by the authors (most of them) were true but highly selective. Some information was not exactly of current concern. The articles selected demonstrate that publication in China is controlled by the state. Articles in *China Today* and *China Pictorial* show that overseas publications are very *Zhengtong* (formal in their political views). The written style is usually *Qianpian yilu* (stereotyped).

In this chapter a big change in the official attitude can be seen before and after the United Nation World Conference in Beijing, as reporting becomes more realistic and more like that in official publications for readers in China from the mid-1980s.

## Chapter Five: Popular Magazines in China (1986-96)

Popular magazines began to be published after the economic reform started and are now read by many women in China. They display important themes on women's issues. At this historic time of transition in China, some articles show women's positive attitudes and new ideals. The content of the articles can also reflect women's problems in Chinese society under economic reform. In this chapter, I shall use the articles I have selected to analyse how the economic reform challenged women's ideals and ideology, and how the popular magazines and TV serials were not only welcomed by Chinese people but were very influential.

In the 1980s, watching serials on TV was very popular in many cities in China. People enjoyed watching serials at night and arguing about them the next day. *Kewang* (Longing) was a serial the heroine of which, Liu Huifang, was a very kind woman. This character attracted thousands and thousands of Chinese to watch and follow her fate. I was teaching in a middle school while *Kewang* was on, and my colleagues were very interested in this serial. What happened to the heroine in the past and in the future? It seemed that all the events had a personal meaning for the audience. Most of my colleagues said, "it is difficult to be a woman like Liu Huifang, why she should bear such a complicated situation? It isn't fair to be a woman with a fate like that of Liu Huifang. I really don't want to be a woman like Liu Huifang".

*Kewang* was showed on CCTV in 1991 and showed Liu Huifang as a woman who devoted herself to her family and the people around her. The story focused on the period before and after the Cultural Revolution. Liu Huifang became a worker in a factory after her father died, and supported her whole family. She became engaged to a man who might have given her a comfortable life, but she gave him up and looked after Hu Shen, who was always involved in many problems. She bravely married Hu Shen, and even accepted a child who belonged to her husband by another woman and let her own son be given away. Finally she became paralysed, and lost her job and income. Liu Huifang was said to have been seen as a good woman by many Chinese, especially men of the working class. This TV play raised many arguments and



discussions and drew many people to watch it. Everywhere in China, men and women, old and young, all talked about the TV play. Different people had different points of view, but the whole argument was focused on the central character, Liu Huifang. Why did the personal life of this ordinary woman raise such a wave, arouse so much debate in Chinese society? Because she was a good wife and a loving mother? Or because she was seen as patient, weak, sympathetic to others, and quiet? Or that she worked hard, humbled herself and sacrificed herself to the people around her, even those who treated her badly? Her personal character drew together the virtues of Chinese women. She was described as an angel. Some arguments from intellectual women were very critical; some criticised this conception of tradition and said that this sacrifice was not natural, but came from the old feudal society. Some even suspected the virtue. Some comments from working women were sympathetic to Liu Huifang saying that she was created and influenced by the social environment around her but she represented a woman who did not lose her identity. This image of a woman was praised in the article 'An Eastern Maria' in *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily, 8 March, 1991) which considered that Liu Huifang represented a woman who was very kind, unselfish and patient, and never got angry. In the eyes of Chinese men, this is the image of an excellent woman. To some degree, the content reflected the concern of a majority of Chinese people about moral standards during that time. Perhaps the theme song can describe the confusing situation:

A long, long way in my life,  
Looking from the beginning to the end,  
Who can tell me what is right,  
And what is wrong?  
I asked the those passing by from the south to the north.

What moral standards should a woman have in society in the 1990s? In Chapter One, I discussed the traditional ideal from thousands of years ago, which demonstrated that people followed the rule of Chinese culture which placed men and women in different positions. Men should behave like men, women like women.

From the official to the popular journals, the same arguments have been started on women's roles since the 1980s. Among these articles, those in popular magazines have been closer to women's daily lives. For example, Chen Duo (a woman) wrote an article in *Women's World* (March 1995, p.4) in which she gave her own opinion of men's behaviour. She argued that, in contemporary society, a model man is sometimes reported, who gave himself wholly to his career and sacrificed his family. This is the behaviour of a hero. If a woman does the same thing, she will be criticised (by women too). She is not a woman, this is not the behaviour of a woman. Chen Duo explained men's behaviour very vividly, using a fairy tale.

She wrote that in 'Da Yu Controlling the Flood' (a fairy tale), Dai Yu was a very strong man who could cut rocks in the maintain. During the time he controlled the Flood, he met a very pretty girl who later became his wife. One day, Da Yu passed his home three times, but did not go in. His wife waited for him and worried about him, then decided to go and looked for her husband. When she saw her husband cutting the rocks and looking like a big bear, perhaps she was scared and then she turned into a stone. This stone was supposed to have been called *Wangfushi* (standing stone watching husband) and is now said to be located near the Chang Jing River. Dai Yu controlling the Flood was praised for behaving like a man, and seen as a hero from generation to generation.

*Women's World* (*Funu Shijie*) is published in Guangxi province and has a discussion section: "Talking about society and life; discussing the current situation". Some selected articles follow.

#### **Article 1:**

Zhang Gunwen (a woman), written in Chinese. "If I could come back to life, I would prefer to be a woman again" *Women's World*, March 1995, p.6.

Women, when you are at home, you can provide a very comfortable environment for your husband, and support your husband's career. You can feed your children and

give them a good education. When you are at work, you can try your best to work well and never be behind others. Women, you can get a good reputation for being “a good wife and a virtuous mother.” Women, why not?

If you are a teacher, you are welcomed by your students because of your natural ability mixed with your education. You are a woman, like a mother. Fashion Clothes are different day by day, especially for women. Women, you are keen on the Fashion World.

Women, suppose you live in a village deep in the mountains. Suppose you are the first *Xiahai* (worker in business), or you are the first one to be selected for a famous University, or the first one to rebel against your unhappy marriage. You will be surprised by the men. In the end, they will confirm that you are a brave, and excellent lady.

“Why, I am a woman”, I raised my head and said proudly. I myself advance men in many aspects. I devoted myself to creating history, I make my contribution through my children, the next generation, I myself played a very important role in the economic reform. I am much more confident as a woman, nothing can change my will. You will regret that there is only once for you to be a woman.

#### Comments:

This article has a different written style and speaks in terms of freedom. In reality, people have different attitudes to their lives, this is true. Such articles in popular magazines are welcomed by the majority of women, particularly young women.

#### **Article 2:**

Chen Duo (a woman), written in Chinese, “Why I am a woman?” *Women's World*, March. 1995, p.4.

Illustration: There is one picture in this article, of a woman thinking with her eyes closed. She looks miserable.

In fact, it is not too bad to be a woman. Designers often design clothes for women. When women work in the exhibition hall, their job is always as guide. People always described the Party of China as Mother. Women are always considered as flowers. And beloved by the people. But I don't want to be a woman.

When I was a child, I told my cousin that if I were a man, I would want to be a soldier when I grew up. My cousin said "To be a woman is much better than being a man. For very few women could join the army, you could be a captain if you could join the army". During the Cultural Revolution, schools were not in good order. The working class was respected. I said that I wanted to be a textile worker, but my classmates laughed at me. As a woman, if you work in heavy industry, the heavy work might be for men. If you could work in light industry, it is very hard ... I want to be a soldier and I want to be a worker. Because at that time I had not been a woman. When I had been a teacher for many years, I realised that I was a woman. Suddenly I didn't want to be a teacher. For I wanted to participate in the competition of society, although I tried my best to think of myself as a woman, as a flower. However, to be a teacher is a suitable job for a woman. But I am frightened of being steady, frightened of looking after others, and frightened of having no social activity. So I didn't want to be a woman. I started to look for a suitable job for myself, looking for a job where I could forget myself, forget I am a woman...

Often I regret being a woman. When men's eyes and hands have touched me, I hated being a woman. When I concentrated on my work, I forgot I was a woman but someone would remind me. I even didn't want to live in the world. When I applied for a job, I was interviewed and regretted being a woman. Because I have a daughter. And I have no husband with me .. I hate to be a woman. I don't know why I am a woman, but I don't want to be a man either.

### Comments:

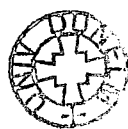
The title of this article is startling, and the content suggests that the complaint we hear is a real voice from reality, which is different from the official journals. Among teachers in China, women are the majority. Some do not like the job, especially young people. After graduation from Teacher's University, they usually intend to get another job instead of teaching. The reason is perhaps the long working hours and low salary. Although teachers' position in society has been improved greatly since the economic reforms in some areas, yet these problems still exist today. Another reason is probably that the education system still has some problems. For instance, when facing the examinations for students to be selected to enter the University, not only do the students feel bored but the teachers too. After a long day, they feel very tired. I myself have been a middle-school teacher for many years. It is contradictory for me as well, I like my students, but not the job.

### **Article 3:**

An Yi (gender unknown), written in Chinese. "Women, when you will start to enjoy yourself?" *Women's Friends*, March 1995, pp.4-5.

Illustration: There are two pictures in this article, one of some ships at sea, one of is a woman who is standing with a smile. There is a notice, '*Shumin Xinxiang*', 'Letter Writing'.

Women, when will you start to enjoy yourselves? When we ask this question we ask it for our mothers, our sisters, and ourselves. The first question we should ask ourselves is, what do women enjoy? We speak of enjoyment, but we are not sitting in a luxury hotel and listening to music under red and blue lights .... We speak of enjoyment, but are not travelling around the world dressed in silk, in luxury ... Pleasure here only means when we are in the kitchen, we just cook one dish which is our favourite; the pleasure we speak of is just to select a favourite cloth for ourselves in a shopping centre. We could have time to talk with our childhood friends in a park without



looking our watches now and then. We don't need worry about cooking the dinner for the family and, we don't need worry about taking in our clothes which are drying in the sun. When we see a film in the cinema, we don't need to worry about someone being cold or hungry ... Actually this is basic life for most ordinary people. Because, many women completely forget themselves. Women, of course you would like to enjoy yourself?

When you breast-feed your children, when you are doing laundry, you wipe your sweat and you say: when my children grow up, I will enjoy myself ... When the children gradually grow up, she/he needs go to the kindergarten. Women, you take your child's hand, shopping in the market, cooking at home. You are also required to work hard at your job. Women you work from morning till night, you forget the world outside. It doesn't matter. When the children go to school, I will be free. I can enjoy myself then. When women said that to themselves, they didn't realise the wrinkles had already appeared in their faces.

When children are old enough to go to school, women are even busier than before. In order to educate your children to be excellent, women, you make up your mind, and you rush between work, family, school, free market and all kinds of training courses for children. Children and husbands are like the Milky Way, women are planets around them. The hair grows grey, and drops down silently in the air silence; it rests on women's tired heads. Women ask themselves, painfully, one moonless night, "When can I enjoy myself and have nothing to worry about? Oh, I am determined, it will get better when the child goes to University. Or he/ she could get a job. Then I could enjoy myself." Women, you said it to yourselves. You smiled in your dream.

Time draws away women's prettiness and youth and leaves instead old age and lines on your face. Your children grew up and flew away. They left the feather with you for your enjoyment. Your son came back again one day, bringing a young baby. Women, you feel time has come back. You work harder than before. The baby starts to learn to speak, he doesn't call you mum but grandmother ...

Women, leave time for yourself to enjoy life from now on. Don't wait any longer. Don't spent your bank savings only to decorate your house, and for your husband. Don't use your whole energy concentrating on your work. Don't forget yourself when you prepare presents for others. Women, enjoy yourself from this very minute.

#### Comments:

The description in this article is very telling, saying that women are like planets going round the Milky Way of husbands and children, all the year round. That is the life of a professional woman in China. The majority have no time to enjoy themselves.

#### **Article 4:**

Wen Hua (a woman), written in Chinese. "Why do Intellectual Women in Shenzhen City spend all their time in pubs?" *Women Reporter*, February 1995, pp.31-32.

Illustrations: There are two pictures in this article, one of a cup of tea and one of the skyscrapers of Shenzhen City, with a very fashionable woman.

More and more pubs have appeared in Shenzhen city. It is getting fashionable. Sitting in the low light, listening to the relaxing music, what do they think of their lives? If they are pretty it doesn't matter, for they are not barmaids. We interviewed them.

Ning is twenty-seven years old and a manager of Fu Tian Joint Venture Company. Her first degree is in International Trade. Ning started her career as a business clerk and worked for about four years to become a manager of the company. She said that it is not very easy to be a woman manager. She worked very hard in the day and had a lot of business activities at night. When she has a free night, she goes to sleep straight away. The only chance to relax is sitting in this pub. This is her only time for herself.

Mai is thirty-one years old, an accountant in Shekou. She is pretty and attractive. She said, 'If there is nothing special I have to do, I come here every Wednesday. I like the

relaxing environment. My husband is a manager in a trading company. We have lived in this city for about seven years. My son is eight and lives with his grandfather and grandmother in Beijing. Life seems very good. But I feel lonely and tired. I have been told my husband has affairs with his secretary. I have never asked him about this. I just leave it and let it go. I don't know if my husband knows I spend time in this pub, it doesn't matter to me. He is always busy. At first he asked me to join in his business activities, but I refused to do that.'

### Comments:

*Women's Reporter* has been published in Shenzhen since 1993. This was the first economic zone in China. It is the favourite magazine of young people. In Beijing library if you want to borrow the latest magazine, you have to order it early because so many people are waiting for read it. What makes this magazine welcomed by many people, perhaps the biggest attraction is the freedom with which it writes in terms of more western ideals.

Intellectual women in Shenzhen City where I have lived, have a moderate standard of living. It is new and fashionable for intellectual women to spend time in a pub. Pubs in China are quite different from those in England. Pubs in England as I understand it are a kind of culture. In England, whatever your social class, you will find some pubs which suitable for you. And also the environment is quite different. To some degree, to go to a pub in China was seen as a western luxury. In some areas, pubs are only provided in the Five Star Hotels where you can enjoy very beautiful music and relax. Of the two examples in this article, one is a successful woman manager, the other an accountant. They don't need worry about their food or living costs. The article above illustrates how professional women's attitudes and social values have changed with their economic situation.

### **Conclusion**

The articles I have just discussed come from two popular magazines, *Women's*



*Reporter* and *Women's World*, both published from 1993. The debates in these two magazines are varied. The complaints mirror the problems arising from the reforms, reflecting the problems in women's daily lives. Women could now tell their own stories in the public press, echoing what happened after the May Fourth Movement eighty years ago. It no longer matters whether their ideas are acceptable or not; they no longer care about the political pressures. Things are very different from when the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. For instance, enjoying or forgetting themselves? This is a new ideal for Chinese women's liberation. For in the 1950's women representations devoted themselves and gave up their own wills for the socialist construction. Their enjoyment was shown as spiritual. The articles I selected from the official journals in the 1990's in Chapter Three still display spiritual satisfactions (what they did, they did for others, not just for themselves). But the difference is they have their own will. This is the change that can be seen. Articles in the popular journals are even more realistic, to me. Nowadays women should enjoy themselves not only the spiritual but also the material. This is the result of the economic reform. Chinese women underwent this historic time of transition, their self-awareness has improved greatly. From their arguments in the official journals about women's place in society to their freedom of speech in the popular journals, new ideals for women's liberation in the 1990's have been raised.

The freedom of speech was also much influenced by NGO forum of the United Nations Women's Conference. The conference widened the view of Chinese women and provided many opportunities for Chinese women to get in touch with the rest of the world. The new ideals may be the result of Western influences.

History changes. From time to time, women's status in society is seen differently. Now the sky for women in China is vaster than before. Now that we professional women realise how heavy our wings are, we shall solve the problem of being overburdened.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Throughout Chinese history, images of women show women's positions as lower than men's. Chinese feudal society was controlled by Confucian thought. From Empress Wu Zetian (Tang dynasty), to Lin Daiyu (Qing dynasty), representations of women indicated that the parts women played were at the bottom of the society in men's eyes. But representations of women changed in recent history. The Great May Fourth Movement changed the whole of Chinese society, and many history books claim that the May Fourth Movement is the watershed of *Jiu zhongguo* and *Xin zhongguo* (the Old China and the New China). The spirit of the May Fourth Movement, *Minzhu yu kexue* (Democracy and Science), has pushed Chinese society forward. Women's position in Chinese society in particular came to be seen very differently. The May Fourth movement is part of Chinese women's history. Images of women from Xiang Linshao in *Zhufu* (Blessing, the short essay written by Lu Xun) and *Shafei* (The Diary of Miss Shafei, written by Ding Ling) reflected the lives of many Chinese women, and women's contributions both to society and civilisation in Chinese history.

After the Movement, women's issues underwent a great change. A famous woman writer, Bing Xin said once: "The May Fourth Movement was like thunder, it woke me up and pushed me to be a writer. Indeed, no May Fourth Movement, no woman writer pen-named Bing Xin". She wrote, "First, you must know you are a human, then you know that you are a man or a woman".<sup>1</sup> Images of women from women writers' work demonstrate that women's awareness improved much after the May Fourth Movement in 1919. A group of excellent intellectual women grew up, and the idea of *Xin nuxing* (New Women) was created after the movement. This was a great leap, a great success in Chinese history. Some women realised that they have the same rights as men. They woke up from their sleep. Women's issues in the 1930s showed that the social environment did not provide women with many opportunities, and women's economic situation and social status still appeared at the bottom of society. The sky was too low

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<sup>1</sup> Fan Bequen and Zhang Huapeng, "*Bing Xin zhuan*", Beijing Shenghuo dushu chubanshe. 1983, p.17.

for them. The slogan of the May Fourth Movement “Democracy and Science” still encouraged women to fight for freedom during that period.

The earliest Chinese Marxists, like Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, proposed women’s liberation from Marx’s point of view, which was very influential for Chinese women.

Honig and Hershatter (1988:3) noticed that, following Marx’ theory:

The young founders of the communist Party inherited the May Fourth legacy; from its inception in 1921 the Party advocated the liberation of women .... Campaigns to end wife-beating and ban arranged marriages had to be carefully weighed against the need to win the support of peasant men. Through the Party did succeed in modifying family power relationships in the rural base areas, increasingly it emphasised bringing women into the paid labour force as the key to their liberation.

At the beginning of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, there was a big difference and conflict between the New Society and the Old Society. Women, who had been kept down for thousands of years, were liberated for the first time, and were in theory able to participate freely in society. So women heroes, such as young workers, young peasants and young party cadres emerged, with images of women like Li Shuangshuang. She represented the women who loved and devoted herself to this new country with gratitude.

Women appeared in literature in the 1950s. For instance, Xier was an image for women who appeared in Chinese literature for about twenty years. She represented women who had suffered in the old days and were very thankful to the New China. During the Cultural Revolution, when the whole nation was involved in political struggle, Xier was again a leading image of women. Images of women during the Cultural Revolution have no feminine characteristics. Women followed in men’s steps. The Eight Model Plays present images of women that time. The effects of the Cultural Revolution were very complicated, so it is not very easy to evaluate its effect

on the status on women. It is also difficult to evaluate the wrongs and rights of the Cultural Revolution and its influence on Chinese women.

Chinese women have been pushed into a new stage since the Economic Reforms of the 1980s. This is clear both socially and economically. Images of women range from *Lu Wenting* (When you are middle-aged) to Liu Huifang, in the popular TV series *Ke wang* (Longing). Women writers challenged society through ideology. Women's tensions between their work and family have grown, and the problem has been drawn to people's attention in Chinese society. Women should fly in the vast sky lightly. Women should have women's criteria and not follow in men's steps. Women's issues have undergone a great change since the Economic Reforms. Articles from different magazines, newspapers and journals can reflect women's real voices. Many debates do represent the majority of women. This is similar to what can be seen after the May Fourth Moment in 1919.

This brings us to professional women. With reference to representations of professional women in China, this thesis has shown that in official journals, discussions about women's problems have become more open. After "what is the standard to be a good wife and a loving mother?" in 1986, followed the discussion of *Funu de chulu* (Women's Future) in 1988, for instance, with women represented as saying, "Where is my future?" or "I admire the women of Da Qiu Zhuang". The debate ranged from theoretical discussion to the reality of women's daily lives. Their freedom of speech is clear and the content of the article is very convincing. I think the content is real and reflects real problems in Chinese society. Professional women's problems were drawn to people's attention in the 1990s because they were overburdened. Official attitudes have changed, as is clear from the journals in Chinese. The main arguments in the 1990s are about solutions to these new strains in Chinese society. The slogan of the United Nations Fourth Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 was: "Democracy, Equality and Science", and "equality" is symbolic of women's emancipation in a different way. Perhaps what women managers suffered, faced, and challenged in their reality can illustrate the song of the economic reform. Maybe, those women managers talking in the official journals of the 1990s can

represent feminist voices.

To me as a Chinese professional woman, the position and social values of Chinese professional women's position are not well represented in China's official overseas publications. *China Today* and *China Pictorial* fail to present Chinese women's real voices to foreigners. Official journals for foreigners are written in much more stereotyped terms than those published in China, in Chinese, for Chinese readers.

In the popular journals of the 1990s such as *Women Reporter* and *Women's World*, more freedom of speech appears, suggesting that Chinese women are now much influenced by western ideals. Professional women in contemporary China have started to think about how to find themselves in the new reality. Here a new ideal can be seen.

Women's position has been changed over time. Chinese women's position in Chinese society now reflects how the Economic Reforms changed women's status in society. The next question will be how to face the big problem existing in Chinese society, *Xiagang*, under which a large number of middle-aged women are unemployed through early retirement. What will be the fate of the *Xiagang* women? I hope that the problems of overload and *Xiagang* for Chinese professional women can be solved and the real "democracy, equality, and science" can be seen in the coming days.

My research has enriched my life, for through it I understand how to be a woman and how to be a successful woman. I am very thankful to my supervisor Janet Townsend. I will never forget the day when I first went into her office in June 1996. There was a dried spider on the wall, and she told me she brought it from the rainforest in Peru. She hates spiders. This at once encouraged me to face my problems, both in my personal life and my academic work. I would like to use the following sentences to describe what I think about women. To be a successful woman, if we have sky and ocean, if we have knowledge, and our own careers, if we have our own confidence and self-awareness, if we really have love from our own relatives and friends and for our own relatives and our friends, our life can be considered as perfect.

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