A COMPARISON OF SOCIAL ROLES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED COMMUNIST CHINESE PLAYS WITH TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ROLES OF CHINESE WOMEN

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
ROGER ALAN LONG

1967

ABSTRACT

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OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED
COMMUNIST CHINESE PLAYS
WITH TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ROLES
OF CHINESE WOMEN

by Roger Alan Long

This study examines the social roles of the female characters in ten modern Communist Chinese plays. Its purpose is to define the traditional social roles of Chinese women in their families, marriages, professions, and political activities, to describe the social roles of the female characters in ten Communist Chinese plays written between 1949 and 1962, and to compare these contrasting social roles.

A library survey was undertaken to supply evidence for evaluation. Ten plays written in China since 1949 were selected from those available from the Foreign Language Press. Sociological evidence pertaining to the social roles of traditional Chinese women was also gathered.

The study is divided into six chapters. After the introduction, chapter two discusses the kinds and degrees of discrimination against women in traditional China. Chapter three provides information about the development of the struggle for women's rights during the transitional period between 1912 and 1949 and the

political influence of the movements. Chapter four presents synopses of ten selected Communist Chinese plays with major emphasis placed on the roles of the female characters. Chapter five compares traditional social roles of Chinese women with the social roles of the female characters. Chapter six is a discussion of the conclusions.

The evidence in the selected plays reveals that there is a transition away from the traditional social roles of Chinese women toward more independent social roles. It is shown in the plays that there is a disintegration of the traditional family clan power structure, and that women are beginning to play influential roles in Chinese society. The improved status of the female characters depicted in this study is a result of significant government support of women's rights and the ability of women to be economically independent.

Approved Finley Richmond

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By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Speech

1967

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Farley Richmond for his many invaluable suggestions and criticisms during the writing of this thesis. Special thanks are also given to Dr. James Brandon who helped shape the study in its early stages.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General Remarks

Inherent in the feudal system of China was a long history of social inequality that incorporated the traditional discrimination against women -- a tradition that was severe in concept and strict in enforcement. Organized resistance against sexual inequality in China was slight and ineffectual until the beginning of the twentieth century when women began coordinating their drive for equal rights with liberal political groups that were attempting to overthrow the feudal government.

The Chinese revolution of 1911 and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 was strongly supported by the women's rights movement, and some intellectuals felt that the problem of sexual discrimination would quickly be resolved. It soon became evident, however, that the new government was not going to institute programs of radical social reform. As a result, the basic discrimination against women remained unchanged, and intellectuals renewed their protests through a variety of forms.

A. C. Scott, writing about the arts in China during this period, states that Chinese youth turned to

the West for new forms with which to express their rebellion.[1] The arts, used as a mirror of social revolution and change, reflected the struggle for women's rights. More and more intellectuals were beginning to believe that "the supreme test of a new art for China was its ideological content."[2]

With the advent of the Communist revolution in 1949, the supporters of this concept and the supporters of women's rights found themselves joined together. A cursory examination of selected modern Chinese plays indicates a major emphasis in the area of women's rights. Women are often active and forceful participants in the action of the plays. This writer feels that one of China's most dramatic social changes has been in the area of women's rights, and that this change is reflected in contemporary Chinese drama. It is also felt that a contextual study of modern Chinese stage plays will provide examples of female characters in their contemporary social roles, and that these portrayals can be compared with the major traditional social roles of Chinese women.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to define the tra-

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[1] A. C. Scott, Literature and the Arts in Twentieth Century China (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1963), p.3.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

ditional social roles of Chinese women in their families, marriages, professions, and political activities, to describe the social roles of the female characters in ten Communist Chinese plays written between 1949 and 1962, and to compare these contrasting social roles.

Significance of the Study

This study provides a view of a dramatic form that has almost literally been thrust upon an entire civilization of 700 million people -- a form of theatre that might have taken decades or even centuries to be assimilated by a culture famous for clinging to tradition. This writer feels, therefore, that much of the study's significance lies in the opportunity to present and reflect upon a group of plays from this relatively new period in the history of Chinese drama. It is especially valuable because of the limited amount of information that is available in the area of contemporary Chinese drama.

Since modern Chinese drama, in the focus of this study, reflects the attitudes and status of contemporary Chinese women, it is a sociological yardstick, measuring the amount and quality of change that has taken place in China during the past several decades. This study, then, in addition to its dramaturgical significance, reflects upon an element of social change as seen in contemporary Chinese plays.

Scope of the Study

Before comparing the traditional social roles of Chinese women with the contemporary social roles depicted in the selected plays, it is necessary to define the areas under consideration. The traditional social roles are grouped into four catagories: family, marriage, professions, and political activities.

The period between 1912 and 1949 was a transitional period in the struggle for women's rights, containing several efforts by female intellectuals to achieve sexual equality. These efforts are briefly outlined to give a sense of progression to the women's rights movement and to illustrate the strong Communist commitment to the movement during the years preceeding the Communist revolution.

Plays used in this study were written after the Communist revolution of 1949 and deal with subjects relating to contemporary China. Each of the ten plays is outlined in synopsis form, with major emphasis placed on an examination of the roles of the female characters. A summary is included after each play to synthesize the social roles of the female characters and to provide a basis for comparing traditional social roles with contemporary social roles of Chinese women as seen in the plays.

Conclusions regarding the changing status of

women and the dramaturgical emphasis on female characters in Chinese drama complete the study.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are frequently used throughout this study.

Traditional China: In this study, traditional China refers to the Chinese culture that existed before the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912.

Marriage Law: The marriage law was probably the most significant advance in the struggle for women's rights in China. It was conceived and enforced by the Communist government in 1949 and, among its many liberating changes, it guaranteed women the right to own property, to freely select marriage partners, and to obtain divorce.

Source Material

Sociological and cultural studies that were exceptionally useful in defining the traditional roles of Chinese women are The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution[3] and A Chinese Village in Early Communist Transition.[4] Both are by C. K. Yang. Both are excellent and invaluable sociological studies of China

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[3] C. K. Yang, A Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1959), 246 pp.

[4] C. K. Yang, A Chinese Village in Early Communist Transition (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1959), 276 pp.

in the early 1950's. Yang's emphasis on the family clan, its disintegration, and the relationship between family members, clans, and villages is exceptionally valuable in determining the changing role of the female in China primarily because he is concerned with the frictions caused by the replacement of old ideas with new.

Two other books, Chinese Women: Yesterday and Today[5] by Florence Ayscough, and The Position of Women in Early China[6] by A. R. O'Hara, while less scientific and objective than those of Yang, provide interesting and useful material regarding the traditional role of Chinese women. Since both books were written before the Communist revolution in 1949, they include pertinent, if somewhat romantic, information regarding the transition period between 1912 and 1949.

While the books of Peter Townsend contain some valuable material about contemporary China, one must be careful to gleen only what is useful from his chaff of information. Both his China Phoenix[7] and What's Happening in China[8] (written with Lord Boyd Orr) contain

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[5]Florence Ayscough, Chinese Women: Yesterday and Today (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1937), 324 pp.

[6]Albert Richard O'Hara, The Position of Women in Early China (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945), 299 pp.

[7]Peter Townsend, China Phoenix (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 405 pp.

[8]Lord Boyd Orr and Peter Townsend, What's Happening in China (London: MacDonld & Co., 1959), 159 pp.

blatant conclusions that cast suspicion on the validity of much of his work. However, there are areas in which his reporting is reinforced by other writers who have visited China.

The ten plays used in the study were selected from among the English translations of Communist Chinese plays available through the Foreign Language Press.

Limitations

The study is limited to female characters because they dramatically illustrate an element of the social changes that have occurred in China during the past sixty years. Also, a cursory examination of the plays reveals a distinct emphasis on the female characters.

The ten stage plays used in this study are selected from among eighteen English translations of Communist Chinese plays available through the Foreign Language Press. None were selected or rejected because of their thematic content; of the eight plays not included, three are children's plays, two deal with historical periods unrelated to the study, and three others offer no worthy contribution to the study.

The study includes Chinese stage plays written between 1949 and 1962. No chronological order can be established for the plays because the publishing dates

of most of the plays refer to the English translations rather than to the Chinese language publication dates. However, the publishing date of the last translation is 1962 and a contextual examination of the events that occur in the plays suggests that they were all written after 1949.

In this study, the traditional period is thought to have culminated in 1912 because before that time there were no significant changes in the status of Chinese women from the pre-Christian era until the late nineteenth century.

The modern period has been set as post-1949 for two reasons. First, until recently the Communist reign has been a relatively stable political period in contemporary China. Second, because of Communist support and enforcement of the women's rights movement, the post-revolution period provides a base for a comparison between traditional social roles and contemporary social roles revealed in the plays.

CHAPTER II

TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ROLES OF WOMEN IN EARLY CHINESE SOCIETY

China, the oldest continuing civilization, was free from foreign influence longer than any other major culture. It has been ascertained that this civilization, which was stabilized before the birth of Christ, retained certain attitudes of earlier periods despite the dramatic transformations that were advanced by Communism.[9] This tendency to retain old customs and superstitions is mirrored in today's Chinese drama, where the conflict between old and new is one of the basic themes.

This conflict is especially true with regard to the movement for sexual equality. However, in order to compare the new social roles of women in China with their traditional roles, it is first necessary to clarify the position of women in pre-Republic China. Therefore, the following chapter briefly defines the major traditional social roles of Chinese women in their families, marriages, professions, and political activities.

The following pages deal primarily with rural Chinese females, whose social roles were practically unchanged from early Chinese civilization until the late

[9]Harry Schwartz, China (New York: Atheneum Press, 1965), p. 23.

nineteenth century. Even when trade and industrialization began to create urban centers that permitted a more liberal attitude toward women, the traditional role of the majority of peasant Chinese women was unaffected.

In general, the traditional role of the female in China was one of stringent subservience to her family, husband, in-laws, and society in general. She was denied the right to keep her given name after her marriage and was sometimes treated with open hostility and disrespect until she bore her husband a son. These were accepted traditions in Chinese society and had been in effect since early Chinese civilization. This is illustrated by the following quote from Chinese Family and Society, "Buddhism, in which woman is the personification of evil, added new ideological propositions to the idea of women's inferiority."[10] This emphasizes two factors. First, since Buddhism probably first traveled from India to China about 100 B.C.[11] and as Buddha's teachings added to the concept of female inferiority, there must have been a tradition of discrimination already in practice in China. Second, it points to the fact that female inferiority was more than a social tradition. It was a

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[10]Olga Lang, Chinese Family and Society (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 43.

[11]Yang I-Fan, Buddhism in China (Hong Kong: The Union Press, 1956), p. 1.

religious concept; and, like Buddhism, it permeated the essence of Chinese culture.

The concept of female inferiority was furthered by classical writings which described the approved methods of conduct for women. They stressed obedience, timidity, reticence and adaptability as the main virtues of women.[12] These teachings, combined with other traditions of subordination, such as the marriage contract, concubinage, absence of freedom of divorce, loss of individuality, seclusion, and restricted education, placed the woman in a lowly position in Chinese society. C. K. Yang mentions that "K'ang Yu-wei, the precursor of modern reformers at the end of the last century, listed being born a woman as one of the calamities of life."[13] Yang also refers to traditional Chinese fiction and says, "the female character was frequently introduced by the line 'unfortunately (she) was born a woman.'"[14] For the majority of women life was dominated by men: fathers, brothers, and husbands. Dominance of men over women was confirmed by philosophical and ethical principles.[15]

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[12] Ibid., p. 43.

[13] C. K. Yang, The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1959), p. 106.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Peter Townsend, China Phoenix (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), pp. 306-307.

Women were considered inferior and were regarded as property; they had no rights or justifiable needs or desires other than those which kept them alive and kept them from dishonoring their families. They could be bought, sold, and traded. There are those, however, who feel that the woman's position in China has been vastly distorted. The Chinese scholar, Shih Hu, mindful of the discrepancies that exist between objective and romantic reality, tells us:

> The position of women in the old family was never so low as many superficial observers have led us to believe. On the contrary, woman has always been the despot of the family. . . . No other country can compete with China for the distinction of being a nation of hen-pecked husbands.[16]

Undoubtedly, there were situations in traditional Chinese society that supported this concept, but the following quote from Peter Townsend's China Phoenix reveals another, less palatable, aspect of the position of women in traditional China:

> Because this subject the treatment of women was very much to the forefront I used to listen to any group discussing the past and present treatment of women and record their stories. . . . A Cantonese described how he had seen women sold in a public market place, disposed of by their husbands to pay a debt or end a family quarrel. Some had been sold as many as eighteen times, and landlords would buy them, pay a percentage of the purchase price to the local tax office and put them to work. A Fukienese recalled how men fallen

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[16]Shih Hu, The Chinese Renaissance (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 104-105.

> in the world would take their wives to certain restaurants and rent them out by the night or the month. The intensity of the woman's subjection varied from district to district.[17]

This extreme was probably no more common than Mr. Hu's "nation of hen-pecked husbands," but the fact that women were sold as slaves, prostitutes, and concubines, reveals a great deal about the traditional status of Chinese women.

It should be noted that much of the discrimination was economic in nature. It cost a peasant family a substantial amount of money to raise a female child who could not work in the fields, and therefore it was necessary to get a substantial sum of money or quantity of goods from the marriage contract. As we will see later, the inveterate poverty of traditional China was a major factor in the subjugation of women. For nearly three thousand years China's economic condition was very low indeed, and the female's social role remained relatively unchanged during this time. Significantly, when the industrial revolution began to affect China's urban areas, and when women became more financially independent, the traditional roles began to change.

Before these changes can be examined, however, it is necessary to define the traditional social roles of Chinese women. The remainder of the chapter will deal

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[17]Townsend, China Phoenix, p. 306.

with the females' traditional roles in their families, marriages, professions, and political activities.

Family

The traditional attitude toward female children can best be described by a quotation from the Book of Songs as translated in The Position of Women in Early China:

> Then he bears a daughter,
> And puts her upon the ground,
> Clothes her in swaddling clothes,
> Gives her a loom-whorl to play with,
> For her no decorations, no emblems;
> Her only care, the wine and food,
> And how to give no trouble to father and mother.[18]

The female child, unlike the new-born male, is given swaddling clothes instead of bright colored ones. She is given a tool of work as her play-toy instead of the bits of jade that are given to the male. She is to be plain and quiet. Her role is passive and should give no trouble to her parents.

The economic position of the child's family largely determined the amount of hardship the child had to undergo and sometimes its ability to survive. Death from starvation and malnutrition was not uncommon in China. If food had to be shared, it was natural that the male child would receive the larger portion since,

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[18]Albert Richard O'Hara, The Position of Women in Early China (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945), p. 262.

eventually, both the father and the mother would depend on him and his children for support in their old age. It is not unreasonable to assume that some young Chinese girls died from malnutrition because they happened to be born females.

Infanticide was never a common practice in China, but it did exist. If infanticide was practiced, it was almost entirely with females since they were worth less to a hard-working peasant.[19] Pearl S. Buck, a romantic but well-qualified observer of Chinese life, has included instances of infanticide in her stories and books. Both The Good Earth[20] and Fathers and Mothers[21] depict what could almost be termed "mercy killings" of female children. In both instances, economic factors forced one of the parents (in The Good Earth it was the mother and in Fathers and Mothers it was the father) to kill a female child. Neither of these were emotionless killings, but they were an economic necessity for the families. Infanticide, however, was a futile last resort. There were more preferable ways of saving children from starvation. Sometimes children, again largely female, were

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[19]Lang, pp. 46-47.

[20]Pearl S. Buck, "Fathers and Mothers," The First Wife and Other Stories (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), p. 295.

[21]Pearl S. Buck, The Good Earth (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1931), p. 85.

given to the temples.[22] These girls became nuns who worked in the temples; cooking, cleaning, and serving others. Life in the temple was undoubtedly difficult, but it provided food, clothing, and living quarters that might not have been available in the home. Also, these girls probably had the advantage of a better education than they might have received from their families. A few young children were sold to brothel-keepers. Although these girls provided direct income for the family when they were sold, the parents who were forced to sell their children in this fashion undoubtedly did so only when it was unavoidable.

It must be said that life in a brothel seems to have been much more pleasant than that in the church or in the average home. Young girls were taught to groom themselves, play the PiPa (guitar), sing, and dance, as well as excel in other forms of social intercourse. They met a large number of men, and it was not uncommon for a well-to-do client to refund the girl's purchase price and retain her in his home as a concubine.[23] However, this occupation has always been subjected to over-romanticism; it is difficult to believe that the majority of Chinese prostitutes were content with their means of livlihood.

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[22]Florence Ayscough, Chinese Women: Yesterday and Today (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1937), pp. 88-89.

[23]Ibid., p. 92.

The young female child was also subjected to the traditional practice of footbinding. Strips of cloth were tightly wound around each foot; and as the foot grew, it became cramped and deformed as a result of the binding. In theory, footbinding was practiced to enhance the aesthetic beauty of the woman.[24] Small feet were considered much more beautiful than large feet. This practice also served a practical role. It physically crippled the child so that when she grew to womanhood and was married, it was virtually impossible for her to leave the house. In the later part of the nineteenth century, footbinding was legally outlawed. However, the law was never enforced, and the practice was continued for many decades thereafter.[25]

The educational opportunities open to an average Chinese girl were practically non-existent. "Educational investment in a girl was considered irrecoverable owing to her eventual departure from the family."[26] Therefore, as previously mentioned, educational opportunities that became available were first offered to the male children. Practical education in the functions of a housewife and mother were learned through practice and assimilation.

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[24]Lang, pp. 46-47.

[25]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 117.

[26]Ibid., p. 106.

Most young peasant girls started working in the house at approximately eight years of age, which was the beginning of their only form of education. Girls sold to the brothels received some training in the arts, and it is possible that the nuns in the temples conducted a program of formal education. Wealthy families could afford to have all of their children tutored, and many women from upper-class homes gained wide-spread popularity as writers and painters, but the majority of peasant women were illiterate, knowledgable only in the simple tasks and crafts of homemaking.

Still, the status of the female, up to this point, was not particularly low compared to that of the male.[27] If the girl had survived childhood, she enjoyed approximately the same amount of parental love and affection as did the males in the family. It was not until the girl entered matrimony that the full impact of her subjucation to male domination became apparent.

Marriage

The marriage contract was no more than a verbal bill of sale. It was an agreement between two families that provided for an exchange of money or goods to one family in exchange for their daughter in marriage. Again the economic factor was instrumental in establishing

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[27] Ibid.

the tradition of contracted marriages. The marrying of male children and the begetting of additional males insured the propagation of the family clan; addition of a woman to a family also meant extending family production to care for the parents in their old age[28] and supplying a new worker for the husband's family. There is an old Chinese saying, "In a betrothel, when a daughter goes out, an ox comes in."[29]

Perhaps the feeling of being traded had little effect on the women of China. Probably they had been raised to expect and hope for a good marriage and perhaps they accepted it faithfully, without complaint. However, as Felix Greene points out, "Not only was this kind of marriage not free, it was contracted on the basis of the idea of the superiority of men over women."[30] There is no doubt that this was a period of dramatic transition for the female.

C. K. Yang points out that, "With the marriage began the most personally humiliating and emotionally disturbing stage of a woman's life."[31] He feels that the

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[28]C. K. Yang, A Chinese Village in Early Communist Tradition (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1959), p. 177.

[29]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 107.

[30]Felix Greene, China: The Country Americans Are Not Allowed to Know (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. 396.

[31]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 107.

marriage must have been an extremely traumatic experience. It minimized the roles of both male and female since neither had any choice in the selection of his partner for life. The female lost all of her individuality. Her given name was eliminated and replaced with her husband's surname. Thus, in a marriage between Elizabeth Gray and John Smith, the woman's name became Smith-Gray.[32] Both surname and given name were eliminated by her husband and his family, and she was addressed by a kinship term denoting her position (although not necessarily her status) in the family. These factors, in addition to the realization that she had been married without her consent, must have been a rude reminder of the role she was to follow for the rest of her life.[33]

In some clans the marriage contract remained in effect even after the husband died, and the children were regarded as the property of the family and could not be taken away. Widows were not allowed to remarry; and if they insisted on doing so, the deceased husband's family could interfere and either sell the woman to another man or kill her, depending upon which plan was most convenient or profitable.[34]

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[32]These names have been Anglicized in order to clarify the example.

[33]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , pp. 110-112.

[34]Ibid., p. 48.

In a traditional marriage, the wife belonged to her husband's family rather than to the husband. Her first duties were to her mother-in-law, one of the few instances of female domination. The husband, out of filial piety, had to side with his mother who was often cruel and harsh with the daughter-in-law.[35] It is fairly easy to understand why a mother-in-law might have been disrespectful to her son's wife. First, although she supplied another pair of hands for the work, she also created a financial burden on the family because of the marriage contract. Until the daughter-in-law gave birth to a son, she had not completely fulfilled her part of the marriage bargain. Even when this event happened, it would take fifteen or twenty years before the grandson would be able to substantially help the family. Second, there was the natural jealousy that occurred when the child's affections were transferred from the mother to the wife.

Probably the newly married female often found herself in a rather hostile environment. Not only were frequent parental visits discouraged, but the bride's family was not even allowed to attend the wedding ceremony.[36] She was confronted by a stranger husband

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[35]Lang, p. 47.

[36]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , pp. 111-112.

and frequently difficult mother-in-law, and as Felix Greene points out, she was "not only denied political and economic rights and held in servitude, but she was also stripped of the right even to manage daily domestic affairs."[37] Her relationship to her mother-in-law was often strained, and she could have been divorced for disobeying her husband's mother.[38]

It should be noted, however, that in this instance a woman was able to gain a position of power seldom achieved by Chinese females. The role of mother-in-law might have been exceptionally harsh simply because it was the first time the average Chinese woman could experience a feeling of power and authority.

Although it would be foolish to think that no contracted marriages resulted in bonds of genuine affection and love, there is a Chinese saying that vividly describes the traditional relationship between husband and wife, "A wife married is like a pony bought; I'll ride her and whip her as I like."[39] This indicates that the relationship of the female with her husband was often no better than with her mother-in-law. A husband might eventually resent a woman who was thrust upon him without

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[37]Lang, p. 46.

[38]Greene, pp. 396-397.

[39]Greene, p. 396.

his consent or consultation. Her attitude most likely reflected the same resentment, although it was probably veiled with demure politeness.

The major difference lies in the reaction of the male. In traditional China, husbands were allowed to beat their wives as freely and as frequently as they pleased. If this did not satisfy them, they could divorce or sell their wives, although this was rarely practiced in peasant families because of the expense of the marriage contract and the loss of a family worker and child bearer.

The female's obligations to her marriage were relatively simple, but strictly enforced. Her major duty was to serve the family and to assist the mother-in-law in the daily house cleaning and cooking and to work in the fields when required. Her household duties were heaviest during the first years of her marriage and motherhood, but they gradually slackened when her children could work and when she reached the position of mother-in-law.

There was no way by which a female could evade the possibility of an unpleasant marriage, and once married there was virtually no way to rectify the situation. As a result, suicides were not infrequent; and unhappy households were even more common. The wife was also subjected to the humiliation of having to live in harmony with her husband's concubines if the husband

chose to bring them into the household. Of course, the average Chinese male could not afford a concubine, but he had the legal right to take one if he so desired. Traditionally, polygamy was practiced by the upper-middle and upper social class minority; and in these circles the taking of concubines was not uncommon. In fact, "a man's wealth and prestige were frequently measured by the number of concubines he possessed. . . ."[40]

Polygamy was practiced for reasons other than the obvious. "The institutional recognition of polygamy was partly a means to insure the continuity of the family organization; and polygamy together with the tacit approval of prostitution had the function of mitigating men's tensions under arranged marriage. . . ."[41] If a female had not produced a male child within a reasonable number of years, the male could take a "second wife" or concubine with complete justification. Indeed, in an unhappy marriage, the wife might appreciate being relieved of some of her marital obligations. In poor families, where concubinage was not economically feasible, the wife undoubtedly underwent increasing antagonism from the husband and the family. A husband could divorce his wife for not bearing a son, but the wife had no recourse

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[40] Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , pp. 54-56.

[41] Ibid., p. 45.

except to accept her situation with resignation.

The possibility of divorce was unthinkable for the average peasant woman. There were written provisions for justifiable divorce, but they were exercised very infrequently. The wife was bound to her husband's family by social, religious, and ethical custom. Death was more honorable than divorce. Indeed, sometimes it was unavoidable, for "In areas where feudal attitudes were most deeply rooted, women who applied for divorce were sometimes put to death."[42] Then, too, there was the ever-present economic factor. Because of vast discrimination against women in all spheres of Chinese society, "the simple threat of hunger forced them to submit to the inferior status assigned them by the male-dominated family institutions."[43] Greene points out that a woman divorced by her husband was an object of social contempt,[44] and a woman who divorced her husband had absolutely no security. Her family would not accept her; she probably had little or no formal schooling, and there were virtually no employment possibilities other than prostitution. As a result, she had to accept concubinage, prostitution, and male domination.

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[42] Ibid., p. 397.

[43] Ibid., p. 112.

[44] Greene, p. 396.

The wife had to be careful not to display jealousy or dissatisfaction for fear of reprisals of beatings or even divorce. There were seven justifications for a man divorcing his wife:

1) If she disobeyed his parents
2) If she failed to bear children
3) If she committed adultery
4) If she exhibited jealousy
5) If she had some repulsive disease
6) If she was garrulous
7) If she stole[45]

The amount of discrimination against women is evident in these grounds for divorce. A male could bring other women into the house and then legally divorce his wife if she showed displeasure or took a lover of her own. If she disobeyed his parents, regardless of how inhumane they may have been, if she talked too much, if she failed to bear children even though her husband could have been sterile; or if she stole goods or contracted a "repulsive disease," she was subject to divorce and social castigation.

It may seem surprising that divorces were not more common; but as Olga Lang points out, "Peasants, artisans, and coolies could not afford the expense of a second marriage after the heavy expense entailed by the first; and the wealthy man did not have to discard the old wife if he disliked her; he could always take a con-

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[45]Lang, p. 40.

cubine."[46] It is evident that the domination of the male was almost complete. The role of female was one of subservience, humility, and resignation to a myriad of social and economic injustices over which she had little legal or political control.

A woman's legal rights were practically non-existent. Florence Ayscough succinctly describes the law in regard to women's property when she states, "She had none."[47] In other areas, she was also the object of discrimination. If a woman's husband abused her and was punished for it (a rare occasion), he was punished less than if he had abused a stranger. The opposite was true of a woman. It was pointed out earlier that a man could legally commit adultry without fear of punishment, but a woman could be beaten, divorced, or even killed. Even women's children were not legally theirs -- they belonged to the family. Legal protection from divorce was not enforced although there were statutes in this area.[48] A woman could not be legally divorced in three instances:

1) If the wife had mourned for her husband's parents for three years.

2) If her parents wouldn't take her back.

3) If she had seen poverty in a family that later

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[46] Ibid., p. 41.

[47] Ayscough, p. 60.

[48] Lang, p. 44.

became rich.[49]

These regulations were not enforced, however, and had little effect on the lives of the vast majority of Chinese women. One other law should be mentioned, although it, too, had little bearing on the position of the woman in her marriage. This law outlined the right of the female to demand a divorce if the husband committed adultry (we must assume this means with another married woman since he legally had the right to take a "second wife" and concubines), if he was condemned for some crime, or if he abandoned her for a period of three years.[50]

Professions

There were few respectable professions open to the Chinese female before industrialization of China occurred, about 1912. Nunnery was probably the profession, aside from that of the housewife, that carried a degree of respectability. There were actually few professions open to women regardless of their social acceptability. Women who were not fortunate enough to be married (the economic security of marriage was more important than the distaste of servitude), and who could not live with parents or relatives could become nuns, matchmakers, female professors of spiritual manifestations, professional

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[49]Ayscough, p. 57.

[50]Ibid., p. 58.

praying women, herbalists, mid-wives, or prostitutes.[51] There is little doubt that many of these professions over-lapped and that the mid-wife was probably a seller of medicines (herbalist) and possibly a professional praying woman.

Serving the church was a source of livelihood for many women. Some children were given to the temples because of poverty or illness and were raised within the confines of the temple to become its servants. Sometimes widows, seeking the solace and protection of the church, would become nuns -- especially those who had no family to care for them. Frequently young girls would escape from brothels and seek protection in the temples, living the rest of their lives as nuns. Old prostitutes, either worn out or disgusted with their way of life, would also become nuns to provide security for their remaining years.

Prostitution was probably the most profitable profession, although the brothel-keeper undoubtedly retained most of the income. Children were bought and sometimes kidnapped by brothel-keepers, and there were always women who had no recourse other than a life of prostitution. These women, however, obtained some training in singing and dancing and undoubtedly hoped, during

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[51] Ibid., p. 87.

their younger years, that they would be admired by some well-to-do man and be taken to his home as a concubine.

As we will see later, several of these traditional occupations are still accepted in one form or another; and several, among them prostitution and matchmaking, have theoretically been abolished. However, before the movement for women's rights began changing attitudes toward women, they were the only means by which unmarried women could make any semblance of a living. The reputations of the women who practiced these various modes of living were tainted with social contempt. There is a writing in a Chinese tomb that states, "Whoever has these mischief-makers about his house is sure to meet trouble."[52]

As the industrial revolution slowly began to reach China during the latter part of the nineteenth century, new occupations began to be offered to Chinese females living in the metropolitan areas where most of the factories were located. About this time upper social class women who had obtained a considerable degree of formal education began to occupy a few professional positions in law, medicine, and business. Many upper social class women throughout the centuries had gained considerable reputation as writers and painters, but this

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[52] Ibid.

could not be considered a profession since custom forebade them to accept money for their services.[53]

Political Activities

Although the majority of women in traditional Chinese society were in positions of subservience, a few women have occupied positions of authority. China has been ruled on occasion by several empresses and empress dowagers since the third century B.C. when the Queen-Empress Wu Chao, in the T'ang dynesty, ruled China from 660-705 A.D. And there were numerous less notable female rulers scattered throughout China's history, the last being the famous Empress-Dowager[54] who controlled the throne after her husband's death in the late 1800's until she finally took complete power in 1898.[55] These rulers, however, gained their positions as a result of the strong clan system that had developed in China over many centuries. When a clan lost all its adult males, family power was transferred to the oldest female until another male was able to assume control of the family. In the relatively few instances when this occurred in a ruling clan, a female became head-of-state.

Women were not involved in political activity,

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[53] Ibid., p. 92.

[54] It is interesting that the last major political effort to suppress the demand for sexual equality was effected by a female, the Empress-Dowager.

however, unless they married or were born into a ruling clan. Traditionally Chinese women have occupied no recognized routine position in the political world; and political activity was neither recognized nor approved.[56] The absence of female political activity began to change somewhat toward the turn of the last century, however, and the fact that there was a large number of female soldiers in the Taiping Rebellion in the early 1850's[57] indicates a degree of political awareness that was uncommon during that period. Later in the century, women expressed concern with regard to their political rights, but their political activity was minor until the early part of the twentieth century, at which time it blossomed into a fullfledged movement for women's rights.

Summary

The traditional role of the Chinese female in relation to her family, marriage, profession, and political activities was one of timidity, and subservience. She was dominated and discriminated against by males but could not rebel against this subjugation because of her economic dependence on the traditional family unit. As a child

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[55]Shih Hu, "Women's Place in Chinese History," Paper read before the American Association of University Women, Tientsin, China, December 5, 1940, pp. 2-3.

[56]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 119.

[57]Ibid., pp. 117-118.

she was discriminated against whenever discrimination was necessary, and her role in the family was one of filial piety and obedience. Obedience was also the key to her survival in marriage. Her role was that of housekeeper, sexual companion, and mother; and she could suffer abuse, beatings, divorce, and even death, if she proved negligent in any of these duties. Her role as a professional woman was little more than nominal, and those professions that were open to her were held in social contempt. The jobs she could obtain were largely parasitic and personally degrading. Political activities were denied the female in traditional China along with practically every other group activity. In short, the female living during the traditional period was subject to accepted religious, philosophical, and ethical discrimination. By the end of the nineteenth century, she was reeling under the weight of three thousand years of oppression; and she was ready to shed some of her ballast.

CHAPTER III

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

This chapter briefly outlines the development of the women's rights movement in China from 1912, at which time the founding of the Chinese Republic ended the era of traditional China, until the early years of Communist control. The chapter is divided into three major sections. After a short description of the movement before 1912, there is a section discussing the Republic period which lasted until China's second major revolution in 1924-25. At this time the Kuomintang (National People's Party) and the Communists collectively overthrew the warlord ridden Republic and established, for a very short period, joint control of the government. However, the Kuomintang quickly took complete control. Therefore, the period from 1925-49 is labeled the Kuomintang period. The last and more stable period is that of the Communist period which started in 1949, although the Communist party was influential in the revolution for women's rights in the early 1920's, long before Communist political domination.

The seeds of revolution, whether they be political upheaval or a movement for women's rights, are sown over

a period of years, decades, and sometimes centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century, the seeds in the movement for women's rights had been maturing for nearly three millenniums. It should be explained, however, that this was not a mass movement.

The demand for sexual equality was first expounded by the urban female intelligentsiz of China, the group that suffered far less than the average peasant women. Nevertheless, the voices of Chinese women began to be heard in the late 1800's, following the lead established by women of the Western world who began their struggle several decades earlier as a result of the industrial revolution.

The pressure for women's rights in China never reached any magnitude in the period immediately before the establishment of the Republic, but the seeds were beginning to germinate. They were matured not only by centuries of oppression, but by a wave of Western influence that was beginning to engulf China. D. K. Yang believes that the movement was a direct result of the early introduction of Western ideas of sexual equality among the upper social class intelligentsia.[58] The 100 Day Reform of 1898 that was initiated as a result of liberal pressure on the young Manchu Emperor, although not primarily a women's

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[58]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , pp. 134-36.

movement, incorporated many of the demands for equality that were being expressed by upper social class women. Not only did it promote the establishment of a free press and the introduction of Western subjects into the curriculum of the schools, it also advocated giving women a modern education and unbinding their feet.[59] The conservative Empress Dowager, in defense of Chinese tradition, organized a military coup, imprisoned the young Emperor, ascended the throne, and ended all attempts at reform.

Subsequent revolutionary movements attracted many women. Chu Chin, the publisher of the first Women's Journal, organized the "Restoration Army" in 1907 and was finally executed. Her struggle for female equality spurred even more activity in the movement.[60] As the Manchu Dynasty crumbled during the first decade of the twentieth century, women became more and more militant in their struggle. "Battalions of women were organized in many parts of China in the Republican revolution of 1911, a revolution which promoted women's rights to education, 'to make friends,' to marry by free choice of partners, and to participate in government."[61] Although

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[59] Ibid., pp. 117-118.

[60] Ibid., p. 117.

[61] Ibid.

the Republican revolution was successful, the struggle for women's rights did not end.

Republic Period

Olga Lang suggests the revolution of 1911-1912 and the establishment of the Republic of China initiated an end to the feudal attitudes toward women.[62] Unfortunately, these feudal attitudes lingered for many decades. The struggle for women's rights went through various periods of agressive action and static inactivity. The period that preceeded the establishment of the Chinese Republic was marked by activity which was largely a carry-over from the Republican revolution. In 1913, the Republican parliament was set upon by a large number of women who demanded implementation of women's suffrage as fulfillment of the revolution's promise. However, "police dispersed the mob, and the men parliamentarians laughed off the episode."[63]

After this disillusionment, the movement retracted to a more staid course and, although women leaders continued to press for modern education, unbinding of the feet, and the other principles that were advocated by the leaders of the Republican revolution, little overt activity was undertaken. Some advances, especially in

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[62]Lang, p. 44.

[63]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 118.

education, were accomplished, but this served only to prime the pump of discontent.

With the May 4th Movement of 1919, the culmination of Chinese protest against the settlements of the Versailles Conference,[64] the frustrations of the intellectual women of China resulted in protests against the social, political, and economic discrimination that was being forced upon them. This was largely a result of three factors: (1) Western influence guided the Chinese demands for sexual equality and provided examples of what united action could accomplish; (2) Publications on modern womanhood were greatly expanded in volume and were being read by an ever-increasing number of literate Chinese females -- mostly middle and upper class urban women; and (3) The formation of several women's organizations such as the Association for Collective Advancement of Women and the Association for the Promotion of Women's Education gave concrete direction and purpose to the movement. "What had been mainly a rising tide of opinion and individual action was now being crystallized into an organized collective movement."[65]

Industrialization had a two-fold effect on the movement for women's rights. By accepting femals workers

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[64] Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , pp. 117-118.

[65] Schwartz, p. 40.

into the factories, economic independence was spread to a large number of women who, without means of self-support, might never have spoken out against male domination and discrimination and would probably never have joined national organizations whose sole purpose was the propagation of women's rights. These women were by-and-large members of the middle class and were probably not intellectuals. Thus, the movement reached another stratum of Chinese society and came somewhat closer to being a mass movement. Industrialization also proved additional discrimination to be combated. Women hired as factory workers were paid less than males in the same capacity. This discrimination, added to the new social evil of child-labor, gave Chinese women another example of the feudal domination of women. By the mid-twenties, the women's rights movement was established as a structured social-protest movement.

Kuomintang Period

The 1920's in China were years of social and political unrest. The Republic regime proved to be little less corrupt or progressive than the previous rule, and liberal Chinese were determined to break the bonds of feudal and foreign control. A new nationalist revolution, made up largely of Kuomintang and Communists, was instigated in 1924 and was successful in

over-throwing the government of the Republic. During this period of strife, women began to realize more and more that they needed political power before they could achieve sexual equality. As Felix Greene points out, "In the struggle against discrimination the women of China learned through bitter personal experience that the feudal marriage system deeply rooted in the past, and the feudal outlook of men on marriage and women were inseparable from the whole system of feudalism in China."[66] The obvious concluding point is stated by Jack Belden:

> The family was a training ground for loyalty to state authority. . . . Submission of female to male and of son to father found its natural reflection in submission of peasant to gentry, tenant to landlord and landlord to state ruler. From the foregoing, it should be obvious that any all-out attempt to free women could only result in the upheaval of the whole social pyramid.[67]

Leading proponants of women's rights organizations also realized this and promptly linked their groups with revolutionary political movements.

In the revolution of 1924-1925, many women donned the uniforms of the Kuomintang and the Communists and fought side-by-side with the men. At the culmination of the revolution, women were included as members of the

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[66]Greene, p. 397.

[67]Jack Belden, China Shakes the World (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), pp. 310-311.

high councils in the early coalition regime of both the Kuomintang and the Communist Party.[68] However, after the Kuomintang had wrested power from the Communists and had taken complete control of the government, little headway was made for the vast majority of peasant Chinese women, even though several laws were passed to give women the right to divorce, to own property, and to prevent foot-binding. However, these laws could not overcome the feudalist tradition of a male-dominated society without strict enforcement, which they did not receive.

The status of women, especially in the urban centers, was improving, nonetheless. The urban intelligentsia had accepted at least the principle of sexual equality by the late 1920's, and there was an accelerated pace in the development of women's opportunities in education and employment. Women living in metropolitan areas were beginning to voice their opinions with authority. Simultaneously, there was a growing dissatisfaction with the Kuomintang among liberal intellectual females.

The Kuomintang Party played a significant role in the women's rights movement during the revolution years. As mentioned earlier, it incorporated women in its fighting battalions and allowed them to sit as members of

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[68]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , pp. 117-118.

the high councils during the early Kuomintang-Communist coalition, The close co-operation between women's organizations and the Kuomintang began to pall rather quickly during the next few years. In 1925, the Kuomintang ousted the Communists from the coalition that had been set up one year earlier because the conservative Kuomintang were not willing to follow the more liberal and left-wing policies that were being advanced by the Communists. Women's movements, too, when they swung too far to the left, were checked.[69]

Much was accomplished, however. The Kuomintang outlawed contracted marriages and footbinding, and the civil code published on December 3, 1930, gave men and women broad justification for obtaining divorce. The civil code also gave women equal inheritance rights and established the right for women to own property.[70] However, while these laws were influential in the urban areas, they had little effect on the majority of the peasant population.

Even in the urban areas, these policies were never strictly enforced, however, and the women's movement continued to seek stronger political ties that would enable it to spread throughout China instead of being localized

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[69] Ibid., p. 118.

[70] Shih Hu, The Chinese Renaissance, pp. 107-108.

in a few metropolitan areas. Gradually, with the onset of the Japanese invasion of China, increased dissatisfaction with the Kuomintang resulted in a definite swing toward the Communists. "The Kuomintang's reign over the political energies of the women's movement was weak; for, in spite of party control of the leadership of many women's organizations, members in these organizations, as well as women in general, had not been organized to participate actively in political work."[71] These factors, plus the strong and effective propagandizing efforts of the Communists, contributed to the Communist party's ascension as the chief force behind the women's rights movement.

The Communist Party had long been a supporter of women's rights. As C. K. Yang points out, "The Communists from the beginning recognized the potential political strength of the women's movement, and during the thirty years of their struggle for power consistently nursed its development to augment their political force."[72] In 1924, Women's Day of March 8th was under Communist leadership. This event was much publicized because of the militant demands of equal pay for women; protection against child labor; the abolition of polygamy, child brides, and

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[71]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 119.

[72]Ibid.

marriage contracts; equal education and the prohibition of slavery and concubinage.[73] Support for this kind of action continued until the revolution of 1949 and undoubtedly secured a great deal of female support for the Communist Party.

The movement for women's rights was by no means the only area in which Communist influence and propaganda was exercised; however, the Communists were certainly aware of the fact that:

> No social revolution -- either good or bad -- ever took place without the existence of a great mass of disinherited people who could furnish a new group with a base of support. In the women of China, the Communists possessed, almost ready-made, one of the greatest masses of disinherited human beings the world has ever seen.[74]

Their use of women's rights was by no means dishonest since their goal was the liberation of all Chinese from feudal beliefs and practices and from foreign domination.

The Communists employed one piece of strategy that was to become their greatest asset in the years after World War II -- they made their appeals to the peasants and the intellectuals rather than to the landowners. The struggle for female respect and equality had previously been located in the cities. In 1926 the Communist Party made a political arm out of the women's movement by

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Belden, p. 317.

working out systematic tactics for recruiting members and expanding the movement from the urban centers to the rural areas.[75] When the effect of this program was felt and understood, the movement for women's rights had finally reached the masses in the form of a revolutionary concept of government that gave male and female alike the right to own land and achieve self-respect.

Aside from the political fight to secure women's rights, there was a definite economic influence that was felt in the urban centers. While most of China was unaffected by industrialization, the metropolitan areas were teeming with new industry. As early as 1927, over 58 per cent of all factory workers in Shanghai were women and, "Once women became factory workers, old restrictions began to vanish; they began to be employed as shop assistants, waitresses, barbers, beauticians, etc."[76] In 1937 Florence Ayscough listed a number of occupations and professions open to women such as dentistry, medicine, law, police work, nursing, secretarial work, journalism, banking, retailing, and, last but not least, illegal prostitution.[77] The number of females able to achieve the needed education to fill positions as doctors, bankers,

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[75]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 120.

[76]Lang, p. 103.

[77]Ayscough, pp. 99-112.

and lawyers were certainly few in number. Undoubtedly, the majority of working women were employed as very cheap manual labor; but a degree of economic independence was obtainable in spite of the physical and mental price women had to pay for it.

Conditions may have been improving for urban women, but the majority of Chinese women, the peasants, were not affected by the industrialization of the large cities. Many women who fought against their traditional role of subservience often paid a severe price for their conduct. Deaths from beatings and maltreatment were still quite common in the mid-thirties. Suicides gave further indication of women's discontent. In a study in 1935 when statistics were admittedly "grossly incomplete" there were 1,353 suicides reported in 244 counties and in 22 provinces. Of this number the largest single cause was attributed to marital strife, and of this group 72% were women.[78] In a study as late as 1950, over 10,000 female deaths were reported as a result of suicide or family mistreatment in the Central-South Region alone.[79] These statistics clearly indicate that the role of the female in China still remained one of harsh subordination and discrimination, even after the Communist Revolution

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[78]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 107.

[79]Ibid., pp. 107-108.

of 1949.

Communist Period

When the Communists came to power in 1949 they immediately took action in the area of women's rights. "Since the Communist revolution from its beginning advocated equality between the sexes even more than other social movements, it was inevitable that a change in the role of women should become an ever important factor in the reshaping of the family institution under Communist rule."[80] This change became evident almost instantly as land reform regulations redistricted land to the individual, not the family clan. This meant that for the first time women became property owners. The new land reforms also guaranteed a woman's right to keep her land in case she left the family for reasons of divorce, separation, or other circumstances.[81]

Women's education was quickly promoted. By 1951, in the cities of Darien and Port Arthur, 8,640 of 9,115 illiterate women were in some type of literacy program.[82] This figure indicates that over 94% of the women in these cities were obtaining schooling. Significantly, this Communist literacy program was being introduced to

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[80] Ibid., p. 105.

[81] Yang, A Chinese Village . . . , pp. 178-179.

[82] Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 115.

the rural areas as well as the cities.

It is Felix Greene's belief that, "More than any other single act, the Marriage Law of May 1950 revolutionized the social structure of China."[83] This law was formulated by the Communist Party in association with various women's organizations; and, among other things, it prohibits bigamy, concubinage, child betrothal, interference with the remarriage of widows, the exchange of gifts or money in connection with marriages; and it guarantees equal status of man and wife, the right for either partner to choose any occupation he or she desires, the right for each to equally possess the family property, and most importantly, the right to divorce.[84] The government supports and encourages sexual equality:

> This freedom of women to marry whomsoever they wish, to enter whatever profession they choose, to enjoy the same property rights as men -- is shouted every where by posters, radio and newspapers. Each village and municiple ward has a branch of the Women's Federation to see they get it.[85]

Women's rights have been served well by the Communist Party; and they, in turn, have benefited from the support of the vast number of Chinese women. The two goals, those of sexual and social equality are merging

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[83]Greene, p. 396.

[84]Ibid., pp. 396-400.

[85]Lord Boyd Orr and Peter Townsend, What's Happening in China (London: Macdonald and Company, 1959), pp. 95-96.

and, "Under strict Communist direction, the women's movement is no longer an independent militant movement battling exclusively for the interests of women; it had become mainly a tool of the general Communist cause."[86]

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[86]Yang, The Chinese Family . . . , p. 136.

CHAPTER IV

SYNOPSES OF SELECTED COMMUNIST CHINESE PLAYS

The following ten plays were selected from those available through the Foreign Language Press and represent a large portion of contemporary Chinese Communist scripts available in this country.

There is no way to group the plays under specific, well-defined headings because nearly all of the plays contain many areas of similarity. However, informal divisions can be made to aid the focus of the study, and to emphasize differences and likenesses in professional, military, and domestic situations.

The first five plays deal with a professional or communal problem, such as building a bridge, establishing a Co-op, or running a hospital. There are many areas of domestic conflict and some mention of military activity in these plays, but they basically evolve from a professional or communal situation. The sixth play is military in nature and presents representations of military life during conflict between Communist and non-Communist forces. The last four plays are domestic plays. The conflict that arises in family environment supplies some of the most vivid examples of the changing social

roles of Chinese women.

Each play is described in synopsis form with major focus given to the female characters. A summary of the roles of the female characters is included after each synopsis.

BRIGHT SKIES[87]

A Three-Act Play by Tsao Yu[88]

The first scene takes place in the outer office of Dr. Jackson, the director of the Peking Yen Jen Medical College, in December 1948. Liu, Jackson's personal secretary, is giving orders to one of the office typists. The stage directions describe her as thin and shriveled; her hair is powdered, her face is rouged, and she is a chain smoker who always uses a cigarette holder. When Dr. Yu, a young eye specialist, enters, he addresses her by her English name, Mary. They discuss the revolution and the approaching Communist Army, but neither one seems overly disturbed about the situation. Liu is confident that even if the Communists take the city of Peking, they will not be so presumptious as to confiscate an American supported hospital.

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[87]Tsao Yu, Bright Skies, trans. Chang Pei-Chi (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1960), 122 pp.

[88]This play was written and originally published in China in 1954.

Hsu Mu-Mei has also entered the office. She is a nurse and the wife of the Dean of the Medical College, a woman described as foolish, conceited, and fond of being clever. She has brought Dr. Jackson a book of his collected essays in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the American College (Yen Jen) in Peking. While they are admiring the book, Yuan, Hsu's adopted daughter, enters carrying a basket of goods her foster-mother had requested. Yuan greets Hsu with the English expression, Mummy: an expression that her foster-mother and father prefer. Hsu is quite impolite to her foster-daughter and openly insults her. Yuan gives no indication that she is rebellious, even when Hsu scolds her for spilling coffee beans by saying, "Damn fool! I've brought you up till you're such a big girl but all for nothing. You're good for nothing but stuffing yourself with three bowls of rice each meal."[89] This attack provokes Dr. Ho, a young revolutionary, to remark that Hsu would have to hire a servant to replace Yuan, but this comment gets little attention other than a sarcastic remark by Hsu about his sense of justice.

Dr. Ling Shih-Hsiang, an elderly bacteriologist, has cornered the Dean of the Medical School, Dr. Chiang, and demands that he receive the field-mice he needs for

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[89]Ibid., p. 11.

his plague research. As Chiang reassures him that he will have no trouble getting field-mice, Hsu blurts out the fact that Ling's daughter, Mu-Lan, has gone out of the city with Dr. Sung, a female surgeon. Since Mu-Lan has been gone for three days without notifying her father, he is quite worried and upset. However, Mu-Lan often escorts Dr. Sung without getting his permission. At this time Dr. Sung and Mu-Lan enter. Dr. Sung is described as, ". . . unmarried and full of enterprising spirit . . . quick of action and speech and . . . straightforward with a fine sense of justice."[90]

Mu-Lan is described as being passionate, sometimes a bit wayward, and nearly as obstinate as her father.

Both Dr. Sung and Mu-Lan are enthusiastic about the clinic for the poor that has been set up outside of town. Dr. Sung remarks, "The poor patients get real treatment like other men. Over there I realized for the first time that doctors were really needed and loved by men instead of being mere ornaments of higher learning."[91] As Dr. Sung prepares to attend to her patients, a nurse reminds her that an officer's wife in the special ward has called for her many times, but Dr. Sung merely says, "I don't feel like attending her. Let's go to the

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[90] Ibid., p. 19.

[91] Ibid., p. 20.

wards."[92] It is apparent she is not influenced by social position. Later, when the woman's servant attempts to persuade Dr. Sung to visit the woman, Dr. Sung replies that the woman is not ill, and says, "You tell your madam this: when a woman gets old, she will have wrinkles on her face; and when she gets still older, she will even die. . . . This is a surgical department, not a beauty parlour."[93]

While Dr. Chiang and Dr. Chen, the director of the eye department, discuss the advisability of putting their money in an American bank, an old couple enter the office led by two doctors, Dr. Sun and Dr. Yu. It appears that the old man, Chao, was blinded at work when he fainted from fatigue and was burned by sparks from molten lead. The doctors have already pronounced his case hopeless, but they know Dr. Jackson is interested in examining a patient with rickets, and Chao's wife fits the description. As they convince her to stay in the hospital, three agents of the Kuomintang Army enter and force Dr. Ho to go with them. Mu-Lan is beaten when she tries to talk to Ho. However, the sound of the artillary of the Communist Army is approaching, and she feels that Ho will soon return. As the curtain falls, she says,

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[92] Ibid., p. 21.

[93] Ibid., p. 25.

"Bright skies will soon be here!"[94]

As the second scene begins, it is the autumn of 1949, and the revolution is over. Dr. Jackson has fled the country and the hospital is now under government control. Liu has resigned and is angrily packing her belongings. Because of her intimate contact with the West, Liu had never learned Chinese and is now considered illiterate. Mu-Lan is quite pleased with the decision to use only Chinese and is amused at the number of people who are upset with the new ruling.

Dr. Tung, the new director, and Dr. Sung meet and discuss the strange death of Old Chao's wife, the rickets patient. Suspecting that Dr. Jackson may have experimented on the patient, Dr. Sung suggests considerable amount of thought be given to the problem. Mu-Lan is in definite agreement, having voiced her opinion to Dr. Tung earlier. The subject is dropped when Dr. Chiang, a close friend of Jackson's, enters with a note from Jackson saying that Dr. Ling's thesis on "Laws Governing the Susceptibility of Hamsters to the Plague" has been published in the American magazine that Dr. Jackson sent along. When Mu-Lan discovers that her father's article was published in an American magazine, she is incensed and asks her father if he is aware that the United States

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[94]Ibid., p. 38.

is an imperialist country. When he asks, in reply, how field-mice can have any connection with American imperialism, Mu-Lan withdraws in silent anger. Dr. Chiang remarks that, "These young folks really have plenty of political enthusiasm!"[95]

After Dr. Ling has gone, Hsu enters excitedly and complains about the amount of inquiry that is being given to the deceased patient of Dr. Jackson. When Dr. Tung enters, she reproaches him for thinking that Dr. Jackson could have mistreated a patient and states that, even though she agrees that the working class is good, before liberation a patient's relatives were not allowed to interview the hospital superintendent. Her husband, Dr. Chiang, interrupts before she can continue.

After a lengthy discussion between Drs. Ling, Tung, Ho, and Chiang about the future of the hospital, Mu-Lan enters with Old Chao and announces that the corneas in his eyes have ruptured, leaving no possibility of curing his blindness.

Act Two begins in 1952 in Dr. Ling's sitting room where Mu-Lan and Dr. Sung are waiting for Dr. Ling's return. Mu-Lan is very upset with her father because he spoke in favor of Jackson at a hospital meeting, and she has just discovered a collection of Jackson's essays on

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[95]Ibid., p. 46.

his bookshelf. Dr. Sung diverts her anger momentarily with a discussion about a new Soviet technique of corneal transplant that can cure Old Chao's blindness. Director Chen has appointed Mu-Lan to conduct the surgery.

Dr. Sung becomes impatient waiting for Dr. Ling to return because the Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Association has asked her to pay them a visit before her Volunteer Surgical Team leaves for Korea in the morning, and a number of things have to be done before she goes. Although Dr. Sung spoke out against Dr. Ling at the meeting, Mu-Lan feels that her father will listen to no one else. She also expresses her approval of Dr. Sung's attack on her father and his subsequent anger, resulting in his rapid departure from the meeting. While they are discussing the meeting, Dr. Ling enters in apparently good cheer. Dr. Sung explains why she felt she had to rebuke his defense of Jackson, but Dr. Ling informs her that he knows he is right and, as a result, he holds no grudges. Dr. Sung accepts the fact that she and Dr. Ling will never see things alike. She is visibly hurt by his persistant refusal to accept what she believes to be the truth about Jackson.

Mu-Lan, however, has not given up the battle, and she begins to question her father, stating that, "Jackson was undoubtedly a special agent sent by the American imperialists for aggression in the cultural fields."[96]

When Dr. Ling tells her that one day's politics is enough and it doesn't matter whether he understands Jackson or not, Mu-Lan replies that it does matter because nothing concerns the individual alone. She accuses her father of being backward and tells him that he has been led completely astray by American propaganda and by the influence of Dr. Chiang. She hotly insists that he no longer associate with Dr. Chiang. Before their argument can be resolved, Dr. Ho and Dr. Chen arrive at the apartment.

When the argument subsides, Dr. Ling sadly gives his daughter a book on corneal transplants and a broach he has purchased for her birthday. After he has gone into his room, Dr. Ho gets Mu-Lan to admit that she was inconsiderate and unkind to her father. She tells Dr. Tung, who has just arrived, that she is to blame for upsetting her father. When it is learned that Dr. Tung has come to ask Dr. Ling to participate in some preparatory work for the Anti-Germ-Warfare Exhibition, Mu-Lan reveals that her father doesn't believe that germ warfare exists. While Dr. Tung is talking to Dr. Ling, Yuan comes in with new information about the death of Old Chao's wife. It seems that Jackson had tied a box of lice to the old woman's arm while she was in the hospital.

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[96] Ibid., p. 66.

During the excited discussion of this new information, Dr. Yu enters and tells Mu-Lan that she will have to operate to remove a splinter from the Commissar of the Chinese People's Volunteers. He and Mu-Lan leave to discuss the strategy of the operation, while the other doctors and Dr. Chiang, who has just come from his apartment downstairs, discuss Jackson.

Scene Two begins three days later. Hsu and Chiang are finishing dinner, and Yuan is clearing the table. Hsu has given Yuan notice that she must move out if she continues to come in late every night from her political meetings, to which Yuan replies that she will go as soon as there is room at the youth hostel, and that it will do no good for Hsu to become angry. She appears very calm and confident as she gathers the bowls and withdraws to another room. While Hsu and Chiang bicker about Mu-Lan's obvious coolness toward them, Liu knocks at the door and requests permission to enter. After Chiang has left the room, his wife admits Liu into the house. Liu immediately asks for a cup of coffee and brandy and proceeds to pour a substantial quantity of the brandy into her cup, explaining that the brandy helps to cure her insomnia. She has smuggled a letter from Dr. Jackson. As she delivers it to Hsu, she mysteriously announces that the Third World War will soon break out. After she has left, Chiang and Hsu read the letter. While they are hotly

discussing its contents (it is revealed that Hsu had an affair with Dr. Jackson), Yuan leaves for a group meeting. Hsu comments that Yuan has been praised as a group leader, but as soon as she is gone Hsu criticizes her for being so smug.

Dr. Ho arrives to talk with Dr. Chiang. While they are discussing Dr. Chiang's inability to completely rid himself of his pre-liberation attitudes, Mu-Lan enters and informs them that Commissar Chuang's eye is badly inflamed. Dr. Yu shows little concern. His attitude of indifference is in sharp contrast to the attitudes of Mu-Lan and her father. Dr. Ling is exceptionally incensed. He has just returned from the Anti-Germ-Warfare Exhibition and is now firmly convinced that germ warfare exists.

When Act Three begins, Mu-Lan is checking Commissar Chuang's eye. It appears that there is little hope that the infection will not permanently damage the cornea. She cannot control her sobbing and Chuang realizes that something is seriously wrong. While Dr. Ling and Dr. Chen discuss possible ways of saving Chuang's sight, Dr. Tung reassures Mu-Lan that everyone still has confidence in her. He tells her she is still scheduled to perform the corneal transplant on Old Chao.

Scene two of Act Three opens two weeks later. Yuan is packing Dr. Ling's luggage. He is heading for an Anti-Germ-Warfare team that is scheduled to leave for

Korea that morning. Both eye patients have been completely cured, and Dr. Chiang's role in the death of Old Chao's wife has been revealed. Mu-Lan expresses her newfound desire to become a truly good doctor; and she is extremely pleased that her father has become aware of the American imperialists and is now actively fighting against them. Also, although somewhat embarrassed by the situation, she is happily in love with Dr. Ho. As she helps finish packing her father's things, Dr. Ho tries to gain enough courage to tell Dr. Ling that he and Mu-Lan are going to be married. Dr. Ling happily gives his consent and the play ends on that joyful note.

Summary

The female characters in Bright Skies illustrate several different types of social roles. They are all urban dwellers, professionally oriented, and well educated. Liu is extremely Western in her habits and attitudes. She is called Mary at the office and after the revolution she is forced to resign her secretarial position because she cannot speak Chinese. Her "illiteracy" is unusual for a Chinese woman; however, because she has acquired an excellent command of English, her position as Dr. Jackson's personal secretary carried a great deal of importance and contrasts sharply to her position at the end of the play when she appears heavily

rouged, mentally disturbed, and has resorted to drink.

Hsu, the wife of Dean Chiang, appeared as a rather haughty woman who tried very hard to impress others. The stage directions point out that, largely through the influence of her husband, she is head of the nursing staff and enjoys considerable prestige and power as a result. Her role in her marriage is not as domestic as her position at the hospital, and she follows the instructions of her husband when he indicates his displeasure with her. As a foster-mother she is often inconsiderate and cruel and assumes a very superior attitude when dealing with Yuan.

Yuan is also a nurse, but she has the lowest rank that the hospital offers. Her later activity in the case of the rickets patient, and her close association with the director of the hospital indicates that her status has risen considerably. Her relationship with her foster-mother is often strained and she accepts Hsu's abuse with quiet obedience. Later in the play she has gained an air of confidence and is willing to move away from the protection of the family. Yuan also becomes interested in political groups, attends group meetings regularly, and has achieved the position of group leader.

Dr. Sung is portrayed as an excellent, dynamic doctor. She is concerned with her patients regardless of their social position and refuses to bother with those

who are not really ill. She is portrayed as a very intelligent and skillful surgeon and is highly respected by the other doctors. Dr. Sung is an activist in various social and political movements. This is seen by her interest and participation in the clinic set up for the poor and her willingness to go to Korea to aid the soldiers in their battle against American aggression. In general, she is very strong-willed and dynamic -- a woman who follows her beliefs regardless of friendship or authority.

Mu-Lan is the youngest of the female characters and is described as passionate, obstinate, and impetuous. An example of one aspect of her relationship to her father is indicated by her three-day unexplained absence. She did not bother to tell her father that she was going with Dr. Sung and does not appear concerned with his worry when she returns. Throughout the play she is willing to criticize her father, sometimes severely, even though this deeply hurts him. Although she loves her father, she is not willing to overlook his faults.

As a professional person Mu-Lan is capable but not overly inspired until her experience with Commissar Chuang. After seeing his strength, she is determined to become a good student and doctor. Her role in political activities is not clearly defined, but she is the most vociferous in denouncing Dr. Jackson and American

imperialism. These political themes are the ones that cause the majority of friction between her and her father until he becomes aware of the great evils of Dr. Jackson and American aggression.

LOCUST TREE VILLAGE[97]

A Five-Act Play by Hu Ko

Locust Tree Village deals primarily with the agricultural co-op movement in a peasant village in northern China. The play covers a period from 1947 to 1958 and illustrates many social changes that occur during the eleven year period. When the play begins, Locust Tree village has already been liberated and the villagers are about to reclame the land and possessions of a wealthy landowner. Mother Kuo, a forceful peasant woman, collects people to attend the meeting and directs much of the action. Aware that the landowner, Tsui Lao-Kun, used to own Date Grove, a nearby village, Mother Kuo suggests that they have a share of Lao-Kun's estate. This shocks Auntie Lao Cheng, another peasant woman, who has been advocating the use of the local militia to keep other villages away. She asks Mother Kuo why it is necessary to be so truthful, as she comically rushes to make sure the village gates are well guarded.

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[97]Hu Ko, Locust Tree Village (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1961), 126 pp.

It is revealed that the local militia volunteers will be needed in the regular Communist army and Mother Kuo's son, Kuo Yung-lai, will be among them. Auntie's son, Ken-shu, will also have to go, and it is well known that Auntie will try to keep her son at home. Mother Kuo reminds the group that the village Women's Relief Association will take care of the problem. She is quite calm about her own son's immediate departure and simply tells him to let her know when he's going so that she can see him off. She and her son resolved long ago that when Yung-lai left for war he wouldn't return until Chiang Kai-shek was thoroughly beaten. Before he leaves, he and Hei Ni, his fiancee, discuss his leaving and Yung-lai tells her that she doesn't have to wait for him. Hei Ni swears she will wait for him for ten years, if necessary, and, after giving him an embroidered handkerchief by which to remember her, she runs into the house -- crying.

At this time Chih-Kuo, the landlord's son, returns home. He is also a revolutionary cadre in the Communist party, although he has never completely cast off all of his feudal beliefs. Young Kao, his guide, remarks that there is a famous song about Locust Tree village that deals with a woman named Mother Kuo. Although Chih-Kuo is pleased that Mother Kuo was his wet nurse when he was a child, he becomes extremely upset at

the knowledge of the loss of his father's property and exits hurredly.

Auntie and her son, Ken-chu, enter arguing loudly about Ken-chu's departure. She wants her son to stay at home and marry his fiancee, Chin-mei, but Ken-chu reminds her that they have agreed not to marry until Chiang Kai-shek is beaten. While Ken-chu is explaining the reasons why he must go, Chih-Kuo enters into a heated argument with the villagers. He has refused to let the people confiscate his father's property for redistribution. As a result of his social position, he nearly convinces the people his family should be shown some extra consideration. Mother Kuo enters, however, and defiantly rebukes his actions, welding village opinion together once more. Under her leadership, the Party line is followed and the land redistribution program continues. After the argument is settled, Chin-mei, Ken-chu's fiancee, enters and informs the people that there is friction at the village gate. The people of her village, Date Grove, and the Locust Tree villagers are quarreling. Chin-mei is upset and says, "We are all under the leadership of the Party; we must avoid a rupture between our two villages!"[98] Mother Kuo agrees and goes to unite the people, ending the first act.

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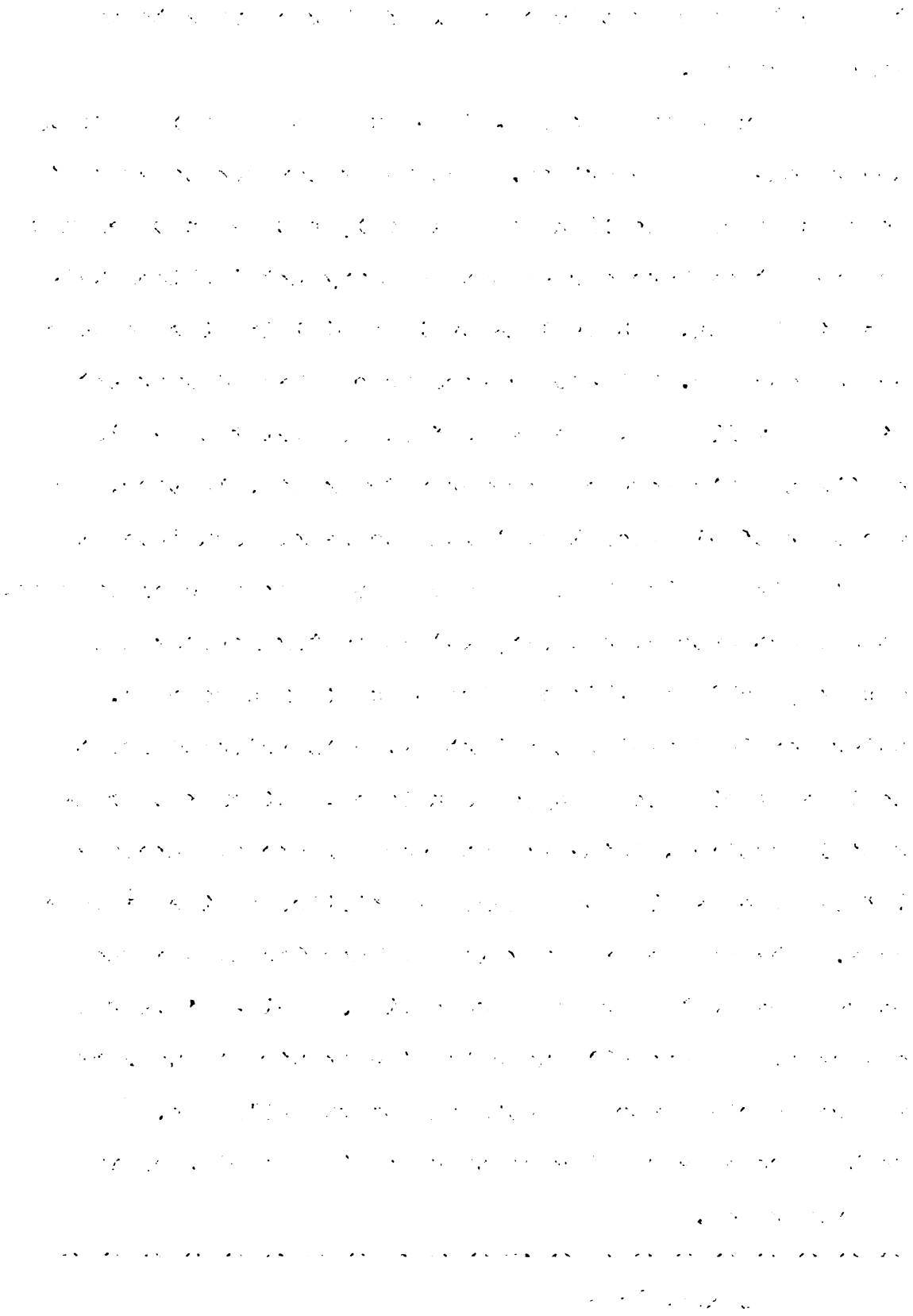
[98] Ibid., p. 26.



Act Two begins six years later with Hei Ni writing a letter to a Party official telling him about the new co-op that has been formed in Locust Tree village. Mother Kuo is sure that it will be a success although things are starting slowly at this point and she is having trouble getting families to join. Mother Kuo is deeply involved in the process of carrying out Party policy, especially now that she has become the Party branch secretary. She tries to convince everyone that the co-op is not only the policy of the Communist Party but it is the best way to unite the village. After she has patiently discussed this to a non-member, to no avail, Chih-Kuo enters with his wife and is cordially greeted by Mother Kuo.

During the conversation Chih-Kuo reveals that his wife, Mei-Li, is pregnant and needs someone to help her until the baby is born. Mei-Li, a haughty city woman, blatantly asks Hei Ni if she can cook, wash, read, and write before she inquires whether or not Hei Ni would be interested in the job. Hei Ni answers yes to all of the questions but the last and welcomes the chance to escape when Chin-mei comes to visit. Mother Kuo refuses Chih-Kuo's request to take Hei Ni for only a couple of months because, as the co-op work recorder, Hei Ni is irreplaceable. She then rebukes Chih-Kuo for his past actions and informs them that lunch is ready and the couple must leave. After they have gone, Chih-hua begins to cry and

tells Mother Kuo of the mistreatment and beatings she received at the hands of her father-in-law, Tsui Lao-Kun. Mother Kuo comforts her and, as they leave, tries to persuade her to report it to the Security Preservation Committee.

After Mother Kuo's exit, Ken-chu, Auntie's son, arrives home from the army. He scolds his father for not joining the co-op as Mother Kuo has suggested and brings news that her son, Yung-lai, was killed in action. When he meets his fiancee, Chin-mei, they shake hands and discuss the best way to dig an irrigation ditch. Chin-mei, now Chairman of the Date Grove Co-op, has formulated a plan to use water-wheels, but first everyone must join the co-op. When marriage is finally mentioned, Chin-mei tells Ken-chu he will have to live with her family because she can't leave her work. Ken-chu refuses, however, because of his feelings of obligation to Mother Kuo. Before the problem can be discussed, several people, including Mother Kuo, greet Ken-chu and welcome him home. After Mother Kuo tells him about the newly established co-op and the need to increase its membership, Ken-chu tells her that he has already decided to join, and gives her his demobilization pay. He then breaks the news that her son was killed in battle. Hei Ni enters and is puzzled by Mother Kuo's grief-stricken sobbing until she sees Yung-lai's medals wrapped up in her handkerchief.

Act Two ends as she weeps at the realization of Yung-lai's death.

Two years later plans are underway to unite the Date Grove co-op and the Locust Tree Village co-op. Chin-mei and Ken-chu have been married for the past two years, but they are both dedicated to their work and live apart in their separate villages. Auntie is having trouble with her son, however, because he has joined the co-op and her husband has not. The resulting friction is not eased by her vacillating loyalty. Ken-chu is further upset by rumors that Mother Kuo is misrepresenting the village at a National Party meeting and that he is being dominated by his wife. When Chin-mei comes in to inquire about his progress in uniting the two co-ops, he accuses her of using the "personal approach"[99] with him. Angered, Chin-mei reiterates her concern for the co-op and refuses to deal with her husband. Chin-mei, followed by Ken-chu, angrily leaves the house as Chin-hua comes in and tells Auntie that she is thinking of leaving the Tsui household because of the ill treatment she receives. Mother Kuo has just returned and, enthused over her trip, renews her co-op building efforts. She tells Chin-hua that she can leave the Tsui family and join the co-op. The land she will receive will be enough to support her. She

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[99] Ibid., p. 60.

also supports the plan to send Hei Ni to tractor school for further study, and is pleased to learn that while she was away the membership of the co-op grew to 857. Plans for an advanced co-op are progressing now that Mother Kuo is back, and the use of irrigation machinery is considered.

When the villagers gather to hear Mother Kuo's experiences in the city and her meeting with Chairman Mao, it becomes evident that someone has been sowing seeds of discontent among them. The negative rumors are exposed and Mother Kuo hotly denies them. As a result of questioning, it is evident that Chih-Kuo is responsible for the suspicion and unrest.

Act Four begins two years later. The co-ops have merged but friction still remains between them, and Mother Kuo is still under suspicion by a number of people. The irrigation machinery has arrived, however, and Hei Ni has been released from school to help install it. While Nei Ni and Lao Kao, formerly Young Kao, go to inspect the machinery, a large crowd gathers at Mother Kuo's to voice their dissatisfaction with the co-op and with Mother Kuo. After they have gone, Mother Kuo is very hurt because of the damage that may occur to the co-op.

Hei Ni greets Mother Kuo and discusses the situation with her. Although Hei Ni offers to take Mother Kuo to live with her, Mother Kuo refuses. She has a respon-

sibility to the Party and must see that the co-op advances. She suggests that a mass meeting be held to discuss the problems of the advanced co-op so that a democratic solution can be reached.

Meanwhile, Mei-li, Chih-Kuo's wife, has been complaining about her four children and Chih-Kuo's unfaithful ways. She is sure that he is going to divorce her and seeks advice and protection from the co-op. Chih-Kuo points out, however, that his scheming ways have been devoted to exposing Mother Kuo as a negative influence in the community. At the mass meeting Mother Kuo has arranged, he tries to undermine the people's confidence in her. Mother Kuo listens to his opinion and the opinions of several people who follow his lead, but does not become upset or discouraged. She calmly refutes their arguments and reminds them that her life, and theirs, is much, much better than it used to be. When Hei Ni and Lao-Kao describe the advances that will be made when the irrigation machines are installed, the villagers are excited and happy. It appears that the co-op is not going to disintegrate and Act Four ends on a joyful note.

The final act takes place in late Autumn, 1958. The village is prosperous and famous for its achievements under the leadership of Mother Kuo. Even Auntie has joined the party after ten years and expounds the need for cadres to lead the way. A writer has come to the

village to examine its progress and wants to interview Mother Kuo. At present she is heading the fertilizer team and is out gathering manure. When Auntie enters with a dung basket on her back the writer, mistaking her identity, rushes to interview her. When his mistake is discovered, Auntie refuses to let him go and takes him into her house to finish the interview.

Mother Kuo enters and gives a few directions to be carried out. As she is the most influential person in the village, no one questions her judgment. She accepts Chih-Kuo's resolutions to improve himself but does not take them too seriously. She is disturbed, however, by the fact that Hei Ni is leaving again and Ken-chu is also going. Chih-mei, however, does not indicate any feelings about her husband's departure. As a Party member, she realizes his first obligation is to the people.

As the play ends, the masses are gathering to assist in the great leap forward in production and construction.

Summary

Mother Kuo is an extremely individualistic woman. When the play starts she has already gained considerable status in the village and continues to work for the community through the play. She is the only villager willing to stand up to the landlord's son and demand that

his property be given for redistribution among the masses. This action is taken despite the fact that she was the son's wet nurse when he was a child and feels close to him. As the play progresses, Mother Kuo incessantly strives to carry out the Party reforms. She is the driving force behind the success of the co-op and achieves nation-wide respect as a result of her work. Even though she is nearly sixty years old at the close of the play, she continues to work in the fields gathering dung and directs the co-op's activities. Her personal status is enhanced by her tireless efforts to better the life of those in the community through adherence to the Communist policies.

Chih-mei also shows initiative and strength. She is willing to wait six years for Ken-chu's return from the army, but once he has arrived she feels she cannot live with his family because of her work in the Date Grove co-op. Her sense of social consciousness is further evidenced by her attempts to unite the two villages and her plan to irrigate the fields. She is not dominated by her husband or by another male member of the village. As Chairman of the Date Grove co-op, she enjoys a position of respect and responsibility.

Hei Ni also waits six years for her fiance's return from the army, but instead learns of his death. Under the guidance of Mother Kuo, Hei Ni learns to read

and write and becomes the co-op recorder. She, too, works directly for the co-op, and her hard work is rewarded by an invitation to attend tractor school. After two years of schooling she returns to assist in the installation of Locust Tree Village's irrigation machinery. She is a praised and respected worker.

Auntie Lao-cheng is not nearly as social-minded as the other women. She exhibits jealousy and suspicion of the Date Grove billagers and is strongly against her son's going to fight. At the end of the play she has assumed an almost comic devotion to the co-op and, after ten years, has finally become a Party member.

Chih-hua, Tsui Lao-kun's daughter-in-law, is not vividly described until it is learned that she receives mistreatment and beatings at the hands of her father-in-law. Eventually, she gains enough courage to break away from the household and joins the co-op. The other daughter-in-law of Tsui Lao-kun, Mei-li, is first depicted as an overbearing, impolite female. She is from the city, and her attitude toward her husband, Chih-Kuo, is of cool superiority. Later in the play, burdened with children and a scheming husband, she applies to the co-op for assistance.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE MILL[100]

A One-Act Play by Tsui Teh-Chih

The action of the play takes place in one of the women's hostel rooms of a textile mill in north-east China. At the beginning of the play Wang, an energetic young worker, is talking with her roommate, Liu. Liu is twenty-three and has been working at the mill since she was twelve. A loyal Party member and head of her spinning team, Liu is described as a mature woman who supports her younger brothers and sisters with her wages. At present, Wang is teasing her about her long-standing friendship with their team leader, Chang. He has left some wool for Liu and asked her to knit him a sweater. Wang teases the embarrassed Liu and admonishes her for never socializing with Chang. Whenever he visits, they simply stay in the room and talk about idealogical problems or the mill. Wang feels they should have more fun, perhaps take in a picture.

Wang is not all play, however, She is excited at the prospect of her spinning team surpassing their quota and winning the red banner again. She exclaims, "You know, if we keep it this month we'll be the mill's model team. Hooray!"[101] Liu, however, is more concerned with the

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[100]Tsui Teh-Chih, Saturday Afternoon at the Mill, trans. Tang Sheng (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1957), 45 pp.

[101]Ibid., p. 8.

Party as she says, "If our team really does do well it's because we try to carry out Party decisions properly."[102] She gently chides Wang's attitudes toward romance and gives examples of young couples who get married and fall back in their work. She is going to be positive before she allows herself to become seriously involved with someone. Before Wang leaves she indicates that Chang must be very interested in Liu because he always patiently waits for her, listens to her talk about work, and then leaves with a forlorn expression on his face. She is convinced that they make a perfect couple.

After Wang has gone Chang enters. He and Liu begin to discuss various production problems and the excellent chance of winning the red banner again. Liu scolds him for working too hard and tells him to watch his diet. As they skirt the idea of going to a movie together, Old Chao, head of "C" shift, their closest adversary in capturing the red banner, enters and indicates one of his workers has suddenly become ill. A worker must be taken from Chang's team to replace her. When Old Chao leaves, Chang is quite upset and feels his chances to win the banner will be lost if he gives away one of his good workers. Liu, however, suggests one of their best bobbin changers, Wang, because the girl that is ill is also a good worker. Chang procrastinates and leaves without committing himself even though Liu has told him, "We might

just as well make up our minds to let Wang Chuan go."[103]

Wang enters, is told of "C" shift's shortage, and immediately suggests they transfer one of their worst workers. Liu promptly corrects her saying, "Their team's working for our country as much as we are. We should give them a helping hand when they're in trouble, shouldn't we?"[104] After a short discussion Wang sees her error and agrees to the transfer. She then gives Liu two tickets to the cinema and insists that Liu ask Chang to go with her. When Chang comes back from talking with Foreman Fu he does not say who he has pledged for the other team, although he gives the impression that Liu's decision has been followed. Wang blurts that Liu has two cinema tickets and wants to go with Chang. Chang has also bought two tickets, and they happily prepare to leave when Foreman Fu interrupts them. It seems that Chang has suggested Sheng, the worst worker on the shift, and the mill manager won't allow it. Chang tells him to take his pick, but the resulting drop in production won't be his fault. Fu leaves without having come to a decision.

Liu is incensed at Chang's deception and tells "We're Communists. We mustn't be dragged into making the

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[102] Ibid., p. 8.

[103] Ibid., p. 21.

[104] Ibid., p. 22.

ordinary mistakes."[105] When Chang still refuses to act, Liu says she will make the decision. Chang accuses her of trying to finish him as team leader; since she is leader of the party group, she carries a great deal of political authority. Before Liu can leave, Foreman Fu informs Chang that the mill manager wants to talk with him. After he has gone, Liu and Wang discuss his actions. Liu decides that she must face her responsibilities and leaves to tell the manager that Wang must be transferred.

Later, Chang comes into the room and displays his anger. Liu has interfered and, although she is not in the room, he addresses her saying, "I know you know. You care only about your work. You don't care a damn about anyone human."[106] He then tears the cinema tickets in half and gathers the wool he brought in earlier. Declaring he will never come to see her again for inspiration, he storms out of the room.

Liu returns and is surprised to hear of Chang's anger, but she is unaware that his actions would have disturbed the mill's entire industrial campaign. She tells Wang that they, as Communists, must practice what is right regardless of personal feelings. She reminds Wang, "We must always remember what we belong to. The

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[105] Ibid., p. 30.

[106] Ibid., p. 36.

Youth League and the Party need a lot of living up to."[107] Inspired, Wang decides to miss the pictures and start work that evening.

Left alone, Liu begins to work on the group plan when Chang enters. After Liu realizes that Chang has not come to be sociable, she begins to point out his selfish behavior. She tells him, "You're no longer thinking and acting in the interests of the state,"[108] and goes on to say, "You don't realize you're sinking yourself into the mire of petty individual interest."[109] Liu sincerely tells him that she wanted their friendship to last, and that she felt they were growing closer together. He must realize that he was wrong in his approach to the problem and she tells him to "Go humbly and honestly before the Party and criticize yourself."[110] When he refuses, Liu takes the knitting needles she has purchased to knit his sweater and bends them in half, telling Chang that she cannot stoop to a person such as himself.

As Chang stands bewildered, Old Chao enters and heaps praise on Chang for giving up such a good worker. Chang is being praised by the entire mill because of what

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[107] Ibid., p. 39.

[108] Ibid., p. 43.

[109] Ibid., p. 44.

[110] Ibid., p. 45.

they consider to be his unselfish act; there is even an official commendation on the mill bulletin board. Chang hangs his head in shame, and after the others have gone he asks Liu to forgive him and to continue helping him. Liu tells him that things can never be the same, and he sadly leaves. After he is gone Liu reconsiders her harsh judgment and when Wang rushes in, pulling Chang by the hand, Liu offers to knit his sweater and, "As she looks at Chang her affection is unmistakable."[111]

Summary

Liu is a young mill worker who serves the Party and the mill before taking any personal feelings into consideration. Somewhat shy and bashful when dealing with romantic situations, she asserts herself with confidence, strength and devotion when dealing with her work and her role as a Party member. Her great disappointment in Chang stems from his selfish desire to win the red banner at the expense of harming the total production of the mill. Unwilling to let this injustice take place, she resolutely interferes and risks losing Chang's friendship. When he still refuses to admit his mistakes, she remains convinced that she was right throughout the situation and, although she does not always control Chang, she exhibits a strong character.

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[111] Ibid., p. 49.

At the end of the play she also shows that she can be forgiving.

Wang is a young girl intent on having a good time both at work and afterwards. This does not distract from her desire to be a good worker, which she is, and her desire to help win the red banner. A bit of a busy-body she tries to persuade Liu that more aggressive action in needed in her relationship with Chang. Like Chang, her first reaction to the need to transfer a worker is one of selfishness. She wants the team to win the red banner and suggests they transfer one of their slowest workers. She quickly sees the error in her thinking, however, and is quite willing to change shifts for the good of the mill.

TAMING THE DRAGON AND THE TIGER[112]

A Play in Six Scenes
by Tu Chang-pin and Tu Shih-tsun

The first scene begins in autumn, 1958. A group of peasants are on a tiger-killing hunt when they discover three cadres who have come to the Tiger Hill People's Commune to explore the mountain, Tiger Hill, and solve the problem of mining its rich iron deposits.

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[112]Tu Cheng-pin and Tu Shih-tsun, Taming the Dragon and the Tiger, trans. A. C. Barnes (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1961), 106 pp.

After Chao, the head of a production team in the village, directs them to the village, a couple, Yen and Meng, enter and discuss their mission. They have been sent to build a bridge over the Dragon River in order that the ore from Tiger Hill might be transported back to the village across from it. Mend, Yin's fiancee, is taken with the red flowers she sees around her and comments on their perfect symbolism. She says that she and Yin also turned red the moment they set foot in the hills. During their conversation, the tiger-hunting expedition sees them and takes them to the village to join the other group.

By the time Yin and Meng arrive in the village, the other group has already obtained a sample of ore from Tiger Hill and expounds the need to ". . . bring these treasures down the hill in the service of socialism."[113] Several old villagers recount the many futile attempts to bridge the fierce Dragon River, and there is general disappointment until the two young engineers, Yin and Meng, bolster their spirits.

At the beginning of the second scene, Chao and his wife, Li, are examining the bridge models submitted in a village-wide contest. Chao tells his wife that there will be plenty of work for her Woman's Company once

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[113] Ibid., p. 14.

the bridge building starts and remarks about Li's being chosen outstanding labour-model for her work on the reservoir. Li has already mentioned the fact that, "The Women's Company aren't (sic) a lot of comfort-loving ladies, you know!"[114] and she affectionately snuggles next to Chao. They are interrupted by the arrival of several people. Li greets Meng saying, "You're that girl technician everyone speaks so highly of, aren't you?"[115] As they exchange compliments, Meng mentions how much she likes hill-people, and Li replies that they always try to treat city people decently whenever they visit. When someone complains about an old villager who is in need of food, Li gets a rigle, fires one shot into the air, and a golden pheasant immediately falls to the ground. Impressed, Meng asks to be taken as a pupil. Li agrees, if Meng will teach her to read and write, and they go off together to inspect their work force.

The Water Conservancy engineer, Yin, expresses serious doubts that the bridge can be built in the allotted time and discourages the others from being overly optimistic. Meng criticizes him, however, saying that the masses' burning desire to accomplish the task is an asset. She tells him he seems to have grown obstinate and

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[114] Ibid., p. 20.

[115] Ibid., p. 22.

cynical since coming to the hills, and he must always keep in mind the necessity to work whole-heartedly for the people. Yin replies that everyone is thinking too far ahead, but Meng simply says that should be an accelerating influence. After Yin, highly annoyed, leaves her, Meng sits and worries about her fiance.

A problem has arisen over the bridge supports, but one of the ore engineers suggests a shock brigade to build water-tight walls around the spots where the piles are to be sunk. The only other immediate problem is the location of the bridge. The logical site is at Lu Pan's rock, but Old Chao supperstitiously argues against it. Many people have experienced disaster when they have tried to build structures on the rock. Chao, his son, defies Lu Pan's rock and, grabbing an axe, leaps upon it and strikes it as the curtain falls on scene two.

Scene three begins the following day with the announcement of a challenge to a swimmer unwilling to undertake the task of building the bridge piers underwater, As the announcer goes off, Old Chao and Yin enter discussing Yin's problem of obtaining the needed hydrographic data. He needs to get to Devil's Gate in order to check the flood levels, but Old Chao, the only boatman with the necessary skill to get there, refuses to take him. Yin follows Old Chao out as Li, Meng and the rest of the Women's Company enter with axes on their

shoulders. Meng has blisters on her hands from her unaccustomed manual labor but is pleased when Li informs the group that they fulfilled their tree-felling quota by two hundred per cent. The women discuss the search for a hero-swimmer, agree that Li's husband, Chao, is the man for the job, and exit in search of him.

At this point, Jin, a member of the Dragon Gate Commune, and a group of his fellow workers enter and see the placard announcing the challenge. When he arrives to take down the challenge poster, indicating he will do the job, he is stopped by Chao's wife and the Women's Company. The women refuse to let anyone but Chao accept the challenge and they form a wall around the poster, guarding it with their axes. When Chao enters it is decided that he and Jin will share the responsibility, each taking command of a separate team and working the opposite sides of the river. At the same time, Secretary Hsing, from headquarters, appoints Li to the post of site supervisor. This causes a moment's hesitation when Chao realizes that he will be taking orders from his wife, but he accepts it amid general laughter as Scene three ends.

Three days later, Old Chao still hasn't agreed to ferry Yin across to Devil's Gate, and Yin is becoming more and more despondent. Meng tries to cheer him up by pointing out that they must keep a positive attitude.

She feels that the challenges they are meeting make the project more enjoyable. The announcement that the seasonal floodwaters are ahead of schedule further depresses Yin, but Meng points out the spirit of the hill-people in their efforts to solve their problems. Seeing that she has upset him and that he has a touch of the fever, she suggests he lie down while she goes to inspect the waterproof wall. While she is gone, Yin persuades Chao and Jin to swim to the Devil's Gate sandbank, pulling him in a boat. After they start their crossing, Li, Meng, and Hsing come to the riverbank and then see the little boat bobbing violently in the middle of the river. To their horror, the boat overturns, and Yin falls into the raging water as Li yells, "Save the engineer! Save the engineer!"[116]

Scene five begins the next evening outside a tent that has been erected for the ailing Yin. Chao and Jin were able to save him, but he is running a high fever. Meng comes out of the tent and, breaking into tears, announces that he is getting worse. She also expresses her worry about the bridge delay and states that the accident would not have happened if she had been with Yin. She is aware, however, that the accident was Yin's fault. After it is decided to attempt to get the hydro-

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[116] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

graphic data at another location, Meng says that she will go on the risky mission in place of Yin. While she is gone, Secretary Hsing talks to Yin about his destructive attitude and his rash actions. Yin is aware of these things, especially after the many kind sacrifices the hill-people have made for him while he was ill, and he resolves to improve.

Meng returns with the data, but Yin realizes that more information must be gathered and proposes another crossing to the new site, Earle's Beak. Chao hotly disagrees. The setting of the piers has been delayed too long, he feels, and with the advance of the flood waters, they must start immediately. At this point his wife enters and severely admonishes him for disobeying orders. He tells her to lower her voice, for ". . . There's quite a wind blowing here and you don't want it blowing down your throat."[117] Li pays him no mind, however, and continues to berate him in front of the others. It seems he built a "practice pier" without getting permission, and all of the materials were swept downstream by the rising floodwaters. As site supervisor, Li tells her husband that she is going to put him in order, to which he replies that he doesn't think she is capable of doing that. Incensed, Li snaps, "Very well, you wild bull, I'll

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[117] Ibid., p. 91.

take you on now."[118] She orders that Chao be dismissed as leader of the Tiger-taming Brigade. Realising Li's authority is stronger than his, he pleads, "I admit -- I admit I'm beaten. Comrade Supervisor, I admit I'm beaten."[119] Li will not relent, however, and commands him to go home. Chao calls her given name Yu-tao, and Li barks, "Don't 'Yu-tao' me! Get off home!"[120] Although Secretary Hsing soothes the friction somewhat, Chao glares at Li as he leaves to hunt a tiger he just spotted in the area. The scene ends as Yin prepares to make another crossing to Eagle's Beak.

As the sixth scene begins, Li has just received word that Jin's Dragon-taming Brigade has finished setting their piers two days ahead of schedule. When Chao enters, he asks that a message be delivered to his wife. His Tiger-taming Brigade has also finished two days early. Li confronts him and asks why he avoids her. She says, "You were resentful because you, a great he'man, had been put in your place by a mere woman, wasn't that it?"[121] Chao does not answer. Li then softens and tells him that she never wanted the position of site supervisor and

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[118] Ibid., p. 92.

[119] Ibid., p. 93.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., p. 97.

could never have done it without the help of the Party and her fellow villagers. She tells him she never expected trouble from her own husband. When Li begins to cry, they embrace as Chao says, "Yu-tao, you can have me carried off by an eagle if I ever go making trouble again."[122] Later, when someone questions the quality of Chao's work, Li rebukes them and tells them that while she can call him handles like "Wild Bull," it does not give others the right to do so.

The play ends when Secretary Hsing crosses the raging stream and announces that the piers will stand up to the force of the heaviest floods.

Summary

Meng's attitudes are nearly always enthusiastic and optimistic. She praises the skill and cheerfulness of the hill-people and criticizes her fiance, Yin, when he becomes discouraged by unexpected problems. She does not allow her love for Yin to interfere with her attitude toward his work, although she is never harsh with him. Like Yin, she is a professional engineer and has been skillfully trained. She expresses no feeling of superiority over the peasants, however, and is anxious to learn to fire a rifle, cut down trees, and cross dangerous rivers as part of her efforts to help build a bridge for

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[122] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

the people of the Tiger Hill People's Commune. Her feelings of duty to the Party are evident in her devotion to her work.

In contrast to Meng, Li is a peasant woman who lacks a formal education. She is an industrious worker, however, and the leader of the Women's Company of the Tiger Hill People's Commune. She is more aggressive than Meng and is even willing to stand guard over the challenge poster with an axe until her husband arrives to accept the task of building the bridge piers under water. However, she is appointed site supervisor and she refuses to let her love for her husband interfere with her work and openly criticizes him after he has made an error. Her strength is apparent when Chao challenges her authority and she angrily removes him from his position as the head of the Tiger-taming Brigade. Afterwards, however, she tells Chao she had no choice and voices her dislike at being in control of him, and later defends his work when its quality is suspect.

THE DAY THE NEW DIRECTOR CAME[123]

A One-Act Play by Ho Chiu

This short, one-act play deals with a bureau-

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[123]Ho Chiu, "The Day the New Director Came," trans. Chung Wei-hsien, Saturday Afternoon at the Mill (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1957), pp. 50-78.

cratic chief of the General Administration Office and his attempts to favorably influence the newly appointed director. As the play opens the chief, Liu Shan-Chi, is telephoning various stores and complaining that the furniture he ordered for the new director has not yet arrived. Chu Ling, a young girl from the construction office, interrupts his phoning and tells him that he must find storage room for the cement stacked outside. It is about to rain, and the oil cloth he provided several days ago has not prevented rain damage to several bags. When Liu claims that there is no room for the cement, Chu reminds him, "That cement's government property, you know, and we can't just stand by and see it wasted, can we?"[124] She leaves after he promises to remedy the situation within a half-hour.

Tai Wei, the general clerk, tells Liu that Chu Ling knows about the empty room that is being saved for the new director and has voiced her opinion that it's a waste of money. Liu, however, doesn't want to share his office space and refuses to let the room be used for storage. Liu leaves the office to supervise some sign painting. While he is gone, the new director, Chang Yun-tung, enters and is mistaken for a repairman. He allows the misunderstanding to remain uncorrected and

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[124] Ibid., p. 53.

learns a great deal about the way the office is run. He exits to look at a gaping hole in one of the hostels. Chu re-enters arguing with Liu about the cement and the approaching storm. She demands at least half of the new room for her three hundred bags of cement, but Liu refuses and tells her that he is going to get some sleep. Chang has re-entered and overhears the last part of the conversation but still remains silent about his true identity. Chu says she will use the empty room regardless of the consequences, but she stops when Liu reveals that the door is locked and only he has a key. He gives the key to Lao Li, the messenger, with instructions not to open the door without his permission.

When it begins to rain Chu decides to cover the cement with her bed quilts. She is stopped by Lao Li who, at the risk of punishment from his superior, states that he is willing to open the door to the empty room. Chang commends Lao Li for his decision and reveals his true identity, telling Chu to gather everyone available to help move the cement.

Later, Liu enters and complains about the slow delivery of the furniture. When Chu comes into the office and tells him that the new director has arrived and is displeased with Liu's actions, he unsuccessfully tries to stop the furniture delivery. After Chu has gone, Chang enters and, still unknown to Liu, is told

that he can do a sloppy job on the roofs if he finishes it within two days. Chu enters and Chang's true identity is revealed, causing Liu great embarrassment. He is forced to pay for the furniture himself and will eventually be replaced because of his dishonesty. The play ends as Chu, Chang, and Lao Li open the windows for ". . . a change of air."[125]

Summary

Chu's major concern is with her work. She is agitated by the approaching rain and Liu's inaction to the point where she is willing to openly defy the chief of the General Administration Office. Her concern for the government property is so great that she risks offending the new director by occupying the space reserved for him without his permission. Although this doesn't occur, her determination to serve the Party is clearly stronger than her respect for Liu Shen-Chi.

COMRADE, YOU'VE TAKEN THE WRONG PATH![126]

A Four-Act Play by Yao Chung-ning, Chen Po-erh and Associates

This four-act play deals with China's War of

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[125] Ibid., p. 77.

[126] Yao Chung-ning, Chen Po-erh and Associates, Comrade, You've Taken the Wrong Path!, trans. A. M. Condron (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1962), 117 pp.

Resistance against Japan, a time when friction between the antagonists, Kuomintang and Communist armies, was being lessened by the common effort to fend off the advancing Japanese troops. It is a war play, and, as such, is concerned primarily with the men who were responsible for the war effort. There is only one major female character, a young girl of nineteen who leads the propaganda teams of a Communist army detachment. This girl, Yang Chun, provides an interesting example of a young female soldier in the pre-liberation period.

Only nineteen, Yang Chun is the leader of the propaganda team of a detachment of the Eighth Route Army. She demonstrates her ability to read and write by creating poster slogans promoting the "United Front." She is enthusiastic about Department Chief Wu's plan to unite with a nearby Kuomintang detachment in order to resist the Japanese more efficiently.

When Wu sees her posters he praises them and tells her to deliver a message to the leader of the Self-Defense Corps. After she has gone Wu suggests she be promoted to chief of the propaganda section. He comments that she is, "brimming with the vigor of youth."[127] And then he goes on to mention how capable she is at her job and how well she speaks. Pan Hui, a

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[127] Ibid., p. 6.

veteran cadre of the Red Army and the most perceptive person in the detachment, is not in agreement, however. He feels she is politically immature and not yet "steeled" for such responsibility, although he does praise her ingenuity and enthusiasm. He remarks that she has a bright future ahead of her.

Yang Chun plays no active role in a series of lengthy events which take place between the Kuomintang forces and the Eighth Route Army. Commander Wu, in his desire to secure a United Front at all costs, repeatedly over-looks various Kuomintang plots to gain control of the area. Although there is evidence that the Kuomintang have secretly joined forces with the Japanese in an attempt to liquidate the Eighth Route Army, Commander Wu continues to ignore the realities of the situation. Eventually even his most loyal admirer, Yang Chun, begins to question his judgment. At one point she sharply remarks to Wu, "In the past, my work with the masses always went very smoothly. . . . It's only recently that I've had some difficulty trying to explain some things."[128]

Several days later the Kuomintang spring a trap and surround a large portion of the Communist detachment. Yang Chun requests that the women cadres be given weapons declaring, "If I don't kill off several of them

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[128] Ibid., p. 84.

Kuomintang today my mind will never be at rest."[129] Other women voice the same sentiments, and they are given several hand-grenades. As the battle continues, Yang Chun finds herself surrounded by several Kuomintang soldiers. Seeing that she cannot escape, she pulls out a grenade and yells, "Come on then, you dogs! Come to your death!"[130] As the soldiers rush at her, she explodes the grenade and dies with several of the Kuomintang. Although the Communists are eventually successful, the death of Yang Chun was a severe blow.

Summary

The character of Yang Chun is a study of youth and dedication. She is almost always enthusiastic about her work and the virtues of the Communist ideology. Although she is generally respectful to her comrades, she is willing to become rather sharp when events warrant it, even with her superiors. Her final sacrifice is the ultimate example of her dedication and loyalty to her party and country.

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[129] Ibid., p. 107.

[130] Ibid., p. 108.

BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE[131]

A One-Act Play Written by a Group
of the Peking People's Art Theatre

At curtain-rise Chang, a twenty-nine-year-old factory worker is discovered seated alone and writing with intense concentration. Mrs. Chang, his young wife, enters and serves him tea and hot meat dumplings as she inquires about his work, but Chang pays little attention to her and she begins to pick up the clothes he has left about the room. She places them in a wash-basin, then exits. Outside, she is greeted by Orchid, her friend and her neighbor. Orchid exclaims, "Ho! What a good house wife! Washing clothes so early in the morning!"[132] But Mrs. Chang dismisses the compliment by saying that she had some spare time and wanted to get it finished while she had the chance. When Mrs. Chang learns that Orchid is going to the housewifes' homework team to pick up some sewing, she tells Orchid to be sure to bring some home for her.

Meanwhile Chang has been writing and his baby son awakens crying. Flustered, he calls for his wife. However, he does not use her given name or a term of

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[131]Artists of the Peking People's Theatre, "Between Husband and Wife," trans. Sidney Shapiro, The Women's Representative (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1956), pp. 95-118.

[132]Ibid., p. 97.

affection in calling, simply shouting, "Wife! Wife!" Mrs. Chang immediately enters and is scolded by her husband for not watching the child. She does not reply to this but simply soothes the baby.

A vegetable worker is heard outside, and Mrs. Chang asks her husband to buy some vegetables, but he refuses, saying that he is busy writing. Mrs. Chang reminds him that he is also her husband and that she also has her hands full but her words have little effect on her husband. Seeing that the child is quiet, he tells her to ". . . just leave him on the bed."[133] Mrs. Chang does this and exits, reminding him to look after the child.

At this time Sun, Orchid's brother, enters and discusses the technical paper Sun is to read at an important meeting later in the day. Sun sees the untouched meat dumplings that Mrs. Chang left for her husband, and he tries one of them saying, "You're really lucky. Your wife takes care of you all right -- you don't have to bother about a thing. . . . You're certainly in clover."[134] When Chang replies that his wife is no different from any other wife, Sun reminds him that his wife is no good. He asks Chang how he

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[133] Ibid., p. 97.

[134] Ibid., pp. 98-99.

could keep his whole mind on the job if his wife didn't take such good care of him and the house. This upsets Chang and he informs Sun that Orchid, too, always defends his wife since they are two of a kind.

Mrs. Chang enters with a basket full of vegetables and meat and, in reply to Sun's enthusiastic comment about the Chang family having meat again, invites Sun to dinner. Sun agrees as he leaves the house. When Mrs. Chang puts the basket of food down she sees that the dumplings have not been touched and asks Chang if he would like them heated. There is a slight pause after he tells her to eat them herself, but Mrs. Chang tries to renew the conversation by telling her husband about the list of candidates the housewives have picked for their Public Health Work Models. Chang sharply replies that she shouldn't bother him since she can see how busy he is. A note of dissatisfaction appears in his wife's voice when she replies, "Busy, again, busy. And when you're busy I can't get a word out of you."[135] She clears the dishes and goes into the kitchen as Chang begins to hunt for a drawing he has misplaced. When Mrs. Chang enters and asks what he is trying to find, he replies that she wouldn't understand even if she were told. He puts on his jacket and goes to the factory to

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[135] Ibid., p. 100.

see if he left it there.

After he has gone and Mrs. Chang has straightened the scraps of paper he has left on the desk, Orchid enters, bringing some work from the housewives' homework team and some money for a cross-stitch job that Mrs. Chang finished. When Orchid learns that the money will be used to buy Chang a new scarf, she marvels, "You're the limit! You think only of him?"[136] Mrs. Chang points out that the weather is turning cold, and he will need the scarf and the new jacket she is just finishing for him.

Orchid remembers a note from the housewives' homework leader that she was supposed to give Mrs. Chang. She forces the reluctant wife to read it, putting her new schooling to work. Mrs. Chang admirably gets through the note, although she is very displeased with her ability. She feels that she is much slower than the others in the class and she will not be able to keep up if they change the group into a high-speed class with a learning quota of over a hundred new characters a day. However, Orchid tells her that she has only one small fault -- she always thinks negatively. Realizing the baby is a problem and the co-operative day nursery will not be set up for a little while yet, she suggests that Chang

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[136] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

take care of the child while Mrs. Chang attends the night classes.

At this Mrs. Chang reveals that Chang never helps her with the baby. Moreover, he frequently chides her for being uneducated and not studying, and when she does try to study, he refuses to help her.

> He doesn't care anything about my troubles; he doesn't care anything about family matters. And when I ask him about the factory, he only grunts, saying I don't understand and telling me not to bother him about such matters.[137]

Mrs. Chang goes on to say that her husband thinks she is backward and asks Orchid if this is true. Orchid appears to be angry while she tells Mrs. Chang about the fine praise she receives from the Public Health Drive Team and that she feels that Mrs. Chang has a good chance of being elected a Public Health model. She tells Mrs. Chang not to listen to her husband but to continue her good work and let Chang see the value for himself.

Mrs. Chang agrees and describes the pleasure she has received by getting over her initial shyness at group discussions and entering into the conversations. She feels that she understands the reports and wants to discuss them with her husband, but he will not listen to her because, "He thinks I haven't got any

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[137] Ibid., p. 103.

brains."[138] Orchid listens and points out that he has always looked down on women, but women are different today. "They drive trains, cars, railway engines. There are even women pilots and tank drivers."[139] She finishes by telling Mrs. Chang that women are just as good as men in every way and that Mrs. Chang should have a talk with him to straighten out his old-fashioned ideas. Mrs. Chang agrees that things cannot go on like they have been and leaves Orchid to look after the baby as she goes to check her public health work.

Chang enters frantically looking for his lost drawing and calls repeatedly for his wife. Angry that she is not at home, he sends Orchid to retrieve her. When his wife enters, he asks her for his design drawing but is too impatient to describe what it looks like. As they both look for the drawing, Orchid calls for Mrs. Chang to come to the meeting with her and this infuriates Chang. He asks how his wife can skip off to a meeting when his drawing is still missing. Mrs. Chang finally forces him to describe the drawing. When he does so, she immediately retrieves it from the clothes she washed earlier. As Chang demands to know why she has been handling his papers, Sun enters and

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[138] Ibid., p. 104.

[139] Ibid., p. 105.

explains that their meeting has been called off because the Ministry of Industry wants to hear Chang's report in person.

After Sun exits Chang scolds his wife, telling her it was all her fault for interfering with his papers. At this point Mrs. Chang begins to fight back. She explains that it was not her fault, that as soon as he took time to explain what the drawing looked like, she was able to help him. She reproaches him for never confiding in her and displaying his bad temper after she has spent the day cleaning the house, cooking, taking care of the baby, studying, performing her public health duties. She goes on to say that now that she's had the opportunity to get outside the house, she understands a little of the new ideas, and she asks Chang, "How is it that whenever I come home I seem to shrink to half my size? Why do I suddenly become good for nothing?"[140] She offers to turn the entire house over to her husband if he thinks there is an easy thing to manage it and reminds him that she can survive. She heatedly reminds Chang that, "Chairman Mao liberated you; well, he liberated me too. You serve the people; so do I. What right have you got to look down on me?"[141] and

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[140] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[141] *Ibid.*

tells him that there is supposed to be democracy in the home.

Orchid enters and puts an end to the argument. Mrs. Chang starts to leave after her husband has expressed his feeling that the liberation of women has gone too far. When he refuses to keep the baby while his wife attends the meeting, Mrs. Chang simply walks out, leaving the baby and telling her husband, "Watch him or not -- that's up to you!"[142] After she has gone Orchid points up all of Mrs. Chang's assets and scolds Chang for not being considerate. She angrily tells him that he despises women and that he is ". . . just feudal."[143] These words deeply affect Chang, and he becomes engrossed in thought as Sun rushes in. Before Sun can talk with Chang he sees that Chang is dejected and tries to discover the cause. After Chang describes the day's events, Sun points out the fact that Chang would not want a wife who could not conjure up an idea of her own, and that Chang could never handle the work his wife accomplishes. He, too, thinks that Chang is feudal and is refusing to recognize the value of his wife. After discussing her value at some length, Sun officially explains his original idea for visiting:

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[142] Ibid., p. 109.

[143] Ibid., p. 110.

Chang has been selected to go to technical training class and is to leave the next day.

At this time Orchid and Mrs. Chang return from their meeting and Orchid announces that Mrs. Chang was not elected as a model worker because ". . . she doesn't understand anything. She's stupid, she's illiterate, she's backward."[144] However, she does want to know what Chang's reaction will be if his wife is elected the next time. When Chang replies that he will admire his wife if she does this, Orchid pulls out a red banner inscribed "Public Health Work Model" and informs him that he can start admiring that very minute. She also points out the changes that have occurred in his wife. Mrs. Chang is not only a model worker, but she can also read three or four hundred characters and she is on the housewives' Homework Team. Chang, delighted at the award and surprised at this woman's achievements, admits to Orchid that he was wrong in his attitude toward his wife; but Orchid, dissatisfied with the way in which he apologizes, makes him squarely face his wife and apologize outright.

Sun relieves the embarrassment by announcing Chang's honor at having been selected to attend the technical training class. Mrs. Chang is very pleased and

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[144] Ibid., p. 115.

gives Chang his new jacket to take with him. The change in Chang's attitude is apparent when he asks her if her work around the house will interfere with her studying. She assures him that, although she will be tired, she will be able to handle both tasks. Chang then offers his wife a notebook that the members of his factory team gave him for finishing his quota ahead of time. After Sun and Orchid leave, Chang takes a broom and starts sweeping the house as his wife prepares the evening meal. When the baby begins to cry, it is Chang who insists on holding the baby, saying, "No, I've got nothing to do now. I'll hold him for a while."[145] The curtain falls on a picture of family love and co-operation.

Summary

Mrs. Chang's role in her marriage is revealed to be one of devotion, love and patience. She contends with what others call her husband's feudal attitudes of rural domination and superiority. Only in rare instances does she become disturbed enough to speak out against his lack of consideration for her and the role she plays in his life. When she finally does speak, however, it is without hesitation or retraction, for she is fully aware of her rights as an individual. She is more

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[145] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

concerned with rectifying her husband's ideas than with asserting control over her household.

Her marriage does not prohibit several outside activities such as earning money by sewing, working for the housewives' Homework Team, attending literary classes, and serving as a Public Health Worker. She also attends her meetings despite her husband's objections.

While her social role is not one of dynamic activity, it does evidence a quiet strength and patience that eventually overcomes the antagonistic feelings of her husband. By the end of the play, Chang is willing to correct his previous behavior and co-operate with his wife.

CHAO HSIAO-LAN[146]

A One-Act Play by Chin Chien

Chao Hsio-Lan is a one-act play that basically deals with the marriage contract, although several other areas concerning the women's rights movement are covered. The play begins in a village during the spring of 1950. Chao Hsiao-Lan, referred to as Lan, and her boyfriend, Kang, are discussing the excellent work that

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[146]Chin Chien, "Chao Hsiao-Lan," trans. Chang Sucha, The Women's Representative (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1956), pp. 5-43.

is being done by the women. Lan, especially, has been singled out as an excellent hoer of stubble, and Kang is suggesting that she get a substantial raise. Lan feels that such a raise is extravagant, and she is satisfied, "as long as you men have got over the idea that women can't do good work."[147] While Lan mends a tear in Kang's trousers, they laugh at her father's intense dislike of the new marriage law. He has stated publicly that he will never abide by it and will find a husband for his second daughter just as he did for the first. Lan tells Kang how unhappy her sister is in her arranged marriage, and that her husband beats her regularly. Lan also says that she has told her sister to get a divorce now that "Women are already emancipated, men and women equals, and marriage is by free choice."[148]

Kang is afraid that Chao, Lan's father, might be trying to arrange a marriage for Lan. Very recently he saw Chao and Mrs. Liu, the village match-maker, talking in a secretive manner. As they discuss this possibility, Mrs. Liu enters, looking for Chao. The youngsters tease her about her fading profession, but she confidently retorts that her profession will never

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[147] Ibid., p. 7.

[148] Ibid., p. 9.

vanish. After Mrs. Liu leaves, Mrs. Chao comes home and sees the children together. After Kang leaves, she warns Lan that people may gossip about such things. She is also afraid of her husband's anger. Lan exits, accusing her mother of continually kowtowing to Chao.

After Lan has gone, Chao enters with a sack of food and wine. He has already made preparations to marry Lan to a boy in a neighboring village for the price of three hundred yuan. Mrs. Chao weakly tries to reason with her husband, but he will not listen to her. He threatens to break Lan's legs if she will not accept the marriage contract. Even though Lan is the sole support of the family, Chao will not consider changing his mind. When Lan comes in, Chao tells her of his plans and refuses to listen to her reasoning. Lan points out that the government will support her in this argument, and she refuses to accept her father's decision. Enraged, Chao grabs a broom and attempts to beat his daughter while Mrs. Chao ineffectively attempts to stop him. Mrs. Liu enters as the activity subsides and agrees that Chao should get back a portion of what it cost to raise Lan. Lan greatly resents being sold like a piece of property; she tells them that now it is possible for a woman to support herself and no longer leave things to fate. She remains in complete control of herself and, after her father leaves, she informs her

mother that, "The Communist Party has smashed the chains that shackled us women."[149]

Mrs. Chao is aware of this. During the past two years she has even obtained enough courage to infrequently argue with her husband. However, she breaks down and sobs at the thought of her family breaking apart. Mrs. Chao points out that Lan is selfish and is going to hurt her father very much if she continues to fight against the marriage. In a burst of anger, Lan tells them they may do with her what they wish. Overjoyed, Mrs. Chao begins to prepare food for the boy's family who are coming to inspect the bride. When Mrs. Liu exits to find Chao, Lan stuffs her bed to make it appear that she is sleeping and then sneaks out of the house.

Lan's deception is not discovered until after the guests have arrived. Although the Chao family goes to great effort to hide Lan's absence, one of the relatives lifts the blankets and discovers the dummy. Mrs. Liu tries to explain that Lan is extremely shy and is simply afraid to greet her future parents-in-law, but at that time the village chairman enters and informs Chao that Lan wants the contract broken. He tries to reason with Chao, explaining the Marriage Law, praising both Lan and Kang, and speaking out against the tradition

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[149] Ibid., p. 27.

of contracted marriages. Chao remains adamant in his position. Only after the chairman firmly states that Lan and Kang can be married of their own free will does Chao become hesitant. Events then begin to cascade about him. Word is received that the boy has refused to honor the marriage contract. Immediately after this, Mei-Lan, Lan's sister, enters and announces her divorce. She has ended five years of abuse and beatings from her husband and mother-in-law and, with the help and protection of the government, has filed an official complaint against them.

She tells her father that she will get a job and live elsewhere if he won't take her back, but Mrs. Chao finally asserts herself and says, "Never mind what he says. I'm deciding today, and this time what I say goes."[150] Chao relents and cancels Lan's marriage contract. The final blow is struck when Lan and Kang return as man and wife. Chao accepts his defeat with little grace and is even forced to personally invite Kang's mother to the marriage dinner. The play ends happily with Lan and Kang gazing at the sky and discussing the next day's work in the fields.

Summary

This play clearly illustrates the difference

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[150] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

between the traditional method of contracted marriages and the revolutionary Marriage Law. Mrs. Chao is seen as a kind mother and obedient wife who has always accepted her husband's domination. She has gained courage within the past few years, however, and at the end of the play she asserts herself as a decision-maker in the home.

The transition from subservience to freedom is also evidenced in the character of Mei-Lan, the Chao's eldest daughter. Her contracted marriage has brought her five years of ill-treatment from both her husband and her mother-in-law -- five years that have ended as a direct result of the Marriage Law. She not only is now able to obtain a divorce, but the government is going to punish those responsible for her beatings. Mei-Lan also refuses to kowtow to her father now that she is aware that she can work and support herself.

Lan, the instigating force behind the majority of events, retains her individuality and is married to a man of her choice. She obstinately refuses to obey her father, speaks out against him to his face, and even seeks help and legal protection from the village chairman. Her spirit is never broken as she consistantly reminds those around her of the female's rights as an individual in the new Communist society.

HOME-COMING[151]

A One-Act Play by Lu Yen-Chou

Fen, a young school teacher, has just escorted little Hsiao-tsui, her sister's ten-year-old daughter, home from school. The child discovers her mother's exercise book and asks why her mother began her studies so late in life. She uncomprehendingly accepts the explanation that the landlords and their gangs made it impossible for the poor people to get an education. Fen then reveals a letter from Hsiao-tsui's father and gives it to her to deliver to her mother. Wang, the father, has been away for nearly four years without visiting the family, and this is his first letter in over six months.

After Hsiao-tsui exits, Chih-hua enters and tiptoes behind his wife (Fen) and teases her. During their conversation Chih-hua, a member of the peasant class, reveals that Fen is pregnant, and expresses his joy at being honored with an educated wife. The following discussion centers around the merits of the peasants, although Fen leaves little doubt that her husband is not diligent in his studies unless constantly prodded.

Hsiao-tsui returns with her grandmother, and asks

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[151]Lu Yen-Chou, "Home-Coming," trans. Tang Sheng, Saturday Afternoon at the Mill (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1957), pp. 96-132.

Fen to read the letter to them. Granny, Wang's mother, is very critical of her son and disgusted that he has stayed in the city for such a long period of time without visiting his family. She is, therefore, very pleased when the letter states that Wang will arrive home that very day. Although Yun has never complained during the past four years, Granny is aware of how unhappy and lonely she is as a result of her husband's absence.

Yun comes home from work excited about the amount of work the brigade has accomplished. When she is informed of Want's planned return, she tries to hide her joy and enthusiasm. She even tells her mother-in-law that she must return to the fields that afternoon, but Granny won't hear of it. While Granny goes to get leave of absence for Yun, Hsiao-tsui and her mother gleefully discuss Want's home-coming.

When Granny returns, she tells Yun how deeply indebted she feels toward her daughter-in-law, and indicates she loves her more than she would a daughter of her own. She then jokes with Yun about not appearing countrified -- Wang mustn't be ashamed of them. Yun only laughs and says, "He won't feel that way. He's a Party member."[152] When she hears a commotion outside and realizes that her husband is back, she becomes

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[152] Ibid., p. 106.

flustered and runs into another room.

Wang enters with an air of assumed importance and is fawned over by the villagers. Granny mildly scolds him for not visiting more frequently and is especially upset that he forgot to bring his daughter a gift. While Granny leaves to see about preparing food, the neighbors tell Wang about Yun's progress. She studies every night, has become a brigade leader, and is also a leader of the local women's group. As they heap praise on Yun, she enters with a basin of water and asks Wang if he would like to wash.

Fen then shows Wang his wife's exercise book and praises the amount of progress she's accomplished during the past four years. Embarrassed, Yun snatches the book out of her sister's hands while the rest of the neighbors chuckle and tease the newly united couple. Soon they decide to leave the family so that Wang and Yun might have some time together. When they sit down to eat, Granny dominates the conversation and again scolds Wang for his prolonged absence. After Hsiao-tsui has saluted her father good-bye, there is an awkward pause between Wang and Yun.

Although Yun tries to convey her joy at having her husband home again, it is quite evident that Wang is upset and pre-occupied. Finally he tells Yun that life is not pleasant for him, and that he mustn't be unfair

to her. Yun replies that she will be happy if he can return only once a year, but Wang says that he may not be able to return more than once every five years. Yun will wait. What if he never returns? Yun will look for him. She expresses that she will love him until she dies. Wang, however, does not care about her love. He has found a young city-girl who will make a better wife for a man of his newly achieved position. He no longer feels that a peasant wife can serve his needs.

Yun is dumbfounded and at first cannot believe her husband's sincerity. Her immediate reaction is one of fear and hopelessness. She feels that, although she may not be good enough for Wang, in time she will catch up to his level of education. However, when he offers her money she becomes incensed and yells, "Do you think my heart can be bought?"[153] As her anger mounts, Hsiao-tsui comes home from school and senses that something is wrong. Yun tells her that her father is dead, and they both begin to cry. The tension mounts as Granny enters and is informed about the unexpected tide of events. Immediately she lashes out at her son, telling him that he is a scoundrel and that he must retract what he has been proposing.

While Wang and his mother argue, Yun rises abruptly and announces that she will sign the divorce

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[153] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

papers. She has an air of antagonistic calm about her when Fen enters and is told that Wang is obtaining a divorce. Yun requests that Fen does not get upset -- she assures her sister that she will be able to manage. Fen, however, begins her attack and demands to know why Yun is being divorced. The villagers have gathered at the house and they, too, express their displeasure with Wang and want to know the reasons for his actions. Wang accuses them of being feudal and asks if they haven't heard about the new Marriage Law. Fen replies with indignation, "Our Marriage Law is not made to be used by scoundrels. It's not an excuse for trifling with women."[154] She also replies to Wang's argument that he has a right to decide his own private life by saying:

> That depends on what you do with it. If a Party member, in his private life, degrades the moral principles of communism, and it affects the prestige of the Party, then not only the Party organization, but also the masses, too, have the right to interfere.[155]

Other villagers join in denouncing Wang as a selfish, bourgeois, exploiter of women.

Yun finally orders Wang out of the house and goes into a lengthy description of his faults. She knows that she will survive because the Party will guide her and her neighbors will help her. She also tells her mother-

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[154] Ibid., p. 128.

[155] Ibid.

in-law that she will never leave her so long as she has a breath in her body. Fen says that she is going to the city to tell Wang's fiancee the kind of man she plans to marry. Wang exits in despair as the play ends.

Summary

Yun's role as a housewife is exemplary. Although she has not seen her husband for four years, she does not utter a single word of reproach when he returns for a visit. During his absence she has worked hard trying to match his educational level and has served the community so well that she has become a brigade leader and head of the local women's group. Even when she first learned of Wang's home-coming, her first reaction was to return to the fields to finish the afternoon's work. Yun's devotion to her mother-in-law is apparent. Even after she has granted Wang a divorce, she promises to care for Granny. As a mother she is kind and cheerful with Hsiao-tsui, and her daughter is one of the chief reasons why she tries to disuade Wang's actions. At the end of the play she displays a quiet peasant strength that is based largely on her knowledge that she will be helped by her neighbors and the Communist Party.

Granny is critical of her son's prolonged absence and in complete sympathy with her daughter-in-law. She

deeply appreciates the fact that Yun has taken excellent care of her in her son's absence, and she openly displays her affection for Yun. When Wang comes home, she scolds him for not visiting or writing more often, and when she learns of his plan to divorce Yun, she becomes livid with rage. However, she does not possess any degree of influence over her son's decisions. In fact, he does not seem to care about her feelings at all. At end of the play, she refuses to go to the city with Wang and stays in the village with her daughter-in-law.

Fen is the most intellectual of the female characters in the play. She is a teacher and her intelligence is highly praised by her husband, although she frankly tells Chih-hua that Yun is ahead of him in her studies, and that if she didn't prod him constantly he wouldn't have reached his present level. Fen makes strong attacks on Wang's request for divorce, often interlacing her arguments with Party doctrine. She adamantly points out that the Marriage Law is not an excuse for abusing women, nor are his actions his own affair. If what he does reflects negatively on the Communist Party then the masses have the right to interfere. Her decision to travel to the city to see Wang's fiancee and to discuss with her Wang's selfish and cruel action is the blow that breaks Wang's attitude of superiority.

THE WOMAN'S REPRESENTATIVE[156]

A One-Act Play by Sun Yu

This play takes place in a small peasant village in Northeast China during the winter of 1952. As the play begins, Lan, a young peasant girl of eighteen, is looking for Kuei-Yung, the newly elected chairman of the Women's Association, in hopes that Kuei has been able to find more straw to be used by the handicraft group. They are working from dawn to dusk in order to supply the government with grain sacks for tax collecting purposes. Mrs. Wang, Kuei's mother-in-law, thinks the whole business is foolish and criticizes Kuei for her many time-consuming activities which keep her away from home. Lan tries to explain that Kuei is their leader in the Association and in their literacy class and that the sacks are for the country's benefit. Besides, she continues, they are earning extra money by their work.

When Kuei comes in and is informed by Lan that no one in the village has any long straw, Kuei indicates that her family has some but that they should first get the permission of Mrs. Wang. Before Kuei can mention the problem, Mrs. Wang defiantly states that no straw will leave the house without her son's permission. Kuei

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[156]Sun Yu, The Woman's Representative, trans. Tang Sheng (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1956), pp. 44-94.

tells her that the straw will be paid for, but Mrs. Wang prefers that the girls stay at home for a change. Realizing her mother-in-law is not going to relent, Kuei takes Len to search the village for straw.

A few minutes later, Aunty Niu, an old-fashioned mid-wife, enters and complains to Mrs. Wang that Kuei has been interfering in her medical practice. Kuei persuaded a family that Aunty Kiu's treatment of their baby was no good and had them take the child to a clinic. Not only did Aunty lose the patient, but Kuei also confiscated two packets of medicine that had been left for the child. Mrs. Wang is upset by the story and promises to have her son put a stop to Kuei's activities when he returns home. (He has been out of the village for nearly three months.) Niu is pleased at this and explains that all of the officials she ever dealt with before Kuei were willing to overlook things for their friends.

At this point Kuei returns with a bunch of fairly strong straw. She greets Aunty Niu and says she has just heard that Chiang, her husband, is due to arrive home any time. At this, Mrs. Wang assumes a commanding tone and demands that Kuei return Aunty's medicine to her. Kuei is surprised that Aunty would want it back since her patient became more ill from using it. When Mrs. Wang again asserts herself and tells Kuei to return the medi-

cine, Kuei gives Aunty some money instead and indicates that she is going to send the concoction to the County Hospital for analysis. Aunty becomes alarmed at this, and Kuei takes the opportunity to scold Aunty for not sterilizing everuthing when she helps deliver babies, for selling illegal medicines, and for sticking needles into a small child.[157] After she has made Aunty promise to never use the medicine again, she tells her that a meeting of women's representatives from several villages resulted in a decision to set up mother and child care centers in each village. In the future, no one will buy Aunty's medicine anyway. However, Kuei knows that Aunty has had a hard time financially, and tells her to keep the money even though she is going to destroy the medicine.

After Aunty Niu leaves, Mrs. Wang criticizes her daughter-in-law for interfering in other people's business, to which Kuei replies, "Ma, I'm chairman of the women's association and a member of the health committee. If I don't bother about these things, who will?"[158] She again tries to obtain Mrs. Wang's permission to sell some of their straw to the handicraft group, but it is of no use. Mrs. Wang refuses, and

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[157]This traditional Chinese cure is called acupuncture and consists of inserting bamboo slivers under the skin.

[158]Sun Yu, p. 54.

warns Kuei that she is in for a hard time when Chiang returns. There is no other choice for Kuei but to take matters into her own hands, and she defies her mother-in-law and allows two hundred of the family's six hundred sheaves of straw to be hauled away.

Although Mrs. Wang is furious, she has no control over her daughter-in-law. She is able to retaliate somewhat by refusing to care for Kuei's baby when it is time for Kuei to attend her literacy class. Mrs. Wang knows that her son does not want Kuei attending these evening meetings, and that he is against leaving the child in one of the town nurseries. Lan suggests that if Kuei leaves the child at home, Mrs. Wang will have to care for it. When Kuei will not do this, Lan tells her she is being too meek with her mother-in-law. Kuei points out, however, that she is a member of the Youth League, and if it is known that she quarrels with her mother-in-law, it will hurt the reputation of the League. This will not stop her from attending the literacy classes, however, and she says with feeling:

> If we women don't learn to read and write, if we don't go out and work, we'll be tied hand and foot. What's the use of fighting for equality? Where will our freedom come from? . . . If I quit, others will feel like giving up too.[159]

As a last resort, Kuei again attempts to persuade Mrs.

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[159] Ibid., p. 58.

Wang to keep the baby for the evening, but when she refuses, Kuei has no choice but to leave the child at the nursery. She tells Lan, "She [Mrs. Wang] is trying to use the child to tie me down at home where her son can beat me and scold me. I've had enough of all that,"[160] indicating that she has been abused in the past. She and Lan then rush off to their literacy class.

Chiang arrives home immediately after Kuei and Lan have gone. He has presents for his mother and his wife. His mother immediately begins telling him about Kuei's many activities, her late hours away from home, and her election as chairman of the Woman's Association. Chiang becomes enraged as Mrs. Wang continues to tell him of Kuei's interference with Aunty Niu, the selling of straw, and the placing of his baby in a nursery. He is about to leave to drag his wife home for a beating, but his mother stops him and advises him to do it quietly in private. She then goes to get the baby as Aunty Niu comes into the house and is questioned by Chiang. Aunty intimates that Chiang's wife is now an important person and that people are talking behind Chiang's back. Chiang rushes out to fetch Kuei just as Mrs. Wang enters with the baby.

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[160] Ibid., p. 59.

Kuei returns home and Mrs. Wang immediately goes to bring her son back home. While Aunty Niu and Kuei are alone, Kuei outlines a program of study for Aunty so that she might become trained as a professional mid-wife. Aunty can hardly believe what she hears and gratefully thanks Kuei, but Kuei tells her, "It's not me. It's the government and the people."[161] Aunty hurries off to meet the district comrade in charge of her application.

When Chiang returns, he begins scolding his wife for her behavior. Mrs. Wang assists him by citing the old saying that "Men may roam the country, but women should only travel round the stove."[162] Although Chiang demands that Kuei stay at home, she accuses him of trying to bring back the "old set of rules,"[163] and she refuses to accept it. Enraged, Chiang looks for something with which to beat his wife, goes into another room, and is promptly locked in by Kuei. As Mrs. Wang enters to investigate the noise, Chiang kicks the door open and threatens Kuei with a horsewhip. Mrs. Wang takes the whip from her son, but Chiang continues to pour verbal abuse upon his wife and tells her he will break her legs if he catches her running about again.

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[161] Ibid., p. 67.

[162] Ibid., p. 69.

[163] Ibid., p. 70.

Kuei remains silent and obeys her husband's commands to bring his slippers and to fetch him a basin of water so that he might wash his feet. While she is getting the water, Mrs. Wang advises her son to only scare his wife. She says, "I'm afraid you can't do anything just by force. Haven't you heard there's a Marriage Law now? The government won't let you beat her. There'd be what they call 'divorce.'"[164] Chiang feels that it is a wife's duty to obey her husband and that he has to act positively or she will get out of hand. The argument flares again when Kuei prepares to visit Aunty Niu, and Chiang again gets the whip. Mrs. Wang tells Kuei that she belongs to Chiang and must obey him, but Kuei asserts her freedom and states that even if he puts a knife to her throat, she will not obey him. At this, Chiang lashes out with the whip. Kuei pulls it out of his hands, breaks it in two, and throws it to the ground.

Mrs. Wang, after pushing her son into another room, sincerely tries to reason with Kuei, and she tells her that a woman will never be equal to a man even though there has been a liberation. Chiang, who has been fuming in the adjoining room, bursts into the room and orders his wife out of the house. Kuei immediately gets one of

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[164] Ibid., p. 73.

the title deeds to the house and says she will have her room torn down. The Communist Party gave her her property rights, she says, and she can do what she wishes. She announces, "I'm not an ox or your mule. The days when women weren't human beings are over,"[165] and she starts to wrap the baby in a quilt. Mrs. Wang is very upset that she is about to lose part of her land and her house along with a "good daughter-in-law,"[166] but she cannot make Chiang apologize.

Aunty Miu and Lan come to the house looking for Kuei, and when they realize the situation, they begin a bitter attack on Chiang's attitudes. Lan finds the broken whip and is about to report Chiang to the authorities when Mrs. Wang stops her and tells her that he did not beat Kuei. Meanwhile, Chiang has been browsing through Kuei's account book and sees that she has learned to read, write, and record figures in the time that he was away. Abashed, he drops his head and sits dejectedly on the bed. Further indignation is heaped upon Chiang when he sees the food and supplies Kuei has purchased with her share of the money from the sale of the straw sacks.

Mrs. Wang also receives a verbal whipping from

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[165] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[166] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Lan for her earlier behavior toward Kuei. Mrs. Wang says she was worried about her status in the family and admits she was wrong. Lan and Aunty Miu leave so that Kuei and Chiang can work out their difficulties. When they are alone, Chiang offers her all of the family money and tells her to manage the family affairs. He assures her that her word will be final, but she replies that things should be democratic and suggests that Mrs. Wang should take care of the money. She then tells Chiang that they must never quarrel like that again. The play ends as Chiang replies, "It was my fault, not yours. From now on, I won't stand in your way."[167]

Summary

Kuei-Yung's actions are all strong and positive. Her relationship with her mother-in-law is one of respect as indicated by her continued efforts to obtain Mrs. Wang's approval and help. However, she does not submit to her mother-in-law when she feels she is justified in her actions. She sells the straw against Mrs. Wang's command to wait for Chiang's return, she leaves the baby at the nursery rather than stay home because Mrs. Wang refuses to care for the child, and she participates in numerous activities against Mrs. Wang's advice. She is never cruel to her mother-in-law, but she definitely

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[167] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

exercises control over the household. Her attitude toward her husband is also respectful until he becomes insistent that she contain her outside activities. Then she becomes defiant, and she is willing to leave the family rather than be a slave to Chiang. Throughout her quarrels with him, she frequently reminds him of the liberation of women and that women's freedom is supported by the government. She refuses to be dominated by him, and by the end of the play, she has succeeded in achieving the status of an equal in the household. Her status in the village is already quite high. She is a member of the handicraft group, the literacy class, the Youth League, and she is chairman of the Woman's Association. It is revealed that other women look to her for leadership. As a member of these various groups, and in her role in the family, she consciously follows the Party doctrine and has faith that the party and the government will support her in her struggle for equality.

Mrs. Wang, Kuei's mother-in-law, believes in the old-fashioned methods of running a home. She feels that Kuei should not spend so much time away from the house and constantly threatens her by reminding her of Chiang's attitude toward what she is doing. At first, she is not concerned over the fact that Chiang sometimes beats his wife, although later she admits he was wrong in doing so. It is evident that she can influence her son much more

than her daughter-in-law, and she admits that she is worried about her status in the family. Although she does not participate in any activities outside the home, she is aware that a Marriage Law has been passed that protects women against cruelty. In every instance Mrs. Wang sides with her son until Kuei threatens to leave with her share of the land and house. After this, she balances between the two and gives her son some severe scoldings for having the very attitudes she had praised earlier. By the end of the play she wants her daughter-in-law to remain in the family, even though she realizes it will be much different than before.

Lan, Kuei's friend, is also very active in various political and service groups. Her lack of patience is apparent when she expresses annoyance with Mrs. Wang and tells Kuei to be less meek when dealing with Mrs. Wang. Later in the play, she shows that she will not be dominated by the mere presence of a male when she directs a severe verbal attack against Chiang because of his attitudes toward Kuei.

Aunty Niu is an example of the old-fashioned mid-wife and herbalist. She, like Mrs. Wang, feels that Kuei should stay closer to home, but Aunty's reason is because Kuei has been interfering with her work. Although she knows her medicine is no good, she continues to sell it to unsuspecting families. However, when Kuei

gives her the opportunity to attend training classes and to become a legitimate mid-wife, she is overjoyed and reforms immediately. She even participates in the attack on Chiang and demonstrates her newly discovered independence.

CHAPTER V

A COMPARISON OF MAJOR TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ROLES OF CHINESE WOMEN WITH SOCIAL ROLES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED CHINESE PLAYS

Evidence presented in chapter two illustrated various kinds of sexual discrimination present in traditional China in education, marriage, employment, social activity, and so on. In contrast, the last chapter furnished examples of social roles of female characters in selected contemporary Chinese plays. It is now possible to compare the findings for evidences of development and change.

For clarity, the comparison follows the structure of chapter two as closely as possible. The family environment is divided into several sections, such as educational opportunities, infanticide, footbinding, and so on. The section on marriage compares the effects of the Marriage Contract, differences in divorce rights, the role of the female in relation to her husband, and similar areas discussed in chapter two. The areas of professions and political activities are structured in a similar manner.

There are several instances when illustrations of traditional social roles cannot be compared with the

contemporary social roles of the female characters because the plays do not furnish similar situations. The selling of children, prostitution, concubinage, religion, and infanticide are not mentioned in any of the plays.

Family

The major differences between traditional social roles of female children and social roles illustrated in the eleven plays appear to be in the areas of education and filial obedience.

In traditional China, young girls, unless born into wealthy families, received little or no formal training. This is significantly different from contemporary Chinese females depicted in the plays used in this study. They are shown having a wide range of educational opportunities regardless of their families' wealth. Probably the most pointed example of the educational differences between the groups being compared in this study is given in Homecoming when Hsiao-tsui, the ten-year-old daughter of Chih-huo, asks her teacher why her mother has just begun to read and write. Her teacher's explanation is that before the Communist liberation poor people could not get educations, and now they can.

There are several other examples of young peasant girls who obtain education. In Comrade, You've Taken

the Wrong Path!, Yang Chun't literacy enables her to serve as leader of the propaganda team of the Eighth Route Army. In Locust Tree Village, another peasant girl, Hei Ni, learns to read and write, becomes the Co-op recorder, and later goes to tractor school where she becomes an engineer.

The only female who studies medicine, one of the most exacting professions, is Mu-Lan, the daughter of a highly respected doctor. It is also interesting to note that Mu-Lan had begun her study of medicine before the Communist Revolution, although she heartily supports the Party and is strongly opposed to American imperialism.

The female children portrayed in the plays are generally willing to resist what they consider to be unfair parental treatment. This seems to differ sharply with traditionally accepted behavior of female children.

Examples of children who rebel against parental authority are vividly portrayed in Chao Hsiao-Lan. In this play, Lan and her sister Mei-Lan openly defy their parents. Lan, under the risk of a severe beating, refuses to obey yer father who arranges a marriage for her. Mei-Lan also defies her father's wishes when she obtains a divorce to end her contracted marriage. In traditional China, such open defiance by a child, especially a female child, would probably result in severe punishment and prolonged house confinement. The authority of the

father in Chao Hsiao-Lan, however, is not heeded, and eventually, with the help of local authorities, Lan and Mei-Lan achieve their goals.

There are no instances of discrimination against female children in any of the other plays. Nor is there mention of children being turned over to convents or brothels, no evidence of footbinding, and no references to infanticide. It should be noted, though, that none of the plays depict situations of extreme poverty, and it was usually this type of environment that caused the traditional discrimination against female children.

In general, female children depicted in this study are shown as being more independent than children in traditional China. Educational opportunities seem to be more abundant and the children's awareness of themselves as individuals apart from their families strengthens their claim of independence.

Marriage

The differences between the traditional social roles and the female characters' contemporary social roles in marriage are among the most colorful in the study. The traditional role of Chinese women in marriage was one of docile submissiveness. Women were married by family agreement, and the presence or absence of love or affection between the daughter and the husband-to-be was of no consideration.

Women were expected to accept the dominance of their husbands and were virtually bound to the arrangement since divorce was legally impractical and socially discouraged. Wives were expected to fulfill their domestic and sexual duties without complaint and were not supposed to venture outside the house unless absolutely necessary. If the typical Chinese husband still desires this kind of relationship, he is probably a very unhappy man. The women portrayed in modern Chinese drama are generally aggressive, demanding, and extremely gregarious. They have their own opinions about most subjects, and they are not shy about expressing them.

The most obvious, and possibly the most stifling, discrimination against traditional Chinese women was the marriage contract. The old, feudal attitude is still maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Chao in Chao Hsiao-Lan. Mr. Chao has already married one daughter through the contract system and, even though the daughter is extremely unhappy with her husband, he plans to wed his youngest daughter in the same manner. Even though Mrs. Chao is sympathetic with her daughter, she still argues that the father should regain part of the money he invested in raising Lan. The daughters rebel against their father, the instigator of the trouble, and with the help of the local officials make their own decisions about their love life.

Chao Hsiao-Lan provides the most direct and dramatic conflict between the traditional and contemporary methods of arranging marriages. In other plays, such as Bright Skies, Locust Tree Village, Saturday Afternoon at the Mill, and Taming the Dragon and the Tiger, there is no indication of any friction between old customs and modern practices, as all of the couples plan their marriages themselves.

The problem of divorce was practically nonexistent in traditional China because men could always take on second wives or concubines. Women were largely prevented from obtaining divorce because of legal discrimination, social pressure and economic dependence on men. In the ten plays examined, there are two cases of divorce and one threatened separation.

The modern attitude toward divorce is shown in direct conflict with traditional practice in Chao Hsiao-Lan. Forced into an unhappy marriage, Mei-Lan is beaten by her husband and mistreated by her mother-in-law. By defying her father and the traditional attitudes toward divorce, she illustrates another aspect of the new freedom of the Chinese woman. In contrast, an example of the misuse of the freedom of divorce is presented in Homecoming, when a husband tries to divorce his wife because of her peasant background and lack of education. The wife agrees to the divorce because she realizes she

can support herself with the aid of the community and the Communist party.

In The Women's Representative, the young and dynamic Kuei threatens to leave her husband rather than give up her community activities. There is no hesitation on her part and she does not stop to debate the possible disgrace she might receive as a divorced woman. However, her positive action (plus the fact that she intends to take one-third of the property with her) makes her husband and his mother reconsider her value.

The domination of men over women, except in cases of filial piety, was unquestioned in traditional China. Except in rare cases, males inevitably controlled government, business, and family functions. The independence of the female characters examined in this study severely damage the image of traditional male domination over women. In fact, there is not a single play that presents a male successfully exerting unjust control over a female.

At the close of both Between Husband and Wife and The Women's Representative the husbands are apologizing for their mistaken and unreasonable behavior. In the first play, Mrs. Chang is portrayed as a patient and devoted wife who succeeds in convincing her husband that his attitudes toward women are feudal. The play closes as he graciously offers to help with the domestic chores.

Kuei, in The Women's Representative, openly defies her husband's wishes by participating in a great number of social and community activities. She refuses to relent in her fight to gain freedom to act as she pleases and even locks her husband in the bedroom when he attempts to whip her. At the end of the play, the husband offers to let her take complete control of the household.

In every play involving a conflict between a male and a female, the female emerges victorious. Li, the bridge building supervisor in Taming the Dragon and the Tiger, fires her husband from an important position because of his careless work and insubordination. Chih-nei, the Chairman of the Date Grove co-op in Locust Tree Village, chooses to live in a separate village from her husband because of the importance of her work. In traditional China this kind of behavior would probably not have been tolerated.

Other examples of female domination or influence are found in Chao Hsiao-Lan, Homecoming, Saturday Afternoon at the Mill, Bright Skies, and The Day the New Director Came. Although some of the examples in the above plays are not between husband and wife, obviously they all represent an attitude of female independence quite different from the traditional role of Chinese women as seen in chapter two.

Part of the reason for the women characters' new-

found independence seems to stem from the legal rights that they exercise. Nearly every play mentions the rights of the "people," and much of the time this is used to strengthen one of the female character's arguments.

For instance, in Homecoming, Yun's sister insists that Wang is misusing the Marriage Law, and it is intimated that he may get into serious trouble with his superiors as a result of his unjust treatment of Yun. Kuei is willing to leave the family because she can claim her child and one-third of the family property as rightfully hers. In traditional China, the children belonged to the family, not to the mother, and women had absolutely no property rights.

There are two examples of the law supporting women's rights in Chao Hsiao-Lan. Party officials allow Lan to be married to the man of her choice without her parents' consent, and Mei-Lan gets support from the authorities when she seeks protection from her husband and mother-in-law.

Conflicts between wives and mothers-in-law are varied, but in none of the plays is a cruel or harsh mother-in-law able to dominate her son's wife. Traditionally the role of the wife demanded that she accept any discourtesy from her mother-in-law. However, in The Women's Representative Kuei-Yung is portrayed as a respectful but independent wife who refuses to obey

her mother-in-law's restrictive demands. At the close of the play the mother-in-law, Mrs. Wang, states that she resorted to the feudal attitudes to simply try to retain her position in the household. She felt that if Kuei could be contained in the home, Mrs. Wang could enjoy the traditional power of the mother-in-law. Now, however, she is willing to accept Kuei as an influential member of the household.

There are two other mothers-in-law mentioned in the selected plays. One, Mei-Lan's mother-in-law in Chao Hsiao-Lan, is never seen, but it is revealed that she abused Mei-Lan enough to warrant being arrested by the authorities. The other, Granny, in Homecoming, is a gentle woman who has been living with her daughter-in-law for several years. She expresses a great deal of affection for her daughter-in-law, Yun, and when Wang (the husband) attempts to divorce Yun, Granny supports her daughter-in-law. At the end of the play, she chooses to remain with Yun, rather than live with her own son. In return, Yun declares she will care for Granny for the rest of her days. This kind of affection between a wife and her mother-in-law is rarely mentioned in writings describing traditional China, but there is no valid reason to suspect that relationships of the type did not exist.

One tradition that was closely observed was the

confinement of the wife to the home except when it was absolutely necessary for the wife to either accompany her husband, work in the fields, or run an important errand. Peasant women seldom had opportunities for long neighborly visits. The women depicted in contemporary Chinese drama, however, no longer appear to be affected by this tradition.

Admittedly, there are some female characters, such as Mrs. Wang and Mrs. Chao, who have no activities outside the home. Mrs. Wang, holding onto the traditional role of the wife and mother-in-law, believes that a woman's place is in the home. Mrs. Chao, however, simply does not have the opportunity to participate in any outside activities because none exist in her pre-liberation world.

Most of the modern wives, though, are involved in a myriad of activities, including Youth League, Women's Associations, Handicraft groups, Public Health groups, literacy classes, Co-ops, Homework teams, official Party meetings, and full and part-time jobs. Although these outside activities often create friction between husband and wife, there is not one instance in any of the plays when a wife is forced to eliminate a single activity.

In traditional China, polygamy and concubinage were accepted customs, although only the more wealthy

men could afford this luxury. However, if this custom continues in present-day China, it is not depicted or even mentioned in any of the ten plays used in this study. Possibly this could be attributed to the fact that the Communist Party outlawed polygamy and concubinage, or perhaps it is because most of the plays deal with peasant people who rarely had the economic power to support a second wife or a concubine. Whatever the reason, the complete lack of discussion of this subject prevents any comparison between traditional and contemporary attitudes toward it.

Professions

Traditionally, upper-class Chinese women considered it improper to accept payment for any service they performed. Peasant women usually helped work in the fields in addition to their housework, but even among the peasants, paying jobs were taken only by unmarried women. This was caused in part by social contempt for employed women, and in part by the lack of positions open to women. In contrast, the female characters work as engineers, doctors, nurses, tractor operators, field-workers, soldiers, teachers, and factory workers, and they all seem to receive the respect and admiration of the other characters in the plays.

There is practically no distinction made between

occupations of males and females. In Li's "Tree Felling Brigade," a group of peasant women work as lumberjacks, swinging heavy axes all day long. In the same play, Taming the Dragon and the Tiger, two engineers are sent to assist in building a bridge. One is a male, the other a female. Mother Kuo, Dr. Sung, Mu-Lan, and Lin all have positions that could be filled by either a man or a woman.

There are two traditional professions depicted in the plays which are also looked upon with general distaste by the responsible characters. The matchmaker in Chao Hsiao-Lan, Mrs. Liu, believes that her profession will never die, but at the end of the play it is apparent that she cannot compete with young girls like Lan, who are willing to enforce the policies of the new Marriage Law.

Niu, the mid-wife and herbalist in The Women's Representative, is chastized for her dishonest practices of selling fake medicine and her unsanitary handling of new-born children. However, she is redeemed when Kuei-Yung, her niece, arranges for her to study at a government-sponsored school for mid-wives. There she will become a certified mid-wife. None of the other traditional professions are mentioned, and this includes the two most prominent traditional professions -- prostitution and the church.

In conclusion, it seems evident that the majority of female professions pictured in the ten plays are varied, respected, and responsible positions. Unlike the traditional attitude toward female paid labor, these modern female characters take great pride in their jobs and in the part they are playing in developing China. Also, a large majority of them are either employed full-time or part-time. In all of the plays examined, only three major female characters, the two mothers-in-law and Mrs. Chao, are not wage earners.

Political Activities

Unless a Chinese woman of the pre-Republic period was born or married into a ruling clan or was bought as a concubine for one of the male members of the clan, there was virtually no way by which she could seek or obtain a voice in local or national politics. The majority of female characters in the plays seem to closely identify with the Communist government and its policies. Most of the many activities in which women participate, such as literacy classes, co-ops, Public Health Work groups, Women's Associations, and Yough leagues, are government-sponsored and increase the female's political awareness.

Kuei-Yung, one of the most active young wives, participates in the literacy class, the handicraft

group, the health committee, the Youth League, and is the newly elected chairman of the Women's Organization. Lan, another female character in The Woman's Representative, is also a member of several political and service groups.

Mother Kuo, the tireless Party worker in Locust Tree Village, devotes her entire life to accomplishing the goals of the Party. As chairman of the Locust Tree Village Co-op, she fervently struggles with complacent villagers, trying to further Party ideology with regards to the advantages of commune work.

The neighboring co-op chairman of Date Grove is so devoted to her work as a Party member that she refuses to give up her position in order to live with her husband in Locust Tree Village. She states that as long as the people of Date Grove need her, she will fulfill her duty as co-op chairman and elects to remain separated from her husband.

Other female characters also achieve noteworthy positions in their socio-political activities. Yuan, the nurse in Bright Skies, achieves the position of Youth Group leader; Yun, the deserted wife in Homecoming, is head of the local women's group; in Between Husband and Wife, Mrs. Chang belongs to several organizations such as the Public Health group and the literacy class; Liu and Wang belong to the Party and

the Youth League of their mill; and even the reluctant Auntie Lao-chen, in Locust Tree Village, becomes a Party member after twelve years of prodding.

Devotion to the Party is apparent in most of the plays. Mother Kuo is one of the best examples of this, but there are others that also stand out. Chu, the young girl in The Day the New Director Came, is willing to openly defy her supervisor because she feels the Party must be served before personal comfort can be considered. And Yang Chun, the female soldier in Comrade, You've Taken the Wrong Path, sacrifices her life in her struggle for the Communist cause.

Clearly, the Communist Party plays a role in nearly every social activity in which the female participates. The battle for sexual equality in the family is also supported by government policy and law. Lan's declaration, "The Communist Party has smashed the chains that shackled us women!"[168] erupts as the battle cry for all the women in all of the plays whenever a conflict occurs between feudal and modern believs.

In Chao Hsiao-Lan, Lan constantly reminds her mother, father, sister, and the matchmaker that the Communist government has granted equal rights to women. She actively demonstrates these rights with the help

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[168]Chin Chien, Chao Hsiao-Lan, p. 27.

of the local government officials by obtaining a marriage certificate from the government without the consent of her parents.

Mei-Lan, Lan's sister, is also an active supporter of governmental policy. Again with help from the local officials, Mei-Lan obtains a divorce from her tyrannical husband and has both him and his mother held by the authorities on grounds of cruelty. The influence of government policy is seen in most plays involving friction between men and women.

When Yun's husband, Wang, asks for a divorce because he desires a more socially acceptable wife, Yun offers no resistence, and expresses faith that help from her neighbors and the Party will enable her to overcome any difficulties she may endure. Her less stoic sister, Fen, openly attacks Wang with Party ideology, and at the end of the play Wang is visibly upset because his actions are going to be revealed to his superiors and his new fiancee. Mrs. Chang, the wife in Between Husband and Wife, also reminds her husband of Communist dogma in her search for recognition as an individual.

Another scene of friction occurs between Liu and Chang in Saturday Afternoon at the Mill. When Chang wants to strengthen his work team at the expense of the total production of the mill, Liu rebukes him for

his irresponsible behavior and repeatedly refers to the Party as their guideline. Her desire to help the mill is prompted by her belief that "the Youth League and Party need a lot of living up to."[169] Kuei-Yung also refers to Party dogma when she is confronted by opposition from her husband and mother-in-law.

It is evident that these contemporary female characters are actively participating, directly and indirectly, in the furthering and strengthening of government policy -- a situation that was totally absent in traditional China, except in the rare cases when an empress would ascend to power. The influence of the Communist party on the female characters appears to be one of the most obvious and influential factors in the majority of plays in this study.

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[169]Tsui Teh-Chih, Saturday Afternoon at the Mill, p. 39.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter two presented evidence that the social roles of women in traditional China were largely subservient to men and that the practice of discrimination against women was a long established tradition. Chapter three presented the women's rights movement in China during the transition period between 1912 and 1949 and the impact the movement had on political parties during that time. Synopses of ten modern Chinese plays were provided in chapter four to show the contemporary social roles of the female characters, and chapter five compared this evidence with the traditional social roles of Chinese women. Now it is necessary to consider the broader aspects of the study and to draw conclusions from the material presented. This chapter synthesizes the evidence into three major conclusions.

The first conclusion to be derived from this study is that the female characters illustrate a transition away from traditional social roles toward independent and aggressive social roles. Contemporary Chinese women have obtained the responsibilities and rewards of actively participating in Chinese society

and are no longer inactive observers of the events that take place around them.

The plays depict women as leaders in their professions and communities. The traditional timidity and submissiveness of Chinese women is replaced by assertions of self-confidence as evidenced by female characters who head village co-op movements, practice medicine, serve in the army, and set examples as "model workers" in their community projects. The confidence with which they attack their community and personal problems is bolstered by their desire for self determination.

The second conclusion to be drawn from the body of this study is that the Chinese family clan power structure, as evidenced in the selected plays, is beginning to disintegrate. We have seen that husbands and mothers-in-laws were securely entrenched as the most powerful figures in the traditional family. Evidence from the selected plays, however, shows that female characters successfully rebel against this established authority. Naturally, the plays dealing with these situations reflect a considerable amount of domestic friction as old traditions come into conflict with new attitudes.

In these situations of domestic conflict Chinese women seem rarely to be mistaken in their attitudes or

defeated in their arguments. Therefore, the plays present the unrealistic picture of China as a matriarchal society. However, it is interesting to note that not once is a female over-ruled by a male in a major conflict.

A daughter who refuses to accept a contracted marriage, women who divorce their husbands or refuse to live in the same village with them, female workers who dominate their male counterparts, and wives who refuse to be ruled by their husbands or mothers-in-law are all examples of successful female attacks on traditional male-female relationships. In one play a husband offers to turn over complete control of the household to his wife, and at the end of another play the husband sweeps the floor and asks his wife if he can take care of the baby. Although both plays may be exaggerated, it is evident that these women exercise strong influence in their families and marriages.

The last major conclusion to be drawn from this study explains two important factors that have enabled the female characters to break away from feudal restrictions and practices of traditional China. These factors are governmental support of women's rights and the ability of women to be economically independent. Both factors serve as major catalysts precipitating the transition away from traditional behavior of

Chinese women.

The Communist government plays an influential role in every play studied. Whenever there is a conflict of opinions, it is usually settled when Communist Party policy or ideology is championed. This is significant because it is usually the female characters who are responsible for revealing the correct party doctrine -- doctrine that overwhelmingly supports women in their struggle for sexual equality. Every major female character in this study, confronted with a conflict between opposing attitudes, successfully uses Communist Party ideology to defend her point of view.

The economic independence recently acquired by Chinese women is the second important factor that has enabled them to effectively resist traditional male domination. It should be noted that this economic independence is largely a result of Communist control of China's industrial and agricultural production and the government's encouragement of female labor.

The financial independence of most of the female characters in this study decreases their willingness to suffer abuse or maltreatment from their husbands or families. The knowledge that women can support themselves is a deciding factor for two of the female characters who want to end their unhappy marriages. And another marriage is saved from possible

divorce when the husband revises his attitudes after he realizes his wife owns an equal portion of the family land and property and does not need him for support. Since economic dependence on males was shown to be one of the most important factors in limiting the freedom of traditional Chinese women, it seems the female characters' improved economic status has significantly aided them in their struggle for independence.

In summary, we see that traditionally Chinese women were dependent on a male dominated society in which women's rights were virtually non-existent. The Communist revolution in China eliminated most of the feudal traditions, but, in essence, the plays in this study indicate Chinese women have substituted one master for another. No longer dependent on men for support, women are almost totally dependent on the government. Undoubtedly they find this more acceptable because their range of personal freedoms is much greater, but it will be interesting to see, once Chinese women have adjusted to their new freedom, if they begin to demand freedom from the government as well.

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