

SURVIVING THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION: CHINESE WOMEN'S PRESS WRITINGS

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Historians of modern China view women's issues in the National Revolution years (1924-27) as different from those in the May Fourth era (1915-24). Roxane Witke, Sally Borthwick, Wang Zheng, and Christina K. Gilmartin argue that the May Fourth discussion on women's issues was embedded in a framework that valued "modernity." The May Fourth era produced literature on the topic of women's emancipation and witnessed female social activism.¹ In the succeeding National Revolution era, by contrast, scholars such as Gilmartin distinguish a more institutionalized approach to women's movement. Gilmartin finds the issue of women's emancipation was closely intertwined with the entire course of National Revolution. She argues, however, that both the Nationalist Party (GMD) and the Communist Party (CCP) used women's emancipation as revolutionary rhetoric to mobilize women to participate in the Revolution. Such mobilization challenged patriarchy and endeavored to reconstitute society and gender relations in a more equitable form.² Wang Zheng argues that although the party-led women's emancipation movement affected women's lives on a much larger scale than the previous May Fourth feminist movement, party-led women's movement eventually closed the social space for women's spontaneous activism in a party-state.³

The Chinese women's movement was controlled by partisans and institutionalized for the first time in the National Revolution. Created on January 31, 1924, the first Central Women's Bureau mobilized mass women's movements in the southern provinces. In these areas, local leaders began to dominate the proceedings of women's

¹ Roxane Heater Witke, "Transformation of Attitudes Towards Women During the May Fourth Era" (Ph. D. diss. University of California-Berkeley, 1971). Sally Borthwick, "Changing Concepts of Women from Late Qing to May Fourth Period." In *Ideal and Reality: Social and Political Change in Modern China*, eds. David Pong and Edmund Fung (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1985), 63-91. Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1999). Christina K. Gilmartin, "Introduction: May Fourth and Women's Emancipation." In *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook*, eds. Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), ix-xxiv.

² Christian K. Gilmartin, "Gender, Political Culture and Women's Mobilization in the Chinese Nationalist Revolution, 1924-27." In *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, eds. Christina K Gilmartin and others (Harvard University Press, 1994), 195-225; and her *Engendering Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1995).

³ Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 334-342; note 68 on page 349.

movements instead of receiving directives from the National government. These women defined the women's mass movement under the Central Women's Bureau as the "women's emancipation movement" (*funü jiefang yundong*) to denote its difference from the middle class women's "feminist movement" (*nüquan yundong*). With the collapse of the first United Front on April 12, 1927, all progressive social forces released during the May Fourth era (1915-23) were suppressed and communists were purged from urban centers. The Nanjing government issued a censorship Act in February 1929,⁴ which led to conservatism and the ideological polarization of print media.⁵ Both political parties remained committed to the principle of gender equality, as seen in the Nationalists' promulgation of the new legal codes of the Nanjing government in 1929 and 1930, and the Communists' guarantee of women's rights in the communist rural soviets.⁶

A close examination of women's print media however, suggests that earlier feminist issues—women's education, property rights, freedom in marriage and divorce, political participation, and legal rights—were kept alive in women's periodicals during the National Revolution and afterwards. The late Qing legacies of promoting female education and women's political participation,⁷ early republican women's struggle for suffrage,⁸ and May Fourth feminists' concerns for consensual marriage, women's legal rights and labor movements⁹ all found continuity in women's journals in the mid- and late 1920s. May Fourth feminist-turned partisans carried on their feminist ideals in the

⁴ Zheng Zhenduo *Nianpu* (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1988), 157.

⁵ Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother and Narrative Politics in Modern China* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 8-9. Wendy Larson, "The End of 'Funü wenxue': Women's Literature from 1925 to 1935," *Modern Chinese Literature* 4, no. 1-2 (1988): 52. Stephen Mackinnon, "Towards a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period," *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (1997): 16.

⁶ Gilmartin, *Engendering Chinese Revolution*, 213-214.

⁷ Joan Judge, "Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalism and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 765-803. Charlotte Beahan, "Feminism and Nationalism in the Chinese Women's Press, 1902-1911," *Modern China* 1, no. 4 (October 1975): 379-415. Cheng Weikun, "Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanities: The Changing Image of Women in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing and Tianjin" (Ph. D. diss. The John Hopkins University, 1995). Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Yuxin Ma, "Nation, '-Isms' and Women's Media Public: Chinese Women's Press 1898-1937" (Ph. D. diss. The University of Minnesota, 2003).

⁸ Borthwick, "Changing Concepts of Women from Late Qing to May Fourth Period," 63-91. Li Youning, "Sun Yat-sen and Women's Transformation," *Chinese Studies in History* 21, no. 4 (1988): 58-78. Cheng Weikun, "Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanities." Louise Edward, "From Gender Equality to Gender Difference: Feminist Quotas for Women in Politics, 1936-1947," *Twentieth Century China* 24, no. 1 (April, 1999): 69-105. Yuxin Ma, "Nation, '-Isms' and Women's Media Public."

⁹ Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2003), 81. Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), 109. Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960). Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 20-21. Witke, "Transformation of Attitudes Towards Women," 334. Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*. Ma, "Nation, '-Isms' and Women's Media Public."

National Revolution. Feminist issues served as a rallying point for mobilizing various urban women, and enabled “the new woman” (*xinnüxing*) to participate in the National Revolution. In Republican China, the new woman represented “a positive view of modernity and the modern nation project,” in contrast to the modern girl who was “a self-absorbed woman searching for subjectivity” and “a dangerous *femme fatale* who devours the urban male.”¹⁰

This article argues for the co-existence of a feminist movement with the party-led women’s emancipation movement in the 1920s, and the continuity of feminist concerns that predated and post-dated the party-led women’s emancipation movement. Chinese feminism in the 1920s was diversified: liberal-minded students struggled to defend female education and women’s dignity; reform-minded women activists strove for women’s inheritance and other legal rights; and women cadets in the National Revolution escaped oppression and pursued heroism. Women’s periodicals survived the ideological polarization of the late 1920s as female writers turned to education, social reforms, and legislative architecture in promoting women’s interests.

Defending Female Education

May Fourth women students fought for coeducation and successfully broadened women’s educational opportunities at all levels. By the 1920s, modern education in China had produced independent-minded women students who valued their freedom, had strong self-esteem, and challenged patriarchy. When the Central Women’s Bureau mobilized women for the National Revolution, college students at Beijing Women’s Normal University fought to preserve the only national university for women, and resisted corruption and despotism in female education.

Despite the improvement in female education, the operation of women’s schools was not democratic in the 1920s. Some school principals had controversial educational philosophies that did not match students’ expectations. Some principals from influential backgrounds assumed their positions for personal gain rather than serving the needs of students and the goal of female education. In 1924-25, students at Beijing Women’s Normal University went on strike against their president Yang Yinyu. They organized into a Student Self-Governing Society, expelled Yang, challenged the Ministry of Education, and defended the university. Beijing Women’s Normal University was the only national university for women and gathered the largest number of the most highly educated women in China. These modern-minded women, as observed by Dora Black who accompanied Bertrand Russell in his visit of China in 1920, “were desperate to discover and adopt values by which they could act on their newly born self-esteem as women.”¹¹

Bertrand Russell was an important liberal thinker in Britain, and a persistent advocate of social democracy, women’s rights, and peace among nations. He visited China in 1920-1921 with Dora Black, whom he later married, analyzing the strengths and

¹⁰ Sarah E Stevens, “Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China,” *NWSA Journal* 15, 3 (2003): 82-104.

¹¹ Witke, “Transformation of Attitudes Towards Women,” 171-172.

weaknesses of the modernization process in China. Russell and Black later started a model school at Beacon Hill in an attempt to transform education to eradicate possessiveness and warlike psychology.¹²

Yang Yinyu, President of the Beijing women's Normal University, was a transitional figure who stuck to old ethics despite a modern education. With bound feet, she nevertheless fiercely rejected an arranged marriage and attended Wuben Women's School in Shanghai. There, she excelled in her study and was selected to study at Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School on scholarship. She later received a M. A. in Education at Columbia University in the United States. She was appointed the president of the Beijing Women's Normal University in February 1924, the first female president of a national university in China. Years of studying overseas had isolated Yang from the revolutionary trends in China. She was unfamiliar with the issues in national politics and not cognizant of her own limits.¹³ Yang seldom listened to others' opinions. She believed that a school should be managed like a family. The famous writer Lu Xun taught at the university when Yang was the president, and criticized her as "a tyrannical mother-in-law to women students" rather than the loving mother that she claimed to be. He characterized her educational policy as "widow-ism," which did more harm to students than Confucian ethics.¹⁴

Students and faculty at Beijing Women's Normal University perceived Yang Yinyu's rule as despotism and malpractice. Students discovered that Yang Yinyu had been appointed president through connections at the Ministry of Education. Within a month she proposed to change the name of the university back to its previous name Beijing Women's Higher Normal School, which caused students' protest and did not actually materialize. In April 1924, Yang Yinyu appropriated school funds, which led to the resignation of many and the close of the school for two months. When a student who did not get along with Yang came down with scarlet fever, Yang did not send her to the hospital soon enough and this delay was widely interpreted to have caused the student's death. When the school's board of directors met for their election, Yang violated electoral rules and installed her own people. In August 1924, Yang neglected the admission criteria and admitted three unqualified students, which was regarded as favoritism by students. Yang hired only her own people as faculty, which caused a decline in the quality of education.¹⁵

On December 10, 1924, a student organization at the university, the Rose Society (Qiangwei she), started a periodical *Women's Weekly* (Funü zhoukan) (Women's Weekly). The journal was edited by Lu Jingqing and claimed to "speak for the pain

¹² <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~bertrand>

¹³ Guo Fenyang, "Yang Yinyu de gushi"[The story of Yang Yinyu] *Nüjie jiuozong* [Footsteps of women] (Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), 109-112. Guo refers to Yang Yinyu's niece Yang Jiang's article "Remembering My Aunt" [Huiyi wode guma].

¹⁴ "Yang Yinyu zhi quanti xuesheng gongqi"[A public notice from Yang Yinyu to all students] (May 9, 1925). "Guoli Beijing Nüzi Shifan Daxue zhoukan or Nüshida zhoukan" [The weekly at National Women's Normal University in Beijing] *Beijing funü bankan kao 1905-1949* [A study of women's print media in Beijing, 1905-1949]. ed. Liu Guangyuan (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1990), 179.

¹⁵ Wanyu, "Nüshida fengchao jishi"[Records on the strike at Women's Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 36 (August 19, 1925).

women suffered for thousands of years,” and to “create a new life for women.”¹⁶ Published as a supplement to the popular *Beijing News* (Jingbao) edited by a progressive editor Shao Piaoping, *Women’s Weekly* enjoyed a good circulation. The journal lasted for a year and coincided with the period when students at Women’s Normal University went on strike against Yang Yinyu. It thus provided substantial information on the strike from the perspective of students. The contact address of the journal changed several times because of interruptions due to the strike. On May 6, 1925, it was changed from Lu Jingqing’s school address to Shi Pingmei’s private address at No. 13, Picai Hutong, Nanbanbi Jie. Then, on July 1, 1925, it was changed once more to Zhang Qiongsu’s school address. Such changes suggested the difficulties women editors experienced in attempting to continue publication.

In early 1925, women students led by the Students’ Self-Governing Society protested against Yang Yinyu’s despotism and malpractices. *Women’s Weekly* closely followed the students’ activities. On January 18, 1925, students asked in vain that Yang resign and published a letter addressing the whole nation in order to shame Yang into leaving. On March 18, 1925, in the article “Some Problems with Women’s World in Beijing” in *Women’s Weekly*, a student using the penname Chiping (“hold even”) advised Yang to take actions that benefitted the school rather than fishing for personal fame. Chiping asked Yang to respect the board of directors, deans, and faculty instead of monopolizing power.¹⁷

It was not until Yang managed to win the support of Shanghai women representatives who came to Beijing for women’s participation in the National Congress that *Women’s Weekly* openly expressed students’ disagreement with Yang. On May 27, 1925, the article “A Sudden Discovery” in *Women’s Weekly* told of the students’ surprise when the Shanghai women delegates’ supported Yang. This article established the students’ legitimacy in representing the university.¹⁸ On June 17, 1925, an author by the penname Lequn (“enjoy the community”) reported in *Women’s Weekly* that the Students’ Self-governing Society had locked Yang out of her office. But she rented hotel rooms as an office and appropriated the name of the board of directors to fire six student representatives. Lequn commented, “Yang forgets the traditional virtues of propriety, righteousness, honesty, and sense of shame!”¹⁹ The militant students sent a telegram to the Minister of Education, asking for Yang’s removal.

As the summer vacation approached, the future of the university became uncertain. On July 1, 1925, an anonymous student advised in *Women’s Weekly* that all students should stay on campus during the summer vacation to protect the school.²⁰ On

¹⁶ Shi Pingmei, “Fakan ci”[Opening remarks] *Funü zhoukan* 1 (December 10, 1924): 1.

¹⁷ “Beijing nüjie yibu de wenti” [Some problems with women’s world in Beijing] *Funü zhoukan* 14 (March 18, 1925).

¹⁸ “Huran kandao”[A sudden discovery] *Funü zhoukan* 24 (May 27, 1925).

¹⁹ “Wei Yang Yinyu xiansheng jin liangju zhongyan”[Some honest advice to Yang Yinyu] *Funü zhoukan* 31(June 17, 1925).

²⁰ “Bakezhong dui nütongxue shuo jijuhua” [A few words to women students in the strike] *Funü zhoukan* 29 (July 1, 1925).

July 29, under the pretext of repairing dormitories, Yang ordered students to move out, but they ignored her order. On August 1, 1925, Yang brought armed police and hired roughnecks to oust students from the campus. When representatives from other universities came to investigate the situation, Yang escaped and left armed police on campus. Women students received food from their outside supporters, and hired a cook to keep open the canteen. On August 11, 1925, an author using the penname Ping (“duckweed”) disclosed in *Women’s Weekly* that Yang colluded with partisans to strengthen her position, abused her power to fire students, brought in armed police to suppress students, and closed the canteen to starve students.²¹ In condemning Yang for using force, an author by the penname Qingsheng (“green student”) mentioned that the Student Self-Governing Society had denied Yang’s authority as the president. The six students fired by Yang, including Liu Hezhen, Xu Guangping and others, had allied with male and female students at other universities to expel Yang. As a result, armed police arrived on the campus on August 1.²² Published reports gathered from students’ journals revealed many inner stories about the strike at Women’s Normal University to readers of *Women’s Weekly*.

In response, Yang Yinyu lobbied the Minister of Education, Zhang Shizhao, to close the school for rectification. Students exposed the politics pertaining to the closedown. On August 19, an author by the penname Bixi (“compare with the west”) challenged the decision, “Do politics, partisanship, and personal connections have anything to do with the closedown? Is there another way to rectify the university? Are students at the university worse than those at other national universities?”²³ The Ministry of Education decided to use the site of the university to start a new Women’s University, and hired a man, Liu Baizhao, to organize the new school. On August 22, 1925, Liu Baizhao brought armed police, roughnecks, and women beggars to campus to oust the students. Students confronted their oppressors but were bloodily suppressed and forced out.

On August 26, a special issue of *Women’s Weekly* reported the details of the tragedy of August 22. A student by the penname Shuxue (“rinse snow”) who had witnessed the tragedy wrote her friend Lu Jingqing who was absent, that on the afternoon on August 22, Liu Baizhao brought more than two hundred people on campus, forcing students to leave. Shuxue described Liu Baizhao and his people as mere robbers and hooligans. When Zhang Qiongshu, the student contact person of *Women’s Weekly* at that time, condemned Liu Baizhao for robbing students of their money and property, Liu Baizhao took out fifty *yuan* from a purse and handed it to Zhang Qiongshu. Zhang threw it to the ground angrily, but Liu picked the money up with a grin. Shuxue’s letter provided details of the violence Liu Baizhao’s people committed against the thirty or so women students who had remained on campus. Thirteen students were besieged in a

²¹ “Wei Nüshida xiaochao gao jiaoyu dangju” [To the Ministry of Education on students’ strike at Women’s Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 35 (August 12, 1925).

²² “Bo Zhang Shizhao shang Duan Qirui tingban Nüshida wen” [Rebuking Zhang Shizhao’s letter to Duan Qirui on closing down Women’s Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 35 (August 12, 1925).

²³ “Duiyu jiaobu tingban Nüshida de shanghe” [On the order of the Ministry of Education to close down Women’s Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 36 (August 19, 1925).

classroom; four or five could not be located; seven or eight were arrested by local security bureau. Two students, Zhao Shilan and Jiang Bodi, were beaten and dragged away, and one girl, Lin Zhuofeng was discovered to be missing.²⁴ Another article published under the penname Ping quoted the report by *Beijing News* on August 23, condemning the brutality of those suppressors,

After students at Women's Normal University were dragged out of the school by old women hired by Zhang Shizhao, seven of them were found to be missing. Two students were rumored to have died from severe injuries. Among those seven missing students, Li Guisheng was found to have a fatal lung injury and could not even open her eyes. She was moved to the supplementary school of Women's Normal University at Baozi Jie. The doctor said that she might lose her life.²⁵

Students called the closedown of the school and the tragedy of August 22 the destruction of female education and the humiliation of women's dignity. On August 19, 1925, at the order of the closedown, the famous student writer and activist of *Women's Weekly* Shi Pingmei proclaimed, "Now the issue is about women's dignity, education, emancipation, and rights!" She employed the rhetoric that female education was important to the nation in order to rally support, expressing her indignation, "The tragedy insulted women's dignity and predicted the bankruptcy of Chinese education."²⁶ Four days after the tragedy, a student by the penname Ping wrote in *Women's Weekly*, questioning the educational authority, "How can the Ministry of Education rely on armed police to destroy female education? Do students deserve threat, humiliation and assault when they resist irrational orders?"²⁷

Women's students' perseverance in preserving their university bore fruit. They successfully restored their university three months later. Immediately after the shutdown, twenty women students rented houses, established a temporary school, and started recruiting new students. On November 30, 1925, they braved a sand storm, held banners, returned to their old campus, and entered their dorm building with tears.²⁸ During the strike, the general press had followed the attitude of the Ministry of Education and the stance of Yang Yinyu. But *Women's Weekly* represented the students' stance. As insiders with firsthand information, students analyzed the origin of the strike, exposed the schemes, and justified their cause and actions.

²⁴ "Nüshida canju de jingguo"[The progression of the tragedy at Women's Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 37 (August 26, 1925): 100-102.

²⁵ "Wei Nüshida de kongqian canju gao quanguo tongbao"[To all compatriots on the unprecedented tragedy at the Women's Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 37 (August 26, 1925): 99-100.

²⁶ "Baogao tingbanhou de Nüshida" [A report on the Women's Normal University after its closedown] *Funü zhoukan* 36 (August 19, 1925).

²⁷ "Wei Nüshida de kongqian canju gao quanguo tongbao"[To all compatriots on the unprecedented tragedy at the Women's Normal University] *Funü zhoukan* 37 (August 26, 1925).

²⁸ Lu Jingqing, "Jiushi chongti"[Recalling old stories] *Nüshida xunkan* 5-6 (1931): 2-5.

The story that students defended and preserved Beijing Women's Normal University in 1925 was regarded as a glorious chapter in Chinese female education, and greatly encouraged women students in the 1930s. When the Ministry of Education decided to merge Beijing Women's Normal University with the male institute, Beijing Normal University, in the early 1930s, women students objected by recalling how the school had been preserved in the crisis of 1925. A student journal in 1931 *The Journal of Women's Normal University* (Nüshida xunkan) affiliated with New People Society (Xinminhui) carried Lu Jingqing's memoir of the 1925 strike. As the editor of *Women's Weekly*, Lu recalled the details of their struggles and perseverance in defending the school.²⁹ Lu's memoir received repercussions. For students in 1931, an independent women's university testified to women students' struggle against despotism. Xie Bin, a student at Women's Normal University in 1931 argued for the school's independence out of feminist concerns. She was not willing to see the female university that had been preserved by the blood of former students perish. Xie Bin dismissed her schoolmates' argument that the merger would save budget and improve female education, arguing that the money so saved would merely become warlords' military funds or provide small change for their concubines' cosmetics. Male Normal University, she argued, had better teachers and a more extensive library. If Women's Normal University had such things and women students studied diligently, they could improve themselves without the merger.³⁰

Nevertheless, the merger went forward as planned. After the merger, in April 1931, women students changed the title of their journal to *The Journal of No. 2 Division of Beijing National Normal University* (Guoli Beiping Shifan daxue di'erbu xunkan). The content of the renamed journal displayed women students' continued interest in feminist ideas and practices. For example, on June 10, 1931, Qi Duanshi reported on women students' achievement in mass education. She maintained that women students' involvement in mass education was a feminist legacy of the May Fourth era.³¹

Given the women's struggles at the Women's Normal University in the mid-1920s, it becomes clear that the party-led women's emancipation movement in the National Revolution did not override women students' concerns with freedom and autonomy in education, nor did members of the party-led movement step in to aid the students.

Reevaluating Feminist Issues

The National Revolution of 1924-27 changed neither the social structure nor women's public and private status. The political atmosphere in North China under various warlords remained oppressive. On March 18, 1926, warlord Duan Qirui's government opened fire on students who protested against imperialism, and closed down

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Xie Bin, "Dule 'Jiushi chongti' yihou" [After reading 'recalling old stories'] *Nüshida xunkan* 7 (1931): 2-4.

³¹ "Wo'men de pingmin xuexiao" [Our plain people's school] *Guoli Beiping Shifan Daxue di'erbu xunkan* 17(June 10, 1931): 14-16.

the Nationalist government's office and the municipal government in Beijing. A month later, another warlord Zhang Zuolin entered Beijing with his troops, suppressed the communists, closed down the progressive *Beijing News*, and executed the editor Shao Piaoping.³² Warlords' destruction of progressive forces made women's mass movement in North China extremely difficult. Women's journals in Beijing either disappeared or shifted away from liberal and political discussions. Communist woman Liu Qingyang who led the Women's Department in Beijing then changed her strategies by either organizing women's activities through legal measures or mobilizing women secretly.

On September 15, 1926, some women from both the Communist (CCP) and Nationalist (GMD) parties in Beijing started editing a bi-weekly *Women's Weekly* (*Funü zhiyou*), to break women's silence on political matters. Published first by Bright Star Press (*Mingxing*) then by the progressive North New Press (*Beixin*), beginning in January 1927, *Women's Friend* testified to the cooperation between CCP and GMD women, and recorded Beijing women's activism in the Northern Expedition. The eight founders were Zhe Songxue, Lü Yunzhang, Zhang Yilan, Xu Kairui, Huang Zhouyu, Zhang Ying, Ding Ziming, and Liao Yuzhen. The first four were members of the Nationalist Party (GMD). Zhe Songxue had once served the head of Women's Department in the Beijing municipal government. Lü Yunzhang was a student at Women's Normal University. Zhang Yilan and Xu Kairui were students at Peking University, and Zhang Yilan later became a martyr together with Li Dazhao because of warlord Zhang Zuolin's persecution. These women could not "tolerate the darkness and misery around women," and expected the bi-weekly could draw enthusiastic women to women's movements. Beijing print media received *Women's Friend* enthusiastically. The *Morning News* (*Chenbao*) first introduced the "new little sister" on September 30, 1926. A month later, *The World News* (*Shijie ribao*) reprinted Tan Jinyun's article "The History of Women's Movements," which had first appeared in *Women's Friend*. The bi-weekly woman's publication enjoyed a circulation of five thousand.³³ Its contact address was Zhou Shensheng's dormitory at Beijing Women's Normal University.

Women's Friend kept alive topics such as gender equality, women's emancipation, family and marriage reform, and the cooperation between intellectual and working class women. However, it critically reevaluated earlier feminist legacy and made constructive revisions on some May Fourth feminist arguments, e.g., women's inheritance. In imperial China, the principle manner of inheritance was equal division of the father's property among surviving sons. Household division was accompanied by patrilineal succession: when a household had no surviving son or male heir at the time the father died, his relatives would adopt a male heir from other branches of the father's family (often his nephew) to inherit his property and carry out postmortem filial duties.³⁴

³² "Funü zhiyou" [Women's friend] *Beijing funü baokankao*, 1905-1940 [A research on women's periodicals in Beijing], 218-219.

³³ *Ibid*, 218-219, 234.

³⁴ Kathryn Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China 960-1949* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999). She finds the Song Code made a daughter legally entitled to inherit if her parents die without any sons; but the "mandatory nephew succession" in the early Ming seriously diminished the property claims of both daughter and widows; in the mid Qing, the state law increased a widowed wife's custodial powers within the nephew succession, and the rise of the cult of widow's chastity made possible for

May Fourth women journalists appropriated male discourse of women's liberation, and were more interested in the humanist goals of women's emancipation than in claiming women's basic rights. They saw the revision of the inheritance laws to include women as the enemy of women's independent personhood. Ever since *New Youth* (Xin qingnian) had carried the translation of Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* in June 1918, many educated young women regarded Nora as their idol of individual liberty.³⁵ Chinese Noras were eager to break away from families and scornful of the idea of women's equal inheritance proposed by liberal-minded reformers since the late Qing.

Having witnessed the mass mobilization of women, the ongoing revision of the Draft Civil Code, and the attacks on patriarchy during the National Revolution, many women activists started to search for a way to end their inequity. Some women journalists in late 1920s espoused a feminist agenda that women should have inheritance, arguing that inheritance were crucial for women's emancipation. In October 1926, Zhe Songxue argued in *Women's Friend* that without inheritance women could not pay tuition nor invest in industries. She advised parents to divide their property equally among children regardless of their sex.³⁶ In February 1928 in the same journal, an author by the penname Yinzhou ("Seal of Zhou," a reference to the hallowed Zhou dynasty) maintained that once women received inheritance, the door to gender equality at home and in society would open. But she advised women with inherited property to live a career life and be independent producers.³⁷ Zhe Songxue and Yinzhou argued that women's inheritance could help women achieve independence, instead of viewing women's inheritance as a barrier to their independence.

May Fourth feminists promoted public socialization between men and women. But in the Nationalist Revolution, some women's attitudes towards men became more critical, even negative. Women who left home for the revolution, sometimes found that male revolutionaries cheated and abused women. Other women demonstrated extraordinary caliber in the revolution and became conceited and disdainful of men. Some women's unhappy marriages made other women hold onto celibacy. In 1926, Communist woman Yang Zhihua analyzed the rise of *funü zhuyi*, an extreme attitude towards men among women activists in the National Revolution. Those women activists took men as the target of women's movements, and argued that once women got intensively involved in political matters, they were manipulated by politics and could not devote themselves to women's movements. Yang Zhihua criticized such narrow views that mistook women's movements for "women's struggle against men's oppression."³⁸

widowed concubines to have custodian rights. Also see Ann Waltner, *Getting An Heir: Adoption and the Construction of Kinship in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

³⁵ In Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*, Nora is a middle class woman who is happily married to a banker and has three children. In helping a friend, Nora makes her own decision without consulting her husband, which ruins her relation with her husband. She realizes that her husband has never regarded her as an individual with her own ideas, and leaves home to pursue her freedom and independence.

³⁶ "Nüzi yi lizheng yichan chengji quan" [Women should fight for their rights to inherit] *Funü zhiyou* 2 (1926 October 1): 1-5.

³⁷ Funü jiefang zhilu"[The road to women's emancipation] *Funü zhiyou* 11 (February 15, 1927).

Another Communist woman Huang Dinghui recalled that women's "celibacy" in the National Revolution was often an expression of women's extreme attitude towards men—taking men as women's enemies.³⁹ As Communists, Yang and Huang had a political commitment to stressing the danger of sex war and to advocating class war. Their comments on women's *funü zhuyi* view were not unbiased. Further examining women's media writings in the National Revolution will reveal why some women only looked at things from a perspective of the struggle between sexes.

In the National Revolution, some women writers employed print media as an arena to declare war against men. They took men as the object of women's movements, and understood women's movement as a sex war. In January 1927, an author by the penname Qiushui ("Autumn water") wrote in *Women's Friend* that women's direct oppressors and enemies were those "sly men" who cheated and abused those brave women who broke way from their despotic families. She proposed that women make efforts to solve all their problems, without giving men any hope of cooperation.⁴⁰

Unfortunately Qiushui assumed an elite woman's condescending attitude towards other women. Since "most women could not differentiate right from wrong," she advised *Women's Friend* to be objective and disclose the cunningness of men and criticize the shortcomings of women.⁴¹ In March 1927, an author by the penname Bi'nian ("compare difficulty") argued that women's emancipation could only be achieved through women's own efforts, and economic independence and equality was the foundation of women's emancipation.⁴² In the same issue, a woman writer Zhang Qianhua called on women to achieve independence and overthrow the male-centric world.⁴³

When the Northern Expedition led by Chiang Kai-Shek began in July 1926 with the goal of eliminating warlords and unifying China, the Nationalist army campaigned against warlords in the north, and Communists concentrated on political activity among civilian population. In such upsurge of nationalism, some women nonetheless argued that women should pursue women's movements while participating in the nationalist movements. Those women treated the National Revolution and women's emancipation movement as two parallel movements that women could pursue at the same time. Their rhetoric was that women's emancipation was an important part of national emancipation, and women by no means could sacrifice their own interests.

Women's Friend as an independent women's periodical provided women the forum to declare war against men. On January 1, 1927, a student at Beijing Women's Normal University, Yuan Shidong, argued in *Women's Friend* that the National

³⁸ Yang Zhihua, "Zhongguo funü yundong zuiyan" [Comments on the Chinese women's movement] *zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, 559-560.

³⁹ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 344.

⁴⁰ "Funüzhuyou she jinhuo de shiming" [The future mission of the Society of Women's Friend] *Funü zhiyou* 8 (January 1, 1927): 14-23.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Zenyang caishi zhenzheng de funü jiefang"[What is true women's emancipation] *Funü zhiyou* 10 (February 1, 1927): 4.

⁴³ "Funü yu zhiye wenti"[Women and career] *Funü zhiyou* 10 (February 1, 1927): 9.

Revolution could not solve all women's problems because women's enemies were "not only warlords and imperialists, but also men." Although proponents of the party-led women's emancipation movement argued that women could pursue their interests better by first participating in the National Revolution, Yuan Shidong proposed, "Women should join men to eliminate mankind's oppression, at the same time women should overthrow their enemy—the patriarchy." She proclaimed, "To strengthen the National Revolution, we should keep the battle between sexes in certain form."⁴⁴ Similarly, the author who used the penname Yinzhou argued in *Women's Friend* that pursuing women's emancipation would help women serve the National Revolution better, "If women are not emancipated, how can they understand the significance of the National Revolution?"⁴⁵

The famous woman writer Chen Xuezhao 1920s proclaimed war against men in a journal edited by male feminists *The New Woman* (*Xinnüxing*). She questioned the authority and legitimacy of male feminists in speaking for women's needs, attacking the hypocrisy of men. In October 1926, her article "To Men" (*Gei nanxing*) criticized Chinese men for being unable to understand educated new women. She found modern men did not understand the importance of women's reproduction and treated young mothers like servants. As a middle class woman intellectual, Chen Xuezhao showed contempt to both men and rural women, arguing "men with slavish nature only deserve to marry rural women."⁴⁶ A male feminist Xia Gaizun argued in his prose essay, "Thoughts at Hearing a Song" (*Wen'ge yougan*) in *The New Woman*, that a woman's proper role was a wife at home. But Chen Xuezhao proposed that new women should be independent. She defended the authority of her voice, "it should be up to women to solve their own problems and exercise their talents." She declared that she would "open fire" on men if they did not liberate their minds.⁴⁷

The editor of *The New Woman*, another male feminist Zhang Xichen explained in the same issue why he carried Chen's article, foreseeing its controversy. "Her article is the boldest writing we have read recently. We hope all modern women can publish their long-suppressed opinions. Such writing can push men to reflect on themselves, and awake the feminist consciousness among women."⁴⁸ Readers of both sexes responded to Chen's article. In January 1927, Chen Xuanzhao, a woman who claimed to be Chen Xuezhao's sister supported her feminist ideas. But a male reader Mo Xinghan disagreed with her denouncement of men, criticizing some new women for being sexually loose, loving money, and climbing social ladders.⁴⁹ Chen Xuezhao subsequently defended new women by arguing that both wife-mother role and husband-father role were "basic human rights," and that a husband and a wife should share housework and child-raising. Chen

⁴⁴ Yuan Shidong, "Dadao nanquan shehui, quxiao bu pingdeng daiyu" [Overthrow male-centric society, abolish gender inequality] *Funü zhiyou* 8 (January 1, 1927): 19-20.

⁴⁵ "Funü jiefang zhilu"[The road of women's emancipation] *Funü zhiyou* 11(February 15, 1927): 1-7.

⁴⁶ Chen Xuezhao, "Gei nanxing"[To men] *Xinnüxing* 1, 10 (October 1926).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ "Paiwanhou" [After editing] *Xinnüxing* 1, 10 (October 1926).

⁴⁹ *Xinnüxing* 2, 1 (January 1927): 127-129.

Xuezhao reasoned that some women chose celibacy or a career life because the wife-mother role entailed too much sacrifice and was too demanding.⁵⁰ If men embraced feminism as instrumental to modernity, women embraced feminism as a new way of life.

In the National Revolution, women writers actively proposed suffrage movement and women's labor movement. If May Fourth women activists were concerned about their individual rights in women's emancipation, female writers in late 1920s were interested in emancipating the majority of women. In 1926, a woman writer Pan Weiming proposed women's franchise in *Women's Friend*.⁵¹ In November that year, a writer using the penname Wangming ("expect brightness") argued that women's political activism was the foundation for women's emancipation and gender equality. She hoped emancipated women should help emancipate oppressed women.⁵² In March 1927, she maintained in the *Women's Friend* that women of all classes should jointly pursue their common interests.⁵³ A week later, Bi'nan argued that independence was the foundation of women's emancipation and equality. But she realized that only privileged women could benefit from suffrage.⁵⁴

Mulan Heroism and the National Revolution

Women activists participated in the 1911 revolution with a feminist goal that women would be recognized as equal citizens in the new Republic.⁵⁵ Women's dual interests in nationalism and feminism found manifestation again in the National Revolution. In the mid 1920s, the general print media understood feminism as women's right to participate in the nationalist movement and the public arena, including the military. Two hundred or so educated women were recruited and trained in a modern military academy in Wuhan in 1926, and some later participated in the Northern Expedition as soldiers. As the most visible national women and feminists of their era, women cadets' experiences in the Northern Expedition offered insights into how they regarded the relationship between women and the nation, feminism and nationalism. In October 1926, the Northern Expedition Army took over the city of Wuchang and the Central Military and Political Academy opened a branch in Wuhan (just across the Yangzi River) that openly recruited young students of both sexes. The Wuhan Military Academy planned to recruit one hundred women. Impressed by female candidates'

⁵⁰ *Xinnüxing* 2, 1(January 1927): 35-39.

⁵¹ "Beiyapode Zhongguo funü zenyang qumou jiefang"[How can oppressed Chinese women gain their emancipation?] *Funü zhiyou* 14 (April 1, 1927): 12-13.

⁵² "Ruhe dadao wo'men nüzi zhenzhengde duli"[How to achieve women's true independence] *Funü zhiyou* 3 (October 15, 1926): 2-6.

⁵³ "Funüzhijie she yu funü—you baili er wu yihai"[The Society of Women's Friend and women—much benefit, no harm] *Funü zhiyou* 9 (January 15, 1927): 3-8.

⁵⁴ "Zenyang caishi zhenzhengde funü jiefang" [What is true women's emancipation?] *Funü zhiyou* 10 (February 1, 1927): 1-7.

⁵⁵ Yuxin Ma, "Nation, '-Isms' and Women's Media Public," 66-71.

grades, the academy recruited one hundred and ninety-five women students, mostly from Hunan, Hubei, and Sichuan provinces.⁵⁶

Women cadets' experiences suggest that most of them did not come to the academy for a nationalist purpose, and that the National Revolution was not always their primary concern. If May Fourth feminism had provided young rebels a legitimate rhetoric to resist arranged marriages, then the National Revolution furnished a material base. The Wuhan Military Academy provided many young women opportunities to escape their families' control and fulfill their ambitions. Xie Bingying was a woman cadet who became famous for writing *Diary in the Army* and *The Auto-Biography of a Woman Soldier*. She recalled that nine out of ten women joined the academy to escape family oppression and find their own lives. In the winter of 1926, her mother arranged for her a marriage with a rich man. But she followed her brother's advice that joining the National Revolution was the only way to escape the marriage and achieve emancipation. She was admitted to the academy with the highest scores.⁵⁷

A few women came to the academy with clear nationalist goals. Huang Jingwen joined the academy under the influence of her father and brother. She was fortunately born into a liberal family, and her father was a member of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance, a very patriotic man with democratic ideas. Her brother Huang Wenkai was a communist who encouraged her with progressive ideas and inspired her to read progressive journals *Guide* (Xiangdao), *New Youth* (Xinqinnian), and *Xiangjiang Comments* (Xiangjiang pinglun). Huan Jingwen became a member of the Socialist Youth League. At the age of fifteen, she was admitted to the Wuhan Military Academy. Her father happily hosted a farewell feast, and her brother escorted her to the academy.⁵⁸

Female cadets went through the transformation from curious women students to mature revolutionary soldiers in a short time. Their physical and spiritual transformation began on the first day. When Xie Bingying moved into the academy, she saw a group of young women hopefuls wearing colorful dresses and standing around talking to each other in low voices. They seemed frivolous. Although, told that they could only leave the academy once a month, many had not brought their daily necessities. When Xie Bingying saw a fully armed woman officer in yellow leg wrappings put on grand airs, she watched that officer with rapt attention. The instruction from a male officer further stunned those girls: "Now return to your dormitories and change into uniforms. From now on, you are no longer spoiled rich girls, but brave women soldiers! Wash away the makeup on your faces, and have your hair cut short, or even shaved bald like ours." The girls let out cries of surprise, but the male officer put on a stern face: "You should remember that the military academy is not like liberal art colleges where you live a comfortable and

⁵⁶ Peng Yilan "Yi Wuhan junxiao nüshengdui he 'Ba-Yi' Nanchang qiyi" [Remembering women's team at Wuhan Military Academy and the August 1 uprising in Nanchang] *Dageming hongliu zhong de nübing* [Women soldiers in the revolutionary tide] (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 1991), 19.

⁵⁷ "Yige nübing de riji he shuxin" [A woman soldier's dairy and letters] *Dageming hongliu zhong de nübing*, 182-196.

⁵⁸ "Chuilian"[Tempering] *Dageming hongliu zhongde nübing*, 62-72.

romantic life. Now you are soldiers! The duty of a soldier is to observe discipline, obey order, and bear hardship without complaining.”⁵⁹

Too excited to fall asleep that night, Xie Bingying wrote in her diary: “Soldier! What a powerful word! Chinese women under feudal oppression can have their day to be soldiers! How hard should we try to reform the society and eliminate feudal remnants?” Beautiful hope crept into her mind like fire sparks, “If it were not in the dead of night, I would have leapt into the air and shouted.”⁶⁰ Although she came to the academy to escape an arranged marriage, once she put on the military uniform and held a gun, her mind changed—she wanted to serve the National Revolution and establish a new China. After a period of intensive training, she went to the frontline with the Northern Expedition Army in early 1927. She wrote down her experiences on the frontline and sent them to Zhou Fuyuan’s *The Supplement of Central News* (*Zhongyang ribao fukan*) in Wuhan, which immediately published her exuberant diaries in series without revision.⁶¹ Soon Lin Yutang translated those diaries for foreign newspapers.

Women cadets did not sacrifice their individual ambition in the National Revolution. These modern heroines perceived that their self-interests could be best served through the struggle for national interest. Some women came to the academy to fulfill their ambition to be heroes. In China, the archetypal woman warrior, Hua Mulan who clad herself in men’s armor and rose to become a general, had stimulated many women’s imaginations. The inspiration of Mulan invited ambitious young women in the 1920s to seek a heroic life. Wang Zheng’s study of Communist woman Huang Dinghui finds that Huang even changed her name to Mulan—“admiring Hua Mulan” in the National Revolution.⁶² Joseph Allen finds that the fictional construction of Hua Mulan in China focuses more on her traditional feminine virtues rather than on her masculine features.⁶³ Hua Mulan chose to be a woman soldier out of filial piety and loyalty to the emperor, but women cadets in the mid 1920s joined the National Revolution to break away from patriarchy, escape arranged marriage, search personal freedom, and fight for a political ideal. Hua Mulan did not intentionally imitate men, but women cadets purposely denied their femininity—some shaved their heads in the manly fashion and cross-dressed like men in daily lives. Others refused to wear the red armband designed to indicate when they were menstruating. Their notion of Mulan heroism “encompassed women’s double struggle over nationalism and feminism.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid. 185-186.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 188.

⁶¹ Bingying’s diaries were published in series by *Zhongyang Ribao*. Although I cannot identify the exact dates of their publication, I find those diaries were published when she was still in the middle of carrying out her military duty in the early 1927.

⁶² Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 350-351.

⁶³ Joseph Allen, “Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior,” *Positions* 4, 2 (Fall 1996): 343-379. Allen argues that the femininity of Hua Mulan was sartorial in Chinese literature, while in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*, Mulan’s femininity was somatic.

⁶⁴ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 350.

Serving the National Revolution gave women cadets unprecedented pride and dignity, but they were disturbed to find out that some male cadets treated women cadets according to stereotyped gender norms. Woman cadet Zhang Yizhi recalled her excitement at her admission to the academy: “We are human beings with dignity now. . . . We need not admire Hua Mulan any more because we can dress in men’s clothes openly.” But she soon realized that she was wrong. Once while they were putting on makeup for a street performance, a male director scolded them, “How can young girls expose themselves and perform in the public?” He assumed that women should stay in the inner chambers and did not see women cadets differently from other women. When those women reported this to the general drillmaster Yun Daiying, the academy sent four former graduates to be their instructors.⁶⁵

Women cadets’ lofty goals and their enthusiasm for serving the National Revolution conflicted with the reality that they were treated no better than other women, even in the middle of a revolutionary mission. In July 1927, the Nanjing and Wuhan governments merged, and the Wuhan Military Academy allowed women cadets to graduate earlier. Some women cadets stayed with the army, some engaged in underground activities, and others returned home. Woman cadet Zeng Xianzhi volunteered to work at the medical division of the second route army. One night, forty women cadets slept on the floor of a big room. Some male soldiers led horses across the room, behaving disrespectfully to those women. Someone told them, “Do not behave like this. They are daughters of good families.” The male soldiers retorted, “How could daughters of good families come to such a place?” Zeng Xianzhi was deeply hurt and could not stay any longer. She returned to the academy, which had changed its name to Military Cadres’ Training Group, asking to work as a secretary.⁶⁶

Gender and class intervened in a special way to the disadvantage of women cadets. They came from well-off families that could afford a middle school education for their daughters and were graduates of the Wuhan Military Academy. With their modern education, professional military training, and lofty political aspirations of serving the nation, women cadets contrasted sharply with male soldiers who were recruited from poor rural households, had little education, and joined the army for food and a meager income. When women cadets met rough male soldiers on military missions, each side judged the other by their own logic and standards. Male soldiers did not believe decent women would leave their homes and sleep on the ground in strange places at night. Women cadets felt their lofty political ideals betrayed their gendered interest and found male soldiers rude and unacceptable. By joining men in fighting for national unification and independence, women cadets expected to be treated like heroes. But they were always seen as women in men’s world. The Mulan subject position worked paradoxically for modern women soldiers—it inspired discontent with their treatment in the Revolution while at the same time consoled them for their sacrifice.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ “Feijian de huohua” [The dancing fire sparks] *Dageming hongliu zhongde nübing*, 165.

⁶⁶ “Guanyu nüshengdui de diandi huiyi” [Scattered memories of women’s team] *Dageming hongliu zhongde nübing*, 61-62.

⁶⁷ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 350-351.

Defending Women's Legal Rights

Perceiving law as an important institution in creating necessary social order, the Nanjing government diligently carried out legal reforms, issuing a new Penal Code in 1928 and a new Civil Code in 1929. Based on the twin principles of gender equality and individual property, the new legal codes granted Chinese women inheritance rights and freedom in marriage and divorce. The vast majority of Chinese women, who were either illiterate or indifferent to the legal reforms, were unaware of their new legal rights. Women journalists not only popularized women's legal rights but also employed their legal knowledge to mediate women's legal cases. In late 1920s, some women's journals societies assumed semi-judicial power in handling women's cases.

Shanghai Women (Shanghai funü), a journal of Women's Society of Shanghai Special Municipality was edited by Liu Hengjing, a woman who belonged to the Nationalist Party. Created on August 1, 1928, it had a special column "Oppressed Women Asking for Help" that carried legal cases filed by women at the society. Those published cases informed readers what the women's society could do for women, and made it possible for readers to relate their personal situations to those cases. When those cases were successfully mediated, the reputation and influence of the women's society grew. The society of *Shanghai Women*, for example, solved the following case. As reported in *Shanghai Women*,

Xie Jialiu was a twenty year old native of Ningbo who lives at No. 56, Chongfu Lane, Hengbingqiao, North Sichuan Road. She married a Hangzhou person Pan Jiarui last year but could not tolerate his mistreatment of her parents-in-law and the abuse of her husband. She had already asked a lawyer, Tang Xingjian, to write a warning letter to her husband and raised her divorce request at the local court. Now she came to our society for help.⁶⁸

On July 8, the society invited Pan Jiarui for a talk. Pan said his relation with Xie had been very good but his parents tried to split them. Both parties agreed to restore their relationship. Pan Jiarui paid sixty *yuan* to the lawyer, and promised they would live separately from his parents.⁶⁹ In this case, Xie Jialiu employed both legal channels and civil measures to claim justice. She not only hired a lawyer and took her husband to court, but also asked for help from the women's society. The mediation of the women's society not only saved her marriage but also helped her escape the mistreatment of her parents-in-law. Had this case been judged by the court, Xie would have either divorced or continued her misery.

Another case also reported in *Shanghai Women* was similarly successful. Guo *nee* Xu's husband Guo Maoxuan died in 1924. Before he died, he had entrusted Yao Shaoming to sell sixty-two *mu* of his land in Nanjing. It had been four years, but Guo *nee*

⁶⁸ "Beiyapo nüzi qingqiu yuanzhu'an"[Cases of oppressed women asking for help] *Shanghai funü* 1, (August 1, 1928): 28.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Xu only received one thousand and two hundred *yuan* from Yao and the rest of the money was not sent. Her family of four had no means to live now.

According to *Shanghai Women*, the society sent an agent to talk with Yao Shaoming on August 1. In two days, another agent went to investigate the case. Both parties achieved an agreement. On August 15, Yao paid off the money he owed.⁷⁰ Without the help from the women's society, a widow like Guo *nee* Xu stood in danger of losing her inherited money. The accused obviously had the money but did not want to pay—perhaps he thought a widow could not do anything. The mediation of the women's society successfully resolved in just two weeks a case that had lasted for more than four years and claimed justice for a widow.

Nevertheless, the mediating power of the women's society remained quite limited. Most cases carried in *Shanghai Women* evaded solution. When the women's society could not solve these cases, it could provide women victims some immediate help and helped keep them away from their persecutors.

Xie Jingyi was thirty-eight, and was Ding Naikuan's concubine. Ding had committed adultery with his niece Ding Erbao, and intended to murder Xie Jingyi. Xie came to the women's society, asking for a divorce and maintenance of twenty thousand *yuan*. Since Xie had no place to stay, the society sent her to a local *gongsuo* to live temporarily.⁷¹

As a concubine, Xie could not sue Ding Naikuan at court because her relation with Ding was not defined as a marriage in the new Civil Code that protected monogamy. Although a concubine was defined as a family member and could receive maintenance from the family head, she had to live at the family head's residence. Xie could not stay at Ding's house because of his murderous intention, but if she moved out she would not be qualified to receive maintenance. Since adultery and intended murder violated the Penal Code, the women's society could not solve her case. But they found her a temporary place to stay where she was protected from Ding.

Some men also filed their cases at the women's society. For example,

When An Jingsheng's first wife died, he rented her room to his relative An Aitang on the condition that when he remarried he could have the room back. Now he remarried a woman *nee* Hu. Since he knew An Aitang smuggled opium, he urged the latter to move out. But An Aitang got angry and beat An Jingsheng's new wife An *nee* Hu severely. An Jingsheng was afraid of An Aitang's power and influence, so he quietly sent his wife to a hospital. An Aitang threatened to beat An Jingsheng to death. An

⁷⁰ Beiyapo nüzi qingqiu yuanzhu'an"[Cases of oppressed women asking for help] *Shanghai funü* 2 (September, 1928): 27.

⁷¹ Beiyapo nüzi qingqiu yuanzhu'an"[Cases of oppressed women asking for help] "Case without resolution" *Shanghai funü* 1, (August 1, 1928).

Jingsheng was so scared that he fell out of a window upstairs and was severely injured. He asked the women's society to help him.⁷²

Both the plaintiff and the accused were men. The case only marginally involved a woman, An Jingsheng's new wife *nee* Hu. The fact that a man did not go to court, but asked for help from the women's society not only spoke for the power and influence of the society, but also suggested the society had broader public concerns beyond women's issues. The women's society followed legal procedure in handling cases. First, the society talked to the accused, then listened to the story from the other side. Then, it investigated the case and mediated between the two parties. Finally, it took action based on the information that had been gathered. As a semi-judicial mediator, the woman's society sometimes was more resourceful and efficient than a court. Publishing cases helped readers learn more about women's new legal rights, informed them that the women's society stood ready to help women, and exposed the wrong-doers to a reading public thus imposing moral punishment onto the accused.

Edited by the Propaganda Team of Women's Society of Beiping Special Municipality—Beijing was renamed as Beiping in January 1928 under the Nanjing government, *Women's Monthly* (Funü yuekan) had a "Funü husheng" (Women's appeals) column to carry legal cases brought to the society. The second issue in October 1929 carried seven cases, which all turned to the rhetoric of "protecting women's rights" or "protecting humanity" in asking help. Ying Guojun brought up his daughter Lian *nee* Ying's case: "My daughter has been tortured severely by her husband Lian Peilin's family and her life is at danger. I plead to the women's society to grant her a divorce in the spirit of protecting women's rights and humanity." He gave details about how Lian *nee* Ying had been humiliated, starved, worked hard, beaten badly, and forced to live separately from her husband. Suffering from anger and humiliation, she had contracted tuberculosis. Ying Guojun reasoned, "The Nationalist government protects women's rights and eliminates social evils against women. How can we tolerate an evil family depriving a woman of her rights and plaguing society?"⁷³ Lacking the money to sue the Lian family, he turned to the women's society: "The society has done many good things for women, brought hope to women who are oppressed by despotic families, and showed benevolence to those who suffered in bitterness." The society interviewed Ying and his daughter, and helped submit the case to a local court.⁷⁴ Ying Guojun was familiar with the legal reforms and the gender policy of the Nanjing government. He utilized the rhetoric of "protecting women's rights" and "maintaining humanity," and trusted the society's ability to defend women's rights and claim justice for women.

As reported in *Women's Monthly*, Ma Yuzehn accused Liu Kuan of kidnapping and raping his daughter Zhao *nee* Ma. Ma Yuzhen expected the women's society to "protect women's rights" and forward his letter to the Supreme Court of Hebei province. The case was very complicated. Ma's sister-in-law had arranged his daughter's marriage

⁷² "Beiyapo nüzi qingqiu yuanzhu'an"[Oppressed women asking for help] "Case without resolution" *Shanghai funü* 2, (1928).

⁷³ "Lai han yi"[The first letter] *Funü yuekan* 2: 30-32.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

to Liu Kuan in exchange for money. But both Ma and his daughter denied the arrangement and persuaded their county magistrate, who declared that marriage invalid. Then Ma entrusted another relative Liu Yong to marry his daughter to Zhao Jingxian's son, and he left to work elsewhere. During Zhao *nee* Ma's first visit to Liu Yong's family after the wedding, Liu Kuan gathered some roughnecks and kidnapped the girl and Liu Yong. He raped the girl and sent Liu Yong to the county magistrate. Liu Kuan bribed the county magistrate and the village head, so the case was delayed.⁷⁵

Ma's letter referred to "women's rights" and the Republican law to denounce the local government: "Gang kidnapping is a serious crime. How could the magistrate be so indifferent to the case? They neglected women's rights, and stamped on the Republican law." Ma Yuzhen hoped the women's society would eliminate the evil local magnate in the spirit of "emancipating women."⁷⁶ He asked the Women's Society of Beiping Special Municipality to discuss his case with the Higher Court of Hebei province so that those accused could be arrested and brought to Beiping for trial. Phrases like "women's rights" and "women's emancipation" in his letter made the case more appealing to the society. In employing phrases like "to maintain humanity," "to protect women's rights," or "to promote women's emancipation," those plaintiffs apparently took the authority of the women's society seriously. *Women's Monthly* carried Ying Guojun and Ma Yuzhen's letters in full length to show its attention to such cases.

Feminist rhetoric of protecting women's legal rights was compatible with the legal reforms of the Nanjing government. Women's journals popularized women's new legal rights and cultivated women's legal consciousness. Women's societies preserved the tradition of mediating women's cases and protecting women's rights since early Republican period, and further developed such legacy when the state recognized women's rights through legal reforms.

Conclusion

In the National Revolution, autonomous feminism coexisted with the party-led women's emancipation movement. There was a continuity of feminist concerns in women's journals that predated and post-dated the party-led women's emancipation movement. Women writers adapted feminist discussions to the changed socio-political context, and enabled feminism to survive the ideological polarization in the late 1920s. Feminists' struggles for women's rights coincided with the legal reforms of the Nationalist government that upheld the principle of gender equality.

⁷⁵ "Lai han er"[The second letter] *Funii yuekan* 2 (1929): 33-34.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*