

Chinese Women in Globalization: New Gender Discriminations and New Feminist Voices

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Introduction

The processes of globalization, forcefully transforming structures and institutions across the globe, behoove us to understand issues in specific countries in the context of globalization. This is particularly true of the emerging gender discriminations against women in China since China's opening and reform. While China's unprecedented economic development has brought both Chinese men and Chinese women more economic opportunities, higher living standards, and more desirable lifestyle, Chinese women have not achieved equal job opportunities or equal treatment from society as Chinese men. In this context, the Chinese government has amended labor laws in 2007, offered new interpretation of marriage law in 2011, and extended maternity leave at the end of 2011 to meet various international standards. As scholars Gita Sen, Caren Grown, and others see, the assumption that the improvement of women's economic position would guarantee improvement of women's social status has been proved deadly wrong before the reality of women's unequal employment and participation in the development process. With the restructured relationship between China's state and market, some advantages that used to protect women are being taken away. Traditional Chinese patriarchy, with Western patriarchy as its accomplice, reemerges in society as a stronger force, while

market ideology is eroding the proletariat and communist ideology. Though men are also vulnerable to the engulfing forces of globalization, women's vulnerability is "further reinforced by systems of male domination" that "deny or limit their access to economic resources and political participation," and "impose sexual divisions of labor that allocate to them the most onerous, labor-intensive, poorly rewarded tasks inside and outside the home, as well as the longest hours of work" (Sen and Grown 26) As a result of these and many other changes, some aspects of women's social status are getting worse, especially when compared to conditions during pre-reform China.

Globalization has contradictory effects on Chinese women. On the one hand, the unequal development opportunities for women has created new gender inequalities that post-reform China finds hard to handle. This underdevelopment, as Desai sharply points out, "arose from their enforced but asymmetric participation in the process of development in which they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits" (190). There are gender-specific issues emerging after the reform: unequal job opportunities and wages for urban women, lower status and exploitation of the migrating rural women, the rapid decline of women's political participation, and the rampant reemergence of prostitution and concubinage. On the other hand, as the state control over individuals is relatively relaxing, Chinese women start organizing to address these problems. Academic feminists begin to introduce feminist theories and set up women's studies programs, and state feminism starts to transform itself to deal

with the new gender issues. These women's movements overcome tensions to build solidarity and create a collective identity to influence decision-making, educate the mass, and ultimately raise consciousness for both the public and the state.

To explore how the confluence of relative retreat of state, the market ideology, and patriarchy has effected discriminations against Chinese women and forced women to organize themselves for a change, this paper examines four major discriminations emerging in reform China: the decline of women's political participation, gender inequality in job opportunities and wages for urban women, discrimination against rural migrating women in urban industries and informal sectors, and the degradation of women's status in prostitutions and concubinage. In exploring these issues, I will emphasize that women's improved access to education, improved economic situation, and improved living standard have not substantially changed women's subordination. More importantly, I will discuss how various Chinese feminists respond to these gender inequalities and work together to construct a collective presence and voice to effect changes in women's lives. Finally, the paper will highlight that raising the consciousness of Chinese women, society, and the state is a necessary and useful strategy to effect changes of gender subordination.

Declining Political Participation of Women: A Decline of Social Status or a Decline of Liberation Consciousness Level?

Benefiting from the state's commitment to gender equality and social rights, Chinese women have enjoyed a high social position. This high position appears to have been sustained during the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, as shown in the high ranking China has on UN's gender-related development index and gender empowerment measures (Shang 1995). However, like in other European socialist countries, the state in China has to retreat and relax its control over politics, economy, industry, agriculture, and education in order to nurture a growing market economy. As a result of the state's retreat and the introduction of market economy, women's political participation, which used to be guaranteed by fixed quotas, has suddenly declined a few years after the reform. The decline is not only disappointingly radical but also present across all levels of political institutions. As Xiaoyuan Shang points out, Chinese women "constituted 21 per cent of Standing Committee members at the Fourth NPC in January 1978" but occupied "only 9 per cent at the Sixth NPC in January 1983," which is not as scary as the disappearance of women cadres in many areas "as soon as multi-candidate elections were introduced as a symbol of the democratic reforms in 1987" (195-6). In Qi Wang's study, the percentage of villages with basic-level women cadres has dropped from 70 per cent in the 1950s to 10 per cent in the 1990s; the numbers look more abysmal with a closer look at the breakdown of the 10 percent: "In 1993, women accounted for only about 3.8 percent

of the country's township administrators, 5.9 percent of the county heads and 5.8 percent of the municipal responsible managers" (19).

What do these dwindling numbers suggest about Chinese women? Scholars both inside and outside China have noticed the decline and started heated debates about whether this decline literally and symbolically means a decline of women's social status. While some lament the transition as disadvantageous to women, others stress that declining numbers do not equal with declining social status. Still others, not alarmed by these numbers, contend that these statistics are only the consequence of "women's unwillingness to take on positions of social or political responsibility in addition to their full-time jobs and domestic chores" (Shang 196). While some attribute the decline to the persistent traditional prejudice against women, "discrimination against women both in the process of selecting cadres or representatives and in the wider society," others take the numbers as proof of women's lower quality—lower educational level—and lower qualifications for political leadership (195-7).

Xiaoyuan Shang responds to these arguments and argues that these arguments have not questioned the old forms of women's participation in the mainstream political system. Shang contends that this decline does not mean that women's status has actually deteriorated. Her argument is that "women's participation in the mainstream

political system such as government, party agencies, and the NPC, according to fixed quotas introduced by the party-state,” is “tokenistic,” because “it is not a form of real participation for ordinary people, irrespective of whether they are men or women; it makes no difference how many women there are in the government if ordinary women are not active in policy making at the basic level” (197).

These debates may throw some light on the issue of women’s political participation, but there are many discussions missing from these arguments. First, the state’s support of women’s political participation has been decreasing in the process of transition from planned economy to market economy. In “State-Society Relation and Women’s Participation,” Qi Wang made an insightful exploration about the reasons for such an unexpected decline:

In Mao’s time, women’s political participation was an integral component of the overall political development of China from 1949, through which the Chinese state both gradually penetrated into society and succeeded in transforming women into an object of politicization and a political constituency of the regime. The strong state input facilitated the inroad of women into China’s local leadership structure, but also made women politically dependent on the state for support and legitimacy. I further argue that China’s post-Mao political transition, marked by the retreat of the state from society, has undermined the foundations of women’s political participation. (20)

Wang concludes that with the retreat of state support, Chinese women have to face up the society and to rely on themselves to compete with men for their political participation.

Second, the state ethics about women's roles has been transforming during China's transition from planned economy to market economy. While the double load—a full-time job and the housework—for pre-reform Chinese women remains true of today's Chinese women, but state ethics about women's roles is different in the two time periods. The Maoist leadership “transplanted into the web of society the willingness to sacrifice family life or personal life for the good of the public interest” (Wang 28). By “elevating such ethics to the status of true virtue, the state fostered,” in both men and women, faiths “that family or individual matters must take second place to public needs and that the relation between political duty and family life should be handled through heroic conduct” (Wang 28). The conflicts between domestic duties and personal comforts are thus resolved through a heroic will to serve the public. As a result, even if Chinese women in pre-reform era knew that they served their husbands and parents-in-laws at the sacrifice of their personal comforts, they were willing to believe that they were making a heroic sacrifice for the good of the general public. But this conflict haunts women in the post-reform China when it is embracing both a capitalist market economy and capitalist ideology: collectivism is giving way to individualism; personal comfort or family life is put before public duty. The state ethics

about women's roles no longer asks women to put their production and social roles before their motherhood and wifehood or to sacrifice personal comfort for the collective. Women no longer believe that political participation and serving the public was an enormous honor or that prioritizing motherhood and wifehood is suspicious of petty bourgeois. Also, the state ethics encourages women to take new opportunities to contribute to the economic growth. Since being woman cadres does not bring economic opportunities as attractive as other jobs, women are less economically motivated to be woman cadres. Also, because men hold better jobs than women, women are encouraged to support their husbands by taking care of domestic chores, the children, and the elders.

Third, the celebration of traditional womanhood with a modern twist is increasingly visible in mainstream discourse: CCTV series, movies, and literature. In shocking contrast to Mao's erasure of femininity, media in post-reform China create a discourse that overemphasizes women's femininity and sexuality. Unlike the sexless, or masculinized image of Chinese women in Mao's time, women in the post-reform era are portrayed as sexually attractive in many media channels. From millions of commercials on women's make-ups and apparels to the eye-catching neon signs that use sexy women to attract consumers, women cannot fail to notice the emergence of this new image or to feel the need to fit into this new image. Since the tough image of an orthodox woman cadre, whose femininity is silenced by her masculine dress and

behavior, is in intensive conflict with the promotion of femininity of the dominant discourse, women are not willing to be women cadres. Consequently, instead of dismissing women's unwillingness to be involved in politics as a simple issue of the conflict between time for work and time for housework, we need to acknowledge how the undermining of a masculinized femininity embodied by female political leaders and cadres has also contributed to Chinese women's withdrawal from active political participation.

Fourth, gender discrimination has been as old as China, but it is generally agreed that there was no overt expression of gender discrimination in Mao's China. While many agree that in the post-Mao era the backlash against gender equality is apparently a reemergence of China's traditional patriarchy, we also need to know that traditional patriarchy has never been absent in China's history and that it is not alone in the post-reform era. First, traditional patriarchy is never challenged throughout China's history, not even in Mao's time, which did mobilize women to work the same as men but did not mobilize men to treat women equally both at home and at the workplace. Gender discrimination was almost erased, both rhetorically and socially, but gender discrimination and subordination never disappears from the cultural consciousness of both men and women. Today, with the relative retreat of state control, individuals are allowed relatively more autonomy and so there emerges overwhelmingly blatant expressions of gender discrimination in every part of today's life. Besides, this time

Chinese patriarchy is not alone; it has been buttressed by western patriarchy, which is imported into China along with market economy, along with McDonalds and KFC, along with sexist Hollywood Movies and western fashions, and along with internet technology. Therefore, it is not that women's quality in the post-reform era is lower that makes them not suitable for politics; it is, rather, that men want to continue, like their forefathers, to subordinate women by excluding them from policy making process.

Finally, Shang's argument that women's political participation is only tokenistic is not totally wrong. However, it is tokenistic in a different sense. Women's liberation is given to Chinese women without going through the process to raise the consciousness of the majority of Chinese women; therefore, the high political participation rate of Chinese women does not automatically mean that Chinese consciousness of gender equality is also high. Unlike the feminist movements in the West, women's liberation was mostly given to women by the Party while most women themselves were generally not aware of what had happened in the process. As Cecilia Milwertz argues, while women's movements have been going on globally for seventy years, "women in China achieved this position of equality very easily and have only understood this relatively slowly" (47). While women in other countries have developed and enhanced their awareness of gender equality in the process of feminist movements, the consciousness of gender equality is developed only in a

small number of Chinese women “engaged in women’s work” (Milwertz 47). Thus, it is not far-fetched to say that Chinese women, except the very few involved in women’s work, have seldom realized the importance of political participation. As a result of multiple factors, women have not realized their privilege until they lost that privilege. To win back their equal political participation, they have a long way to go.

The decline of women’s political participation is, indeed, a decline of women’s social status, and this decline in turn gives impetus to the strengthening of patriarchy. While juggling to be sexy women and good wives, while struggling to support husbands’ careers and succeed in their own jobs, while praising the improved job opportunities, the majority of Chinese women are reinforcing patriarchy and losing a privilege. On the other hand, the decline of women’s political participation does not mean an automatic decline of women’s liberation consciousness, because the liberation consciousness of the majority of Chinese women has never been as high as their high political participation rate. As many women activists and feminists are endeavoring to argue, to raise women’s consciousness of gender equality is a necessary and urgent thing to do right now. It is a process that Chinese women have skipped but cannot skip for ever. Without the support of state input, women have to depend on themselves to face up the gender discrimination to fight against patriarchy.

Gender Inequalities in Jobs and Wages: Urban Chinese Women

Because China is adjusting itself to market economy, the first thing it does is to break “iron rice bowl,” which means there will be no permanent job security. This policy has given enterprises not only more autonomy to hire and fire employees but also a more “decent” or legal excuse to lay off women workers, to give low-paying jobs to women, and to reject women college graduates. At the same time, the state passes some laws and regulations to counteract against this new emerging gender discrimination against urban women. Many of these laws and regulations, however, have not shielded women from discrimination at work: they gave enterprises more excuses to exercise gender discrimination.

The laws passed after 1978 have been trying to protect urban women’s rights and interests. As Margaret Y.K. Woo has explained in “Chinese Women Workers: The Delicate Balance between Protection and Equality,” the 1982 Constitution adopted offers a strong promise of equality for women and guarantees that women enjoys “equal rights with men in all spheres of life,” and that the state protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work to men and women alike” (279). This promise of equality was reaffirmed by the adoption in 1992 of a Women’s Rights Protection Law, which pledged to protect “women’s special rights and interests granted by law” (Woo 279). The 1986 Health Care Regulations and the 1988 Labor Protection Regulations are in the same line with these two laws.

Both regulations emphasize the importance of health education, prenatal and postnatal care, and call for the provision of facilities to ensure health care and non-discrimination. *Real Right Law*, the *Labor Contract Law*, and the *Employment Promotion Law* was passed in 2007 in part to protect women's rights. These laws and regulations surely have provided stated guaranty of Chinese women's equality in production and reproduction, these guarantees have been mixed blessing. As Woo continues to argue, there is little doubt that these laws and regulations have represented "advances in addressing the health needs of women," and the "recognition of positive guarantees is consistent with international standard, which encourages the provision of support services and benefits for women workers" (Woo 282). Nonetheless, these regulations can also do women a disservice. As Woo points out, "these regulations can themselves contribute to the problems of discriminatory hiring and occupational segregation" (282). Despite their original intention to secure women's equality, these regulations are interpreted as reinforcing the idea that women are biologically weaker and need more protection than men (Woo 279). The reasons for this (mis)interpretation are multiple. First, by being protective around women's health and reproduction, these regulations have been reinforcing the stereotype that women's role of reproduction comes before their role of production. Then, these regulations have also reinforced the traditional notion that women cannot do many works that men can do. As Gita Sen and Caren Grown emphasize, gender-based subordination and discrimination is "deeply ingrained in the

consciousness of both men and women and is usually viewed as a natural corollary of the biological differences between them;” and is “reinforced through religious beliefs, cultural practices, and educational systems (both traditional and modern) that assign to women lesser status and power” (26). Just because there are some jobs, like lifting and working in cold water are not suitable for women when they are in critical situations like menstruation, pregnancy, delivery, and nursing, and menopause, men would assume that these jobs are not suitable for women at all times. Even though in Mao’s time, women are praised to hold up half the sky, the state discourse does not erase the “traditional cultural attitudes and prejudices regarding women’s participation in economic and social life” (Sen and Grown 16). Thirdly, “these regulations also deter employees from hiring women because of the cost of benefits that must be provided to women workers” for maternity leave and delivery of children and etc (Woo 283). Under the influence of western market ideology, people would try all means to minimize costs to maximize profits. In this sense, women are believed not to be as productive as men. Actually, this view of productivity is only a patriarchal view of productivity. Vandana Shiva argues that “productivity means different things from different perspectives:” from the perspective of capitalist patriarchy, productivity is a “measure of the production of commodities and profit;” from the point of view of women, productivity “is a measure of producing life and sustenance” (192).

The results are not just that women are more likely to be laid off than men are; there are also consistent gender disparities in job opportunities and wages. In their article “Wage and Job Inequalities in the Working Lives of Men and Women in Tianjin,” Yanjie Bian, John Logan, and Xiaoling Shu compare the gender disparities in wages in a large city Tianjin and offer us some disheartening statistics:

Our previous multivariate analyses of wages in Tianjin have shown that the net effect of gender on wages, controlling for background factors and job characteristics, was essentially unchanged: a 15.2 percent male percentage in 1978 and an 18.3 percent male advantage in 1993. Further review of the Tianjian data reveals that the gross gender disparity, i.e. the effect of gender with no controls for background factors and job characteristics, was even more stable: a 26.1 percent male percentage in 1978, compared to 26.0 percent in 1993. (111)

While many researchers expect a market economy to bring full gender equality to women, they are disappointed to see that both the state-as-equalizer model and the market-as-equalizer model fail to bring gender equality to Chinese women. More sadly, the gender wage gap and job opportunity gap are becoming persistently stable; as women’s job security is taken away, and more and more women are being forced to return to domestic sphere. As authors Bian, Logan, and Shu observe, the work unit

managers in the post-Mao era are learning from western capitalists to see women as less reliable and more expensive, and thus they tend to pay women less and put women top on their list of employees to be laid off. Some enterprises reject female college graduates, and others don't even give top female college graduates a chance for interview. Further, the same authors mentioned above, after a review of occupational differences between men and women, conclude that the "key male advantage seems to be in administrative occupations and occupations with market potential" while women have an advantage in clerical occupations and those with market activity (151).

While the Chinese government has endeavored to provide more legal protection of women's job opportunities and gender equality, established policies and regulations in numerous areas continue to prevent women from benefiting these legal protection. For example, these authors believe that the early-retirement policy for women has excluded women from salary increase beyond the age of 50; less access to education and party membership has adversely affected the distribution of base salaries and wages for women; the lower status of traditional female occupations prevents women's salaries from increasing as much as men's (132).

Discriminations against Migrant Rural Women in Urban Industries and Informal Sectors

To provide a sufficient labor market for urban industries, the state relaxes its control over urban-rural division and implements a policy of migration. Migration policy consists of the core policy—the household registration system—and a number of supplementary decrees and regulations. The household registration (*hukou*, in Chinese) has long divided countries from cities and peasants from workers. By implementing the *hukou* system, “the state has de facto generated a status-based society, where people and labor are identified by a whole set of hierarchical criteria in socialist China (Huang 95). The *hukou* system was relatively relaxed from 1980 onwards and consequently mobilizing rural labor to migrate out of native villages. As a result of this migration policy, there are millions of rural people selling their labor in cities, towns, and non-native villages. However, the migration does not dismantle the traditional rural-urban divide, because there are still restrictions and regulations to rural migrants, which continue to define their status as lower than urban people. As a result, rural people can only sell their labor in certain types of labor markets with prescribed status.

Unquestionably, the migration policy has both fed the labor needs of industries and improved rural people’s economic opportunities. However, the traditional urban-rural division created and sustained by the state and the market forces have exposed rural people to the exploitation of their employers. The jobs they can find are most likely to

be temporary jobs that urban people do not want. Among them, women are more vulnerable for a number of reasons. First, women have less mobility to migrate to get jobs; second, rural women's labor is concentrated in urban informal sectors and light industry sector; working in these two sectors, women are not only treated as lower or lesser workers but also paid less; third, since they are temporary rural women workers, they don't have the protection, security, and welfares that urban women workers have.

The informal sectors in cities are least desirable to urban women, so it is no surprise that rural migrating women are squeezed into this urban service sectors and private commercial and service enterprises. In the process of urbanization there are a huge increase of job opportunities in domestic service, canteens, hotels, and stores, where rural women, mostly young, are working with low dignity and low pay. As many notice, domestic service has "become a source of employment for and is dominated by migrant women": "in 1989, three million rural women working in cities were recorded as housemaids" (Huang 95). Before 1949, housemaids were very common and were considered as low-status servants, but after 1949, especially in Mao's time, Chinese people were not allowed to have housemaids, because having a maid means feudal oppression of women and petty bourgeois lifestyle of exploiting women for one's personal comforts. In post-reform China, having a housemaid is seen as an improvement of their lifestyle and a convenient solution to the conflict between work

and family. In addition to the long tradition of low status, their illiteracy or semi-illiteracy and rural behavior code segregate housemaids from urban women. Their low-status, low pay, and hard work has enabled urban men to excuse themselves from housework and allowed urban women more time for themselves. Women who work in urban private commercial and service enterprises are vulnerable to another kind of discrimination: migrant women workers are not provided the social benefits that urban workers at state-owned or collective enterprises have; their jobs are contingent; their works are usually heavy and physical works that receive low pay and demand long working hours.

In the industrial labor market, the gender “disparity between men and women in terms of jobs, pay, and working conditions” is almost as universal as natural (Huang 97). The majority of migrant women workers have unskilled, dirty, heavy jobs that demand longer working time and offering lower wages and no social benefits. As Xiyi Huang elaborates:

Women work also more intensively than men in the assembly process. Furthermore, in the special economic zones, male technicians and skilled workers often earn considerably more than women—3-400 *yuan* per month for a technician, 1000 *yuan* for a skilled worker and even 800 *yuan* for a casual worker; whilst a female operator earns only around 500 *yuan* per month. (98)

Huang further argues that migrant rural women in the industrial labor market encounter discriminatory treatment different from local women, because better job opportunities are allotted to local women. Besides this social bias and male bias, migrant rural women are also vulnerable to the profit-orientation and market-driven mentality of their employers who give the lowest possible wages to women workers and fire them when they are married, to avoid the cost of housing and nursing facilities (Huang 100-1).

Even though they are encountering social bias and gender bias, migrant rural women workers are not left with many other choices, because if they don't want these jobs their employers would have sufficient labor reserve from labor market to substitute them, and any request for a change of working conditions or pay would end up in failure. This is truer of women in certain export-based industries and occupation, which are typically producing "consumer electronics, semi-conductors, toys, and sporting goods, textiles, and apparel, footwear, luggage, wigs, optical equipment, and bicycles" (Sen and Grown 35). To maximize their profit, these transnational industries are always hunting for the cheapest labor, which most of the time happens to be poor rural women, who have difficulty in finding better-paying jobs and are, therefore, willing to settle with a minimal salary. As Sen and Grown argue, "attempts to improve the income and working conditions in this sector pose a serious dilemma. Since multinational corporations locate in these countries principally because of the

presence of cheap female labor, attempts to demand better wages, working conditions, job security, and advancement prospects often induce further capital flight” (35).

As Shiva argues, the assumption that the “improvement of women’s economic position would automatically flow from an expansion and diffusion of the development process” would turn pale in front of the extremely exploitative conditions of migrant rural women.

The Reemergence of Aged Social Ills: Increasing Prostitutes and Concubines

In China, prostitution, as well as concubinage, has been centuries old. As China celebrated its liberation in 1949, it also passed marriage laws that protect women’s rights and prevent prostitution and polygamy. While these laws still exist today, they were carried out with the utmost force during Mao’s time because the New China State, eager to establish it as different from both feudal and capitalist states, exerted all forces—political, ideological, social, cultural, and legal—at all levels of administration to guarantee prostitution and polygamy were not practiced at all. Coupled with endless anti-feudalist and anti-capitalist dominant discourse, the New China State performed a miraculous eradication of both prostitution and polygamy. Since the reform, there is, however, a disturbing stormy backlash of prostitution and

concubinage, especially in cities and special economic zones. Even though every year the government has taken strong measures to ban pornography, prostitution, and polygamy, it seems that these measures only produce counter effect.

The reemergence of prostitution and concubinage in China, of course, cannot be dismissed simply as a decline of morality of Chinese women. We cannot fully understand this issue if we fail to find out the factors and players that are prompting their appearance and supporting its existence. Jyothi Sanghera sheds light on this issue in her article, "In the Belly of the Beast: Sex Trade, Prostitution and Globalization." As one of the oldest professions, prostitution exists, as she argues, both because the "social and economic vulnerability of women and their attendant powerlessness in society has left them only a small range of options open to them to eke out a livelihood always true in every class society," and because there is always a demand for female sexuality in any patriarchal society where men can appropriate the female body in the same way as they possess land and resources (47). She believes that "basic, determining factors on the supply and demand side remained principally the same in most countries" (48).

Prostitutes in the Chinese history have been condemned as the lowest, and concubines are never socially, legally, and culturally sanctioned. Yet the confluence of the market economy, the backlash of patriarchal notions, the new vulnerability to

market economy, and the increased mobility in population have revitalized these aged traditions. While Mao's regime did away with prostitution and concubinage from society, it never erases them from the consciousness of Chinese men and women. Although women throughout history have traded sex or dignity for food, security, and other needs, the market economy, which turns everything into commodities, nurtures more opportunities for women to commodify their bodies for economic benefits. As the relaxing state control is giving more autonomy to individuals, the patriarchal notions of consuming female bodies find rich soil in the opened China. The borrowed market economy has not only justified the idea of turning women's bodies into commodities; it has also largely increased women's social and economic vulnerability. Masses of urban women who are laid off by the former state-owned enterprises are middle-aged women, who do not have chances for reeducation and reemployment. In order to keep the urban living standard, they choose to do so. For young rural and urban poor women who do not have much education or skill would find it an easy way out. Furthermore, as a result of the migrating policy, there is a huge migrating population thronging to industrialized cities; they leave their wives or girlfriends in their hometown and seek prostitutes for their satisfaction. Also, men's jobs have more mobility than women's, because their travel is a lot more frequent and further than women. Meanwhile, the mushrooming restaurants and hotels are built to meet the needs of prostitution. In the coastal areas, the phenomenon of prostitution and concubinage is more popular because of the high concentration of migrating

population and rich men. Finally, because there is no job security and financial security, some women, even highly-educated college women, are willing to be illegal wives of married rich men who can provide a safe wall against the forces of competitive market economy.

The extreme degradation of prostitutes and concubines indicates the decline of social status of Chinese women as a whole and makes gender subordination more visible to society. Forced into the process of development and catch-up with the first world, with the worst opportunities, these women are suffering the costs of the development without benefiting from the development; they are carrying both a traditional burden of gender subordination and a modern load of merciless market economy.

The Emerging Public Space: Women's Activism and Feminism

In reaction to these contradictory effects brought by the expansion of market economy and the gradual state withdrawal of employment security in the post-Mao era, an impressive number of women's organizing activities have emerged in China. In responding to the gender inequalities that emerge after the retreat of state, a new field of women's studies has also been created to reconstruct women's identity. To adapt to the new mission of state and to deal with the new women's work, state feminism represented by the All-China Women's Federation is transforming itself to

be more representative of women's interests. As a public space is emerging, these feminisms create new voices for women and complement each other in their struggle to call for a women's collective consciousness.

From the late 1970s and early 1980s onwards, the relaxing state control allows for the development of a wide range of (more or less controlled) activities in the sphere that has been theorized as civil society and public space. Urban educated women have exploited emerging spaces and have also created new political spaces to address gender-specific discrimination in relation to issues such as employment, education, and rural to urban migration. Activists have set up social services to support women in vulnerable situations related, for example, to prostitution, domestic violence, and divorce. In the past over fifteen years, there have emerged many women's organizations in Beijing alone. Among them are the East Meets the West Feminist Translation Group, The Blue-Stocking Group, the Queer Women Group, the Association for Promoting Rural Women in Development, The Women's Health Network, the China-Canada Women's Project, the Center for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services, the Women's Research Institute (later Maple Psychological Counseling Center), the Jinglun Family Center, and the Migrant Women's Club (Milwertz 5-22).

The relationship between citizens and the state has been transformed as citizens expand their sphere of participation in social change, so there emerges a unique fluidity in Chinese women's activism in relation to central structures of power: the activism is "situated both inside and outside the center, yet sometimes preferring to negotiate in the interstices, the spaces in-between, working outward from the inside, but also influencing the center from the outside; starting from positions of weakness and marginality and transforming these into mobility and strength" (Hsiung et al 4). Because of such fluidity, their activities have adroitly delineated "a borderland of social and intellectual movement which is leaving neither the center nor the periphery unaffected and unchallenged. (Hsiung et al 4). As a result, the experience "accumulated by these activities forms part of the collective experience and identity and consciousness transformation that is at the core of collective organizing for social change" (Hsiung et al 8).

Numerous centers for women's studies have mushroomed at tertiary educational institutions in China during the historical changes of the mid-1980s. The four universities that pioneered the establishment of women's studies centers to raise women's consciousness are Zhengzhou University in 1987, Hangzhou University in 1989, Peking University in 1990, and Tianjin Normal University in 1993. These four centers as well as the numerous women studies centers burgeoning before and after the Women's Conference in 1995 build solidarity among themselves and seek,

through both formal and informal relationships with upper-levels offices and powerful administrative positions, to develop their curriculum and institutionalize their operation and modes of collaboration (Du 242).

Playing a unique double role, the All-China Women Federation (ACWF) represents a more “dynamic organizational identity in its advocacy of women’s interests, lobbying for policy and the improvement of women’s lives in response to needs expressed at local levels” (Husing et al 9). As China is transforming itself, ACWF is also transforming itself to be more effective to advocate for women’s interests; the Women’s Conference has given ACWF unprecedented chance to develop itself. As many researchers have noticed, Women’s Federation has cooperated, at various levels, with new forms of popular women organizing and with academic feminism. Meanwhile, ACWF has both transformed and strengthened itself through its active preparation and participation in Women’s Conference in 1995.

As expected, there have been tensions and boundaries between women’s activism, state feminism, and academic feminism. But as Sen and Grown argue, “feminism cannot be a monolithic in its issues, goals, and strategies, since it constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds” (18-9), the diversity of feminisms in China can respond to and address the diverse needs and concerns of diverse

women, but this “diversity builds on a common gender oppression and hierarchy” (19). The collectivist tradition as well as the practical strategy needed have encouraged Chinese feminisms to devise strategies to bypass and transcend these tensions and boundaries so that a solidarity could be built up to create collective consciousness in China.

As Sen and Grown advocate, while women’s organizations provide excellent examples in raising consciousness, mass education—through institutional education and mass movements—must be supported by agencies and governments (77). While raising the consciousness of the general mass is urgent, Sen and Grown further contend, “raising the consciousness of government and agency officials and functionaries is an ongoing necessity as it largely determines their ability to recognize women’s potential for developing methods to mitigate and perhaps even resolve the various crises outlined earlier” (77).

As pioneer Chinese feminist Xiaojiang Li articulates, women’s liberation is both a social and a personal issue. Echoing Sen and Grown, she calls for a development of collective consciousness, which she believes is the ideological basis for women’s liberation: “if the collective consciousness of Chinese women were awakened, then we would definitely see enlightened women actively involved in society, and would see self-improvement and consciousness-raising movements for women” (382). She

also stresses that the state support and participation in decision-making are important to raise the consciousness of the whole society.

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