WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT:

ASPECTS OF THE CHINESE CASE UNDER COMMUNISM

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ABSTRACT

The primary concern of this thesis is the association between development and gender relations. At three levels: international, national and regional, various concepts of development are studied, and their different impacts on women are examined. In the first part of the thesis, an attempt is made to compare the different experience of women in capitalist countries and in socialist countries. In the second part, the People’s Republic of China is chosen as a case study at the national level. The focus of this part is on how the different development frameworks affected the lives of rural women in the PRC’s forty-five year history under the Communist Party. In the last part of the thesis, the author concentrates on studying women’s lives at the regional level in the Pearl River delta, which is located in Southern Guangdong Province. The major interest here is how women’s lives in Pearl River Delta have been changed since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping initialized a new development program in rural China. In the conclusion, it is suggested that a gender-sensitive approach should be emphasized in international, national and regional development planning.

The major sources for the second and the third parts of the thesis are from the Chinese periodicals, including Chinese official publications, such as Zhongguo Funu [Women of China], Renmen Ribao [People’s Daily] and Nanfang Ribao [South China Daily]. Some community studies conducted by English-language scholars are also utilised in these two parts. It is also part of the intention of the thesis, which is through these various research sources to present the different points of views on women in rural China.
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INTRODUCTION

The invisibility of women in the mainstream literature on development was an initial motivating factor behind my thesis. It is my feeling that in social sciences, men have been the prime informants in virtually all social aspects, while women were only depicted in areas of marriage and family life. The male perspective has been typically seen as the dominant perspective of the society.

This tendency to subsume women’s experience under men’s was revealed in various social contexts. In the capitalist world, the long existing unequal distribution of power between men and women was reinforced by the conventional concept of development, in which economic growth and technological transformation were identified as the primary goals and gender equality was not recognized as one of the indicators of development. In both the industrialized nations and the developing nations, gender-insensitive planning has made women marginalized in the process of development.

Among the socialist countries, despite a development framework which was distinguished from that in capitalist nations, a male-biased approach to development planning was also undeniable. In most socialist countries, while ideological integration was identified as being of the prime importance to development, the interests of women were typically ignored. Even though "women’s liberation" was claimed as a measure of social progress in Marxism, which was their theoretical guideline of development, gender equality was not actually implemented in full by the socialist parties. Under a male-dominated power structure in these socialist countries, women’s interests were simply assumed to be identical with those of men. Women in socialist countries were not able to change their inferior social position
after so called "socialist construction".

This lack of attention on development from the international perspective was also present in my own country, the People's Republic of China. I have chosen China as my case study because I have been always fascinated by the great changes of women's lives in China, whenever I think about the lives of my grandmother, my mother and myself. I believe that studies on rural women in China have been long overdue.

I have chosen women in rural China as the subjects of my study. What I am particularly interested in is how the different development frameworks which were introduced by the Chinese Communist Party [the CCP] affected the lives of women in rural China. In order to demonstrate the change and the continuity of women's lives, I briefly introduce the social situation of women in Imperial China.

In Imperial China, gender roles were to a large extent segregated. Women's activities were hardly mentioned in the orthodox historical texts, except for chaste or filial women who were recorded with praise as gender models. Women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere, and women normally did not participate in public production, except for women in southern China. The patriarchal family was one of the strongest institutions perpetuating gender inequality, and China's kinship system further strengthened it. Girls were not considered to be the permanent members of their natal families, and sometimes were seen as an unwanted expense. When women married, they moved to their in-laws' houses. These new brides and daughters-in-law often found themselves in unfriendly and unfamiliar surroundings. Once they were settled in their new houses, their reproductive roles became primary. Their position in their husbands' families was determined by their ability to give birth to sons.
Women had virtually no formal power in either domestic or public spheres. They were subordinated in a power structure designed to keep them dependent on men. The heavy emphasis on male superiority in Chinese society was also reinforced in the ideological sphere. Confucian texts declared that women should be subject to the "three obediences"—first to her father and elder brothers, then her husband when married, and finally her son when widowed. The socialization of women in such a social environment led women to internalize their subordination in society.

The description above briefly characterizes the position of women in Imperial China. There are, of course, some deviations from these broad versions about women in Imperial period. One of the important points is that, despite the enormous suppression of women, they were not always the passive victims of an unequal social structure. Women in China learned to develop strategies to expand their power within the domestic spheres or in local communities, even though their power had no formal or legal recognition (M. Wolf 1972 37). Some even initiated movements to resist the male-dominated marriage system, which later I will discuss in detail.

The issues of change and the continuity of women's lives from the late Imperial period to the modern period is very interesting. On one hand, after the establishment of the CCP, women in rural China experienced a critical transformation. On the other hand, the continuity of some characteristics in gender relations from the past was also very significant. In the nearly forty-five years history of the PRC, various development policies have been adopted, which have had a great impact on women's lives. Issues concerning women under the developmental frameworks of the CCP, from 1921 to the 1990s, become the major concern of
In this thesis, there are five chapters. I will look at the associations between development and gender relations at the international, national and regional levels. In Chapter One, at the international level, I will discuss the differing concepts of development in capitalist and socialist worlds and their different impact on gender relations. From Chapter Two to Chapter Four, I will examine the People’s Republic of China as a case study in order to raise the issues of women and development at the national level. I will also study the official positions of the Chinese Communist Party [the CCP] on women’s issues in three historical periods: the revolutionary period (1921--1949), Mao’s China (1949--1978) and Deng’s China (1978--present). In these three periods, different developmental frameworks were introduced by the CCP’s leaders in accordance with the changing social-political conditions of China. In Chapter Five, at the regional level, I will concentrate on women’s lives in the Pearl River delta, Southern Guangdong, China. In particular, I will investigate how women’s lives in the delta area have changed since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping introduced the new development program in rural China.

At the end of this thesis, I will summarize some of the common themes on the issues of women and development emerging at these three levels. I suggest that a gender-sensitive approach should be emphasized in international, national and regional development planning.
Part I Women and Development: At the International Level

Chapter I A Review of Women and Development in Capitalist Countries and in Socialist Countries

After World War II, the world was split into two antagonistic ideological battle fields: the capitalist and the socialist worlds. The countries in these two systems followed different developmental processes. The differences in the definitions of "development" between them are significant. It is assumed here that women have had distinguished experiences under their contrasting frameworks of development. In this chapter, I will review the historical perspectives on women’s issues in these two worlds, and also try to analyze the different implications of these two development models on gender relations.

1. Capitalist Society: Lessons from Countries of the First World and the Third World

Current literature demonstrates that within the capitalist system, the developed countries and developing countries underwent quite different processes of development (McCormack 1981:15--31; Ramasack 1981; Cottrell 1981). Thus, it is necessary to clarify the similarities and differences between them first.

(1) Developed Capitalist Countries

In developed capitalist societies, development had been long conceptualized in terms of constant economic growth and technological improvement. There were two major measures indicating development: 1) growth of the market economy; and 2) increase of gross national product (GNP). It was believed that with high GNP growth, benefits would be eventually
shared by everyone. New technology, which intended to raise productivity, would generate compatible changes through society (Blumberg 1981, Jansay & Heaton 1989, Feldman 1991).

It is strongly argued that this conventional perspective on development in industrialized countries ignored gender relations in its analysis (Macormack 1975, 1981). Policy makers and development planners in the developed capitalist countries had been so gender-insensitive that experience of women under economic transformation was barely mentioned. They were not concerned with how, or even if, women could participate in the definition of "development". With few exceptions, women's interests were marginalized in the formulation and implementation of development policies (Moser 1989). Moser has indicated that this concept of development was male-biased:

"This is not to claim that male policy-makers deliberately define objectives in terms of benefitting men more than women, but rather than they tend to see as in general interest policies that in practice are male-biased, and to perceive policies that reduce gender asymmetry as female biased" (Moser 1991: 13).

The poor record of development literature with regard to the changing of women's social position under economic and technological transformation also reveals a lack of commitment to understanding this issue in the male-dominated academic community (ILO for women 43 1981). Women's roles were most likely depicted in the issues of marriage and family life while women's other roles were hardly mentioned. The data available about women was not only inadequate but also presented a distorted picture of women's contribution to development (Evnas 1992).

It was not until the 1970s that this sexist approach on development studies was challenged by both grass-root women's organizations and women activists in the academic
community. Influenced by the women's movement in late 1960s, feminist theories were gradually developed. More scholars began to pay attention to the effects of development programs on women. They presented a wealth of evidence to demonstrate that the development process has had an adverse impact on women in developed nations. Boulding (1981) indicated that in the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s, the dollar earnings of women steadily declined in relation to men. Cain (1981:254) pointed out that the most drastic social effect of "development" in the developed capitalist countries is that the relations between men and women are disintegrating and, consequently, women are being increasingly left to their own resources to provide subsistence for themselves and their children. Wajcman (1986) expressed her concern that the introduction of electrical household appliance in the domestic sphere was not able to relieve women's burden, but rather continuously maintained the unequal gender division of labour in the domestic sphere. The presumptions that development would automatically lead to women's liberation were thus called into question.

Many researchers not only became very concerned with the trend of marginalization of women in the development process (Rathgeber, 1989), but also attempted to trace the root(s) of gender inequality and expose forms of women's subordination in developed capitalist countries. A strong link was suggested between the gender division of labour and the subordination of women in society. With regard to the gender division of labour, it should be noticed that segregated sexual roles do not necessarily entail the domination and subordination in gender relationship (Leacock 1975). The key question was whether the gender-segregated roles fulfilled the complementary functions to the benefits of both genders, or whether they were used as an instrument to perpetuate gender inequality (Stolcke 1975).
Many researchers argue that in developed capitalist society, the gender division of labour was, in fact, functioning as an instrument to perpetuate gender inequality. "Sexual division of labour appears to express, embody and furthermore to perpetuate female subordination" (Machintosh 1984:4). It was believed that the persistent invisibility of women, and their subordination in the development process occurred because women’s work had persistently been socially constructed as "secondary" or "inferior".

The question here is how the gender division of labour has been manipulated as the instrument for the perpetuation of gender inequality. The researchers discussed this issue from different perspectives and indicated various factors as hints to understanding the unequal gender relations. Leacock argues:

"Some scholars see women’s role in reproduction as primary, and as universally causing some degree of female dependence and subordination. Others, including myself impressed with the enormous variability in the power and authority of women both in relation to men as individuals and to their society as a whole, see production relations as primary" (Leacock 1986:107).

The various theories on gender issues can be categorized by what they attribute gender inequality to: unequal production relations in capitalist society, to women’s reproduction in household or to the combination of these two forces. Here I will introduce the different interpretations in three mainstream theories on gender issues: the orthodox Marxist perspective, the orthodox Feminist perspectives, and the Marxist-Feminist perspective.

I. Marxist Perspective

According to Marxists, the gender inequality of capitalist society can be attributed to
the private production system. In his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels argued that the rise of the patriarchal family was a consequence of increasing wealth in human history. In order to maintain class supremacy and private property, the ruling class stressed the genetic legitimacy of their heirs. Controlling women’s lives seemed necessary for this purpose. This control was achieved by confining women in the domestic sphere. Women were socialized to accept motherhood as their primary mission and the source of gratification in their lives. In capitalist middle-class ideology, women were seen to be innately incapable of anything beyond the tasks related to their roles as wives and mothers (Molyneux 1984).

Marxist theory on gender relations assumed that women’s participation in the public economy was the prerequisite of women’s emancipation. It suggested that in capitalist countries, proletarian women should become wage labour first, and then unite with the male proletarian to destroy the private property of capitalist production. Marxist theory claimed that women’s full emancipation could only be achieved in a classless society in which private property has been abolished.

Some researchers developed Marxist ideas on gender issues and argued that women becoming wage labours neither sufficiently generated a fundamental change in women’s subordinate position nor had a marked effect in altering women’s inferiority in society, as far as the private property of capitalist production was maintained. The functions of women in the capitalist economic system became the focus in their analysis (Mackintosh 1984). According to them, women began to participate in public production from the initial stage of the Industrialization Revolution because the process of industrialization took the means of production out of the household, and men’s wages thus became inadequate to support their
families. Since then, the number of women in the labour force has been continuously increasing, particularly after World War II. This trend has become more prevalent in the last three decades and "the workplace is no longer a man’s world" (Ralph E Smith 1979:1). There is no doubt that women’s labour is extremely important in capitalist production today. The growing number of women in labour force did not, however, substantially improve the social status of women in developed capitalist countries. "Women form one of the cheapest and most valuable parts of the wage labour force, and are thus open to a high level of exploitation" (Boulding 1981 Leacock 1986). These researchers have argued that women have always been a reserve labour force which enabled capitalist production to survive its chronic cycle of inflation and depression.

From the Marxist perspective, the production relations in the economic sphere characterize gender relations. Economic development in developed capitalist countries can not fundamentally change women’s inferior status in society, unless there is revolutionary change in production relations.

II. Feminist Theory

In contrast to Marxist perspectives, which stressed the linkage between gender relations and production relations, most feminist scholars tends to concentrate on the relationship between men and women. Production relations in capitalist society were not considered as the fundamental cause of unequal gender relations. Feminists contend that the root of women’s subordination lies in their unpaid domestic work (Humphries 1977; Rubery 1978). They suggest that the salient roles of women as housekeepers and mothers in the household emerge as the fundamental reason for the lack of transformation of women’s social status, despite the
economic development in society as a whole (Freeman 1990). Unequal gender relations were assumed to be based on the inequality of the marriage contract within the household. The implication of this argument was that the subordination of a woman through an unequal division of labour in public production was ultimately derived from her subordination within the marriage-based household. Women's responsibilities as mothers and wives, constructed in a male-dominated society, weakened women's bargaining power in the labour market.

Feminist commentators suggested that women should demand their rights and their freedom as individuals, not because of, or in spite of, the fact that they are women. Women should seek freedom from familial responsibilities and achieve intellectual and emotional satisfaction from creative and professional activities. For these scholars, one of the crucial steps for women's emancipation is to re-define gender roles and to make women's unpaid work in the domestic sphere visible. They argue, for example, that women's household work should be measured in the social economy and counted into the GNP.

III. the Combination of Marxism and Feminism

There are also some scholars who have tried to combine Marxist and feminist ideas on gender issues. They attributed women's subordination to the partnership of patriarchy and the capitalist production system (Person, Whitehead and Young 1984:X). They argued that women's expanding roles in public production actually augmented the exploitation of women and made their situation even worse (Anderson and Chan 1988:11). In this process, women "serve two masters" (Hartmann 1981). On the one hand, women's work in the domestic sphere was still largely ignored and devalued. On the other hand, women's "superficial participation" in public production did not help them to change their subordinate position in the working
place (Kasperson and Brertbart 1974). The increasing employment of female workers did not bring about increased chances for women to compete with men on an equal footing. Women have been continuously restricted to gender-typed jobs, which were most likely to be low-paid, low-status and unskilled. The sex-segregated occupational pattern was identified as the major instrument of the perpetuation of gender inequality in public sphere.

From this perspective, the forms of patriarchy were "modernized" with economic development. It was suggested that the forms of patriarchy can be differentiated into expressive patriarchy (rape, machismo, symbolic misogyny in the arts) and instrumental patriarchy (job discrimination, different access to education, health, legal service and political office). It was believed that once established, different areas of the sexual division of labour tend to reinforce each other. The interdependence of these different forms of patriarchy were identified as the key to the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Despite the debates on many issues concerning gender relations among these theories, there is almost unanimous agreement that the capitalist economic and ideological systems have facilitated a view of women as the secondary gender in society. First it was claimed by western capitalist middle-class, that the gender division of labour was natural and the tasks of housekeeping and raising children was based on women's biological characteristics (Osterrgaaed 1992). As a result of the socialization process, women generally did not fully develop their potential in the public sphere as men did (Elson 1982). Although public production was purported to be open to all participants after World War II, it was evident that the development process systematically blocked the full and creative participation of women.
The institutional disadvantages women confronted were neglected, while women's inferior position in public production was attributed to women's own problems or women's biological limits. In this way, the gender division of labour in the domestic sphere and that in wage labour, reinforced each other and gender inequality was perpetuated.

Over the last one and a half decades, gender studies in developed countries have aroused more attention on the issues of women and development. The approach of "integrating women into development" was promoted by United Nation and women were urged to achieve their economic independence. Global estimates made in the 1980s suggested that the total female labour force had doubled since 1950s, with women constituting one quarter of the world's industrial labour force and around two thirds of its agricultural labour force. The unequal distribution of income between men and women, however, was not improved and may have worsened. At the beginning of the 1980s, women received only one tenth of world income and owned less than 1 percent of world property (United Nations 1980:8). In recent years, some researchers have criticized the approach of "integration women into development". Boulding has suggested that: "Integration (of women in development) has meant systematic marginalization, accomplished so effectively that the majority of First World women must enter the paid labour force to maintain their household according to the standards modernization rhetoric had taught them to think of as required" (Boulding 1981: 11).

Women's participation in public production did not successfully bring gender equality. Other approaches are suggested for promoting gender equality. More and more women in advanced capitalist countries suggest that gender relations are socially constructed and not derived from different biological characteristics, which means that, this unequal division of
labour along gender line can be changed by the increasing autonomy of women. Some argue that women should organize and raise their voices to defend their interests, press the authorities to take of women’s requests seriously. The proponents of women’s rights and women activities have made great efforts to enter into all levels of decision-making and opinion shaping. They have demanded that the male-dominated legal and administrative systems reduce and eventually eliminate institutional barriers to allow women to develop an independent character in society. The authorities are pressed to pay more attentions on women’s practical needs as well as strategic needs (Moser and Peake 1987, Anderson 1992).

Elson and Person summarize the association of gender relations and development in the developed capitalist society in this way:

"The incorporation of women into wage work can be expected to decompose existing forms of gender subordination. The way in which (and indeed the degree to which) they are recomposed will be determined both by the outcome of struggle between women workers and capital, and also by the relationship of women to men in family, household and kinship structure which shake the particular forms of women’s subordination."

Today, improving women’s collective consciousness and organizing women’s pressure groups in the developed capitalist countries are identified as effective approaches to advance women’s equality with men.

(2) Undeveloped Capitalist Countries

Studies related to women’s roles in the development of Third World countries have only been carried out regularly for the last twenty years. Compared to developed capitalist nations, developing capitalist countries reveals a different picture about women and development.
Many of these Third World countries are the former colonies of developed capitalist nations. Their definition of "development" had been long equivalent to "westernization". Many policy makers and development planners in these countries assumed that the process of development was unilinear, and they would follow the model of the developed capitalist societies. The primary concern among these leaders was how modernization, which had been experienced in the developed countries, would be incorporated into the developing countries (Hibroner 1966).

The effects of development were historically specific. They were also extremely complex and sometimes even yielded some contradictory outcomes (Vangham 1987; Gallin & Ferguson 1991). However, one common phenomenon on the issues of women and development among the Third World nations was that women's social position seemed to be weakened. Black and Cotrell argue:

"whether or not economic development occurs, women seem to lose status relative to men and to be virtually absent from group planning for change. Women seem to be the most disadvantaged in those least developed nations where they have lost their traditional roles in subsistence agriculture without acquiring any new functions in the growing cash economy" (Black & Cottrell 1981:8).

This androcentric and ethnocentric approach to development did not see the exclusion of women in their planning as any problem. "Androcentrism is to gender as ethnocentrism is to culture. The first makes women invisible and the second renders people or situation invisible" (Jasolosan 1981: 7).

Blinded by obsolete notions of modernity and even a colonial ideology, most of the planners ignored women's interests in the development programs they designed, which later
caused disasters, such as the food crisis in some developing countries (Tinker 1976; Blumberg 1981; Newman 1981; ILO 1986).

Many international aid organizations, which held similar ideas about development, also failed in their missions to help Third World countries develop their economies. Ignorance of social and family structures were identified as the fundamental reason for the failure of such development projects in recipient countries (Ostergaard 1992: 1). The package of measures, including structural adjustment programs promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have had a particularly detrimental effect on women because they lacked a gender perspective in their development proposal (Hansen & Ashbaugh 1991 205-240; Morsy 1991: 129-176).

It has been clearly shown that the implications of development on women were ignored in the national or international programs. These exterior forces have had persistently subordinated women in the developing countries (Moore 1974, Gallin and Ferguson 1991:18).

The pioneering work which tried to assess the implications of the development programs/policies on women in developing countries was Ester Boserup’s Women's Role in Economic Development (1970). Boserup indicated that industrialization tended to intensify the differences of gender roles in developing economies and produce a distortion of gender relations at the economic level. She pointed out that the change from a subsistence economy to a market economy has dealt a serious blow to the value of goods traditionally produced by women, such as handicrafts. This economic transformation further weakened women’s position in traditional agricultural production.

At first sight, women’s lesser involvement in agricultural production could be made
up when more and more became wage labourers. Like their sisters in developed countries, numbers of women becoming wage labourers in Third World countries has been increasing (Pearson & Elson 1984; Lim 1981; Jansay & Heaton 1989). The cheaper labour force and the loose environmental regulations have encouraged more and more labour-intensive industries to move from developed countries to developing countries. With the new global division of labour, women workers in the Third World are in great demand. However, "This extension of the market brings new opportunities, but also new risks" (Elson 1991:26). The unequal international market economy reinforces or recomposes unequal gender relations, instead of helping women to improve their social status. "The relatively powerless position of women offers capital a potentially ideal labour force at minimum cost, while resting on an ideology of the naturalness of women’s skills and capabilities. Capital, in fact, adapts the regulation of the labour force to different concrete structures of subordination" (Pearson & Elson 1984: 32). It has been agreed by many observers that in this process, there has been always the autonomy of unequal gender relations and the limitation of wage work as a measure to bring about the emancipation of women.

Most Third World countries have been continuously disadvantaged in the global economy. It is a great challenge for these Third World countries to achieve economic growth on the one hand, and prevent eroding the position of women in this process on the other. If we accept the definition that "development is meant to work toward freedom from dependency; or more specially, freedom from poverty and inequality" (Jansay & Heaton 1989 11), it seems that Third World women are in a very ambivalent situation. While women in the Third World have to cooperate with men in order to survive and to fight for fair treatment in the world
capitalist market, they also need to demand an equal share of the fruit of development with men. It is possible that women's practical needs and strategic needs are sometimes in conflict (Anderson 1992:186).

The inferior status of women in Third World countries can be attributed to two major variables: underdevelopment and male-biased development planning. First, under-development and the subordinate position of their economy in the global market is partly responsible for women's inferiority. It is believed that the marginalization of women in developing nations is more extreme and women meet more barriers in pursuing their independence and equality because they are at the bottom of the global economic and political hierarchy. As Leacock has argued:

"the development of (the third World countries) within a capitalist framework generally undercut their (women's) position rather than improving it. Women's formal legal rights to act with near equality in the public domain are not possible to exercise, given the constraints of their economic position, and the fact that patriarchal institutions of pre-capitalist times are reshaped and perpetuated in order to maintain these constrain" (Leacock 1986:127).

Another equally important variable is the gender-blind development planning in Third World countries. Naomi Black identified this male-biased development planning as another reason for women's subordination. She believes sexist development planning in Third World countries at least bear the same weight as the under-development of the Third World countries for women's subordination. She argues that:

"It is assumed that women will serve their own cause by participation in development, for it is underdevelopment that explains their disadvantage. Sexism has not yet been recognized as a fundamental explanation of how societies are organized." (Black 1981 273)
Learn from Each Other: Women and Development in Developed Countries and Developing Countries:

From studying the experiences of women in developed countries and developing countries, we can learn the particularity and universality in the associations between the women's social status and economic development.

Firstly, it is recognized here that women in developed countries and women in developing countries shared some similar experiences in the processes of development. In both developed and under-developed countries, development planning has been gender-blind while only economic and technological transformation were regarded as the central issues. Women in both worlds bear the burden of triple roles: responsibility for reproduction, production and household--community management (Moser and Levy 1986). Economic growth has had some adverse effects on women's lives and has made their situation worse. Women have been persistently subordinated under the current gender division of labour in both domestic and public spheres. The male-dominated socio-economic structure has not been fundamentally changed. The similar fate shared by women in both worlds can enhance their solidarity and help to promote gender equality worldwide.

Secondly, women in both worlds underwent rather different experiences in their respective processes of development. They confronted different social circumstances because of the different social-economic contexts between developed countries and developing countries. There emerged different interpretations of "women's liberation" under these different social contexts. Hanna Papanek (1975) cited the different concepts of women's emancipation, which varied from being defined by the symbols of women's personal status to
being more concerned about the broad social-economic transformation and the impact of structural change on women, or from focusing on the formulations of women as individuals to viewing women's identity in the context of families. It is widely agreed that "The specific situation and concerns of women as diverse as the cultures in which they lives" (Tinker 1976: 29). Women in both worlds constitute a heterogeneous group and their experiences are shaped by class, ethnicity, age and family structure. These variables may determine the different agenda or priorities for women's emancipation under various social contexts. For example, in most developed countries today, women have been fighting for equal pay for equal work, seeking personal satisfaction and individual recognition from professional achievement, and trying to free themselves from traditional familial roles and duties assigned to them by virtue of sex. For women in Third World countries, the most urgent problem is how to deal with the change from a subsistence economy to a market economy and how to strive to change their subordinate position in the same process. Women in Third World realize that it is essential to make sure they can attain fair fruits of development.

It is extremely important for women in these two worlds to understand the similarities and the differences between them, so that they can understand each other and also possibly build up women's solidarity worldwide (Huizer 1979). There has been growing consciousness among women of the necessity to carry on dialogues within and between women's groups on the issues about development and gender relations, such as what is the very concept of development in the specific social context, and how it can be furthered in the societies we now have (Boulding 1981 26).

More and more women become aware that women's movements in the First World and
those in the Third World are inseparable. Women in different societies should respect each other's choices, and also help each other to promote gender equality. Learning lessons from their own experience, women in the First World try to show their sisters in the Third World that women's empowerment and raising collective consciousness is crucial, because these are the prerequisites for the genuine integration of women and development. They suggest that development planning with a gender perspective should be established in Third World countries. They also remind their sisters in developing countries to choose appropriate technology which ensures that women will not be denied access to the benefits of development. They urge women in Third World to be more actively involved in development programs and encourage them to demand fair treatment in the process of development.

The experiences of women in developing countries have greatly contributed to the existing literature about women's emancipation. The versions of how women can integrate into regional development are expanded. The prevailing feminist notions in the First World have been criticized by many women in Third World, because they did not take the particular social contexts of these Third World countries into account. "Feminism debates of 1970s (in the First World) tend to be ethnocentric, tended to isolate women as a separate and often homogeneous category, and were not concerned either with the dynamics of imperialism, or its effects on women in the third world countries" (Pearson, Whitehead and Young 1984.ix). The women's movements in the Third World brought about new meanings to the definitions of feminism, racism, class issues, ethnocentricity, the dependent system of global economy and north-south relations. Today, women in Third World countries propose their self-determined development concepts and urge the community level organizations to raise women's self-consciousness.
They provide another perspective by which to examine women’s issues and make the western middle class feminists aware of women’s different situations in terms of class, race and culture. They believe that enhancing women’s independent bargaining power economically as well as politically should be emphasized.

A New Concept of Development in Capitalist World

The proclamation of 1975–1985 International Women’s Years gave official notice that women should be a central issue in international, national and regional development planning. Since then, a new race to integrate women into development has started. Women’s roles in the economic process has been a topic included at most development forums. Yet, despite this rising awareness of women’s issues and setting an agenda to improve women’s situation, Taylor’s 1985 survey on women worldwide has shown that, from a macro perspective, the situation for women has actually worsened: "Two serious barriers to achieving any significant change (in women’s social status) are the marginalization of women within the development system itself, and the lack of opportunities for women’s creative and full participation in the development (Kirson 1990)."

With the gender perspective being emphasized in the assessment of international, national and regional development, more social factors are recognized as the measure of development. "Development must be a human-centred process, programmes of human-resource development must be at the centre of economic development strategy" (Ostergaard 1992 4). It is also suggested that social-economic change is a process of transformation which depends on continuous integration of the cultural, social, political and economic institution in both First
capitalist market, they also need to demand an equal share of the fruit of development with men. It is possible that women's practical needs and strategic needs are sometimes in conflict (Anderson 1992:186).

The inferior status of women in Third World countries can be attributed to two major variables; underdevelopment and male-biased development planning. First, under-development and the subordinate position of their economy in the global market is partly responsible for women's inferiority. It is believed that the marginalization of women in developing nations is more extreme and women meet more barriers in pursuing their independence and equality because they are at the bottom of the global economic and political hierarchy. As Leacock has argued:

"the development of (the third World countries) within a capitalist framework generally undercut their (women's) position rather than improving it. Women's formal legal rights to act with near equality in the public domain are not possible to exercise, given the constraints of their economic position, and the fact that patriarchal institutions of pre-capitalist times are reshaped and perpetuated in order to maintain these constrain" (Leacock 1986:127).

Another equally important variable is the gender-blind development planning in Third World countries. Naomi Black identified this male-biased development planning as another reason for women's subordination. She believes sexist development planning in Third World countries at least bear the same weight as the under-development of the Third World countries for women's subordination. She argues that:

"It is assumed that women will serve their own cause by participation in development, for it is underdevelopment that explains their disadvantage. Sexism has not yet been recognized as a fundamental explanation of how societies are organized." (Black 1981 273)
Learn from Each Other: Women and Development in Developed Countries and Developing Countries:

From studying the experiences of women in developed countries and developing countries, we can learn the particularity and universality in the associations between the women’s social status and economic development.

Firstly, it is recognized here that women in developed countries and women in developing countries shared some similar experiences in the processes of development. In both developed and under-developed countries, development planning has been gender-blind while only economic and technological transformation were regarded as the central issues. Women in both worlds bear the burden of triple roles: responsibility for reproduction, production and household--community management (Moser and Levy 1986). Economic growth has had some adverse effects on women’s lives and has made their situation worse. Women have been persistently subordinated under the current gender division of labour in both domestic and public spheres. The male-dominated socio-economic structure has not been fundamentally changed. The similar fate shared by women in both worlds can enhance their solidarity and help to promote gender equality worldwide.

Secondly, women in both worlds underwent rather different experiences in their respective processes of development. They confronted different social circumstances because of the different social-economic contexts between developed countries and developing countries. There emerged different interpretations of "women’s liberation" under these different social contexts. Hanna Papanek (1975) cited the different concepts of women’s emancipation, which varied from being defined by the symbols of women’s personal status to
being more concerned about the broad social-economic transformation and the impact of structural change on women, or from focusing on the formulations of women as individuals to viewing women's identity in the context of families. It is widely agreed that "The specific situation and concerns of women as diverse as the cultures in which they lives" (Tinker 1976: 29). Women in both worlds constitute a heterogeneous group and their experiences are shaped by class, ethnicity, age and family structure. These variables may determine the different agenda or priorities for women's emancipation under various social contexts. For example, in most developed countries today, women have been fighting for equal pay for equal work, seeking personal satisfaction and individual recognition from professional achievement, and trying to free themselves from traditional familial roles and duties assigned to them by virtue of sex. For women in Third World countries, the most urgent problem is how to deal with the change from a subsistence economy to a market economy and how to strive to change their subordinate position in the same process. Women in Third World realize that it is essential to make sure they can attain fair fruits of development.

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World and Third World countries. This new definition of development is greatly distinguished from the previous technocratic one (Ostergaard 1992:3). Anderson has distinguished five approaches towards the integration of women in development: welfare, equality, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment (Anderson 1992). He argues that each of these approaches has its own substance, strength and limitations. Women’s empowerment is, however, highlighted as the most effective strategy for women to advance gender equality in society. Elson concludes: "Possible and appropriate strategies will differ across time and place and for different groups of women in different social and political situation. But there are some common themes, in particular the importance of women getting together and act publicly" (Elson 1991:25).

2. Socialist Countries:

Socialist countries (here including those former socialist countries in Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union) have displayed an interesting picture on the issues of women and development, which was vastly different from that of capitalist countries.

The former socialist countries in Eastern Europe, who formed part of the Soviet bloc before its collapse in 1989, were differentiated in many ways from the socialist countries in the Third World. Despite the differences, most of them adopted similar strategies in their socialist development. Jancar argues that "without exception, all communist countries in the post-revolutionary phase adopted virtually identical policies" (Jancar 1981:140). Here, my primary interest is the similarities in gender issues among these socialist countries.

In socialist countries, the institution of the socialist state and Marxist-Leninist ideology were the dominant forces which affected women’s social situation. The political factors have
been more important in determining women's social status than others factors, such as the level of economic development, previous traditions in regard to women and previous patterns of social and political organization. The common themes emerging from these countries under such an ideological environment were significant. Here I will discuss some common characteristics on the issues of women and development.

First, socialist countries all claimed that they adhered to orthodox Marxist theory on women's issues. According to this interpretation, Marx and Engels defined proletarian women as part of the working class and considered female oppression part of the larger and more general problems of social inequality in human society. Women did not have special interests which are different from those of men. Class, not sexual oppression, was identified as the primary dynamic in society. The key to women achieving equality with men was women's economic independence. Only if women participated in production and united with men to overturn private property in production, would gender equality be realized.

Marx and Engels implied that the division of labour within the household was based on biological characteristics of the two sexes and that it was natural for women to bear responsibility for domestic chores. But Marx and Engels appeared to provide a perfect solution for women. They argued that, under socialist and communist countries, housework would be collectivized and women would be relieved from its burden. It was assumed that abolishing the system of private property and encouraging women to participate in the public setting would eventually eliminate gender inequality (Molyneux 1984 55).

It is evident that orthodox Marxist ideology on gender issues has had a profound effect in all these socialist countries, even though they sometimes debated on the more "appropriate"
interpretation about Marx and Engel’s theory. From the revolutionary period to the maintenance period, Marxist theory was claimed as the only guideline for women seeking their freedom in these socialist countries (Jancar 1981:140).

From the early days of the socialist bloc, socialist parties showed their concern about women’s subordination in pre-socialist societies and declared their commitment to women’s liberation. This was quite different from capitalist states, which initially neglected women’s issues in the process of social transformation. The socialist parties indicated that women’s emancipation was one of the essential tasks on their revolutionary agenda. They reiterated their position that women should be united with men in the revolution and that the emancipation of women was part of the general endorsement of social equality. When Molyneux compared the progress of women’s liberation in capitalist and socialist countries, he argued that:

"In socialist states, official ideology places considerable emphasis on the need to liberate women from the oppression they suffered under the pre-revolutionary order....By contrast, in many capitalist countries, measures to improve women’s position were taken only after a prolonged struggle by women and their allies to secure enfranchisement and other democratic rights.... It can be concluded that the most significant influence on women’s issues in socialist countries was from the theoretical implication of orthodox Marxism".

This official emphasis on improving women’s social status had been most significantly reflected in the progressive legislation and egalitarian policies implemented by socialist parties. Many socialist policies were proposed to produce gender equality. The political leaders attacked pre-revolutionary behaviour against women and attempted to dismantle sexually discriminatory attitudes. Through legal reform and the subsequent implementation campaigns, much violent behaviour against women was enormously reduced.
Besides the emphasis on legal recognition of women's equality, the socialist parties and governments also encouraged women's participation in public production. They maintained that women's economic independence was the key to promoting women's social status. The socialist parties believed that women had the greatest potential for the revolutionary cause and socialist development. Women were encouraged to challenge the traditional gender division of labour and take "men's work" to demonstrate that men and women could do the same works. It was also made quite clear that women's position would be strengthened by their increased access to education, their economic independence and their socialist experience outside the household.

The socialist regimes were also very concerned with women's roles in the domestic sphere and special needs derived from them. Parties proposed to set up social facilities in order to ease the conflict between women's domestic roles and their expanded roles in social production. Social welfare programs were launched to provide health facilities and service for women. In the process of socialist development, collectivization was often considered as the crucial means for economic growth, industrialization, political advance and social egalitarianism. Collectivisation was also seen as the perfect solution for women's conflicting roles in the domestic sphere and the public sphere. It was believed that women could be mobilized to leave home and participate in collective production while housework was socialized. It was expected that women's social positions would be improved under collectivisation.

Besides advocating more economic participation for women, the socialist states also launched campaigns to urge women to play more active roles in political movements. A series
of ideological campaigns were set up to raise women’s class-consciousness, which was identified as an important means to improve women’s self-esteem and their loyalties to the socialist regimes.

It was evident that the socialist parties brought about substantial improvements in the social position of women. Jaquette suggests that "...women (in socialist countries) have been rapidly and intentionally integrated into modern roles by administrative fiat under the aegis of a gender-egalitarian ideology..."(Jaquette 1985:xiii). And Moleneus also believed that "In the Third World today, it is the socialist societies that have the greatest official commitment to bring about sexual equality" (Moleneus 1984 48).

Despite such progress in gender equality, other research has revealed that women were still inferior to men, and there was a lack of fundamental change in gender relations in the socialist countries. It was argued that the socialist development brought about a rather contradictory or unanticipated impact on women’s social status. Some western commentators have been very critical of the gap between the rhetoric of liberation for women in socialist countries and the reality of their positions. The failure of socialist strategies for women’s emancipation in these socialist countries can be generally attributed to the following factors:

1. the Deficiencies of Marxism as the Theoretical Guideline

As many scholars have argued, using orthodox Marxist ideas on women’s issues as the sole theoretical guideline of these socialist parties poses a serious problem. It is argued that the Marxist analysis of gender relations was theoretically insufficient because it did not address women’s subordination to men. Even though Marx and Engels declared the emancipation of women to be the most natural indicator of social development in their work, The Holy Family.

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orthodox Marxism was "production reductionist" and "sex-blind". It simplified the complex
dynamic of gender relations and did not recognize, in addition to the category of class, that
gender can also be an important social variable to differentiate the social status of people. Its
presumption that proletarian women were equal to proletarian men does not reflect reality.

Orthodox Marxism was clearly inadequate in explaining the perpetuation of gender
inequality in society, and thus it is not surprising that the solution it provided for women’s
emancipation did not successfully reach its goals. Marxist theories predicted that abolishing
private property and encouraging women’s participation in public production would guarantee
gender equality. Socialist parties and governments believed that "all inequalities in society
could be subsumed under the exploitation of the working class, and the party could, in general,
subscribe to the simplistic view that women’s emancipation would be an automatic
consequence, a fringe benefits as it were, once socialism had replaced capitalism" (Meyer
1985:180). The socialist parties always put all their effort for promoting gender equality
through the transformation of production relations in societies, but they denied the necessity
of a separate women’s movement. Even though socialist systems has been established for a
long history, women were still the inferior gender in socialist countries.

It is argued that in socialist countries, the sexual division of labour remained prevalent
and socialist development had a negative impact on women’s social status. First of all, the re-
definition of sex roles in socialist countries was asymmetric. In the analysis of orthodox
Marxist theory, women’s labour at home as wives and mothers was accepted as a natural
division of labour. In socialist countries, women were urged to become full-time workers in
economic production, but women were still expected to be primarily responsible for the
housework and the early upbringing of children. The socialization of domestic work, which was supposed to alleviate women's housework burden, was not fully established in any of these socialist countries. Women in socialist countries bear the same triple burdens as their sisters in capitalist societies; as wage earner, as housewife, as mother. There was substantial evidence to demonstrate that, in the gender division of labour in these socialist countries, "women's work" in both domestic and public production remained persistently undervalued. Household work was not seen as social production and women's contributions as unpaid labour to socialist development was not recognized. Sex-segregated occupations and the subsequent inferior position of women in the workplace rendered women's economic status lower than men's. In the labour market, women were seen as an essential part of the reserve army of labour in the socialist economy. Women experienced pushes and pulls as a consequence of economic booms and slumps. Some analysts presented a powerful argument that women in socialist states shared similar experience with their counterparts in capitalist states. "The overall lesson is that the sexual division of labour in socialist states not only bears similarities in form to that prevailing under capitalism, but also in some of its effects" (Molyneux 1984: 81).

2. No Autonomy of Women’s Movement

Even though socialist regimes advocated women becoming involved in the process of decision-making, women were continuously placed at the bottom of the economic and political system. Women's representativeness at higher levels of decision-making remained strikingly low in these socialist countries.

In the socialist countries, women's lack of power was revealed not only in the small number of women delegates in the male-dominated power pyramid, but also in the ways that
women lacked autonomy in the development process, from the revolutionary to the maintenance period. "One of the most serious deficiencies in socialist countries is the inabilities of women to create autonomous organizations through which to advance or defend their interest...whatever equalities have been achieved, they have been handed down to women by the male ruling elite in yet another exercise of patriarchy" (Meyer 1985: 23). In socialist countries, the concept of women's liberation and its components were defined by governments. To separate the women's movement from the broad revolutionary tasks was criticized as "capitalist and bourgeois", and socialist parties denied the necessity of launching a separate women's liberation for promoting women's equality with men.

Women's associations were directed by the socialist parties as one of the mass organizations which closely followed Party's policies. They seldom functioned as pressure groups to represent women's interests and raise women's voices. Women's associations served only the purpose of the socialist parties, to exercise their influence more effectively over women. Most official women delegates were not sufficient independent. Some of them may not be aware of the need to represent women's special interests. The interests they represented were only those of the dominant group in socialist countries.

Women, as a social group were not empowered by socialist development. The absence of women's movements and independent women's associations in these countries placed women at the bottom of the power hierarchy. Because of a lack of powerful groups representing women's own interests, women could not defend themselves or make their voices heard, even under situations where their interests were threatened by gender-insensitive development policies.
There was no concept of the self-liberation of the women's movement in socialist countries. "Seen from a feminist perspective, socialism does not seem to have done very much for women" (Meyer 1985:23).

3. The Low Position of Women's Emancipation in the Agenda of Socialist Development and the Instrumental Nature of the Socialist Parties to Mobilize Women

Even though in the propaganda of the socialist parties, women's liberation has always been on the revolutionary agenda of revolution, it was subordinate to other priorities, such as the development of socialist economic production or political issues. While the socialist parties proclaimed the improvement of women's status, they emphasized on how women's liberation would help to achieve the other social issues. The ultimate purpose of mobilizing women or improving women's social status seemed more the instrument for helping the socialist parties in achieving other goals. The low priority of promoting equal gender relations and the instrumental nature of mobilization of women were very blatant in these socialist countries.

Socialist governments were overtly committed to equality for women, but their practices always turned out to be selective and conditional. It was fairly frequent that the parties held back their effort to promote gender equality, in particular when the implementation of these policies was in conflict with other development policies (Scott 1974; Jancar 1974). The socialist parties upheld the principle of gender equality in practice only if it was congruent with other objectives and only if it did not interfere with the more "important" work which was formulated by elite males.

Jancar's research has shown that in socialist nations, the ruling socialist parties moved backward from a revolutionary image of women's liberation to a traditional view of women's
roles (1981). Meyer also indicated that "in virtually all cases, the mobilization of women for revolution and civil war was followed by their demobilization once the crisis was over" (Meyer 1985: 23). In the revolutionary period, women had a powerful potential to overturn the old social relations, so the socialist parties put a considerable emphasis on liberating women from traditional ties in order to transfer their loyalty from the old institutions to the new socialist parties. After the socialist parties seized power, and became concerned primarily with the consolidation of the new regimes and maintaining their dominant position in society, they tended to become more conservative with women's issues. They modified their policies on gender relations and re-emphasized the traditional roles of women in order to avoid creating any resentment from the male members in the societies. Many socialist programs were compromised by patriarchal practices, and the subordination of women was retained.

Summary: Women in Socialist Countries

It is clear that women's social status was enormously enhanced in socialist countries. The common problems emerging from the process of socialist development, however, were also critical. Lack of gender-sensitivity in decision-making was largely due to the sex-blindness of the Marxist theoretical framework in these countries. Women's lack of empowerment in the socialisation process facilitated the ignorance of women's interest in the process of socialist development. The underestimation of the importance of gender relations and the instrumental practice of women contributed to the failure of the fundamental change of women's subordination.
Part II

Women and Development at the National Level: The Case of China

China provides us with a great opportunity to examine some of the arguments concerning women and development. From the initial stage of the establishment of Chinese Communist Party (the CCP) in 1921, the CCP claimed that orthodox Marxist theory was the only guideline in China's development. During the revolutionary period (1921-1949), women's emancipation was recognized as part of China's broad socio-economic transformation. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (the PRC) in 1949, there have been great changes in official ideas about socialist development. During the period of dominance by Mao Zedong (1949-1976), the model of socialist construction emphasized political and ideological transformation. Since 1978, the major influence on economic policy in China has been Deng Xiaoping. Under his leadership, a model of "market socialism" has been formulated, and dramatic reform of the practices of the Maoist period has been initiated. There has been a stress on high rates of economic growth and increasing efforts to improve the material standard of life of the Chinese population. Socialism was and is continuously claimed as the foundation of the development frameworks in China; however, the definitions of socialist development, its theoretical perspectives and its practice between these two periods are very contrasting.

The primary concern in the following chapters is to examine implications of the two development models for the social status of women in rural China. In Chapter Two, I will review the Chinese Communist Party's positions on women's issues in the revolutionary era (1921--1949). In Chapter Three, I attempt to illustrate the fluctuation of rural women's social positions effected by various development policies in Maoist China (1949--1976).
Four, I examine the impact of Deng’s new development policies on the lives of rural women in general. In Chapter Five, focusing on the dramatic changing landscape of the Pearl River delta area in southern Guangdong Province since 1978, I will introduce three studies about the implications of the socio-economic change in the Pearl River delta for local gender relations.
Chapter Two

The CCP’s Positions on Women’s Issues in Revolutionary Period (1921–1949)

The notion of "women’s liberation" in China underwent tremendous change after it explicitly appeared during the May 4th Movement of 1919.

The May 4th Movement takes its name from the demonstrations which occurred in Beijing and other big cities in China, when Japan claimed Jiaodong Peninsula, the former German concession, at the Versailles Peace Conference after the First World War (Meisner 1977 17). The initial theme of the May 4th Movement was nationalist, but later developed into anti-imperialist and anti-warlord activities in the major cities across China. During the May 4th Movement, many intellectuals expressed their ideas on all kinds of social issues and sought to answer why China, as a long advanced civilized society, was adversely affected by modern development in the twentieth century.

"In the decade of intellectual ferment which followed the May 4th Movement, no aspect of traditional society was more firmly rejected by young radicals than the subjugation of women and the old marriage system" (Davin 1976 13). The active intellectuals were inspired by the feminist movements in Europe and North America. The freedom of marriage, equality in education and the movements for women’s citizenship, women’s suffrage and women’s inheritance rights, were among the issues most concerned. Particularly to those female students and scholars who were most likely from middle and upper class families, sexual oppression seemed far more obvious than economic oppression from the landlords and the capitalists. They took this opportunity to free themselves from the control of the traditional patriarchal family (Croll 1978 3-4; Honig & Hershatter 1989 325). The women’s movement at this period
appeared to reflect the ideas of a handful of urban intellectuals on love, marriage, family and women’s new social roles. It hardly confronted the problems faced by women from other social classes, and in particular the interests of women in the grass-roots were ignored (Salaff & Merkie 1973 159--162; Leith 1973 53,56).

The Chinese Communist Party [CCP] was founded in 1921 by some of the young intellectuals who were actively engaged in the May 4th Movement. They were fascinated by the success of the new found Soviet Union and came to accept Marxism as their theoretical guideline in seeking an independent, prosperous China. They declared as their goal establishing communism in China, and ultimately liberating all human beings from exploitation and oppression (Mesnier 1977 17).

From the very beginning, the "woman question" was recognized as one of the tasks on the CCP’s revolutionary agenda. Some CCP members, however, soon realized the limitations of the feminist movement in the May 4th Movement. The most eminent female leader in the CCP, Hsiang Chingyu, who was elected as their first minister for women in 1922, criticized the bourgeois tendency in the current women’s movement which, she argued, was devoted to pursuing individual solutions instead of searching for fundamental change in broader social and economic structures of women’s problems. She pointed out that the feminist movement would be meaningless without a general socio-political revolution in China (Siu 1970 151; Witke 1973 331). She was not the only female leader in the CCP who held this position. When Roxane Wikte discusses the women politicians of the 1920s in the CCP, she finds out that "the most radical among them (women politicians) were not bound by self-importance as female and putting women’s issues at the forefront. They chose rather to set aside what seem to them
to be partisan sexual issues and to devote their lives to the various revolutionary movements which eventually would carry Chinese from Confucianism to Communism" (Witke 1973 33).

The CCP declared that women’s emancipation was an integral part of the wider revolutionary movement (McElderry 1973 32; Leith 1973 53; Siu 1970 100). "The CCP took the position that the liberation of women lay in national liberation from imperialism, capitalism and feudalism, and was very critical of the bourgeois women who fought for individual liberation during the May 4th Movement" (Siu 1970 151). The CCP attributed women’s subordination in China primarily to class oppression and exploitation. The Party insisted that women’s liberation was dependent on whether China could become a classless society.

In order to resist imperialism and the chaotic regional situation caused by warlords, the CCP and the Kuomintang [the KMT] led by Sun Yat-sen formulated a political alliance in 1923. The alliance adopted a new approach for China’s revolution. Under their direction, the Peasants Movement Training Institute was established in Guangzhou in 1923 by the alliance. The Northern Expedition (1925-1927) led by the alliance swept away the power of the regional warlords from Guangzhou to the central part of China. About one and a half million women were involved in the Northern Expedition. They not only participated in the battle but also promulgated new ideas about marriage, family lives and women’s rights along the way.

Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, the alliance of the CCP and the KMT soon collapsed when Chiang Kai-shek, the successor of Sun, ordered the massacre of CCP members in May 1927. The CCP suffered severe losses of its members. The CCP had to give up all of its urban bases and retreated to the rural areas. From then on until 1934, the CCP occupied part of rural Jiangxi Province in central China while the cities were in the hands of the KMT.
After 1927, the emphasis of the CCP’s work shifted to organizing peasants movements from its rural bases. After leading the Autumn Harvest Uprising in Hunan in 1927, Mao Zedong gradually emerged as one of the most important figures in the CCP. Mao and his comrades set up a soviet-style regime in western part of Jiangxi Province, where Marxist ideas were put into practice. The CCP launched a land-reform movement which was intended to attack the exploitation system and eventually eliminate it. Land reform intended to reduce rent, reallocate land and ensure each peasants household receiving certain piece of land for their cultivation. During this land reform, the CCP stressed that women had the same access to land as men did.

The CCP formulated marriage regulations in 1932 and ultimately developed them into a Marriage Law in 1934. The Marriage Law, as the first in China’s history, proclaimed gender equality in social, economic, political spheres and family life. It attempted to abolish old customs and promoted gender equality in land allocation, freedom of choice in marriage and divorce. There were some particular provisions in the Marriage Law which were designed to protect the interest of divorced women. For example, one of the provision required an ex-husband to cultivate land for his ex-wife until she remarried. The ex-husband had to provide two thirds of the living expenses of his ex-wife and his children, if the custody of the children belonged to the mother (Kazuko 1989 149).

Women in the Jiangxi Soviet were urged to participate in public production. In imperial China, women were not usually engaged in farming, except women in some areas of southern China who were traditionally involved in agricultural production. The Party also called for women’s integration in anti-imperialist and anti-KMT activities. The Party launched education
campaigns to raise the political consciousness of women. Many grass-roots women’s organizations were established and directed by the CCP in order to mobilize women in the revolution.

Considerable progress was made to expand women’s roles in public production as well as the political affairs; however, in reality, the Jiangxi Soviet did not achieve the results it had hoped for. The messages conveyed by land reform and by the Marriage Law were not thoroughly delivered for several reasons: first, it was almost impossible to completely destroy traditional ideas and customs in such short time; second, while the priority of the CCP’s agenda was to unite with as many peasants as possible, the party did not want to create gender conflict, which it was believed would weaken the peasants’ solidarity. The issue of seeking gender equality was always subordinated to the other central tasks of the CCP. For example, in cases of disputed settlement of land and other household property, the Party compromised its principle of gender equality with patriarchal ideas, and the reallocation of property was not equal between men and women. The solidarity of the CCP and the peasants, particularly with the male peasants, was considered as crucial for the revolution, because the CCP’s army was made up of the male peasants.

In 1935, the KMT surrounded the Jiangxi Soviet and almost defeated the army of the CCP. The CCP lost most of its territory and had to give up its liberated base. In order to escape the surrounding KMT, the CCP launched the Long March in October 1934. Around 300,000 members began this extremely difficult journey, and about 30,000 had survived when the army reached the destination in Shanxi in October 1935. Among those remaining, only 33 were women and most of them were the wives of the CCP’s top leaders (Kazuko 1989 150).
In 1937, Japan invaded China and the anti-Japanese War broke out. From 1937 to 1945, the anti-Japanese War became the most urgent task for all Chinese. In the liberated base of Yanan, women were mobilized to integrate into the anti-Japanese War. When men were fighting at the front, women were organized in groups to nurse wounded and sick soldiers at the rear areas. Women also became the mainstay in agricultural production. In order to help women overcome their fear of playing new roles in public affairs and raising their class consciousness, the CCP arranged public meetings and invited women to "speak bitterness" about their hard lives under the control of the KMT and the Japanese army. During this period, it was always women who launched land reform and rent reduction movement in the CCP's liberated areas (McElderry 1973 46; Salaff & Merkie 1973 164).

In December 1937, the CCP and the KMT eventually reached an agreement to stop the civil war and established a united front against the Japanese invaders. With the lessening of hostilities between the CCP and the KMT, some left-wing intellectuals who were inhibited from visiting the liberated areas by the KMT finally went to Yanan. They also brought with them new perspectives about China's revolution as well as about women's movement. Some of them raised their voices to challenge the orthodox position of the CCP on women's issues. The well-known writer Ding Ling discussed the question of women's identity and complained that the CCP did not sufficiently put their principles about women's emancipation in practice. She argued the CCP ignored the special interests of women and failed to realize the deep-rooted sexual oppression of women. Her ideas, however, were dismissed by the CCP as misleading bourgeois ideology which pursued exclusively women's interests without regard to the fundamental transformation of the social and economic structure (Kazuko 1989 67;
McElderry 1973 32–38). The CCP insisted that women achieve genuine equality with men only through class struggle, and that there was no need of separate women’s movement.

Shortly after victory in the anti-Japanese War, the civil war broke out again, despite all attempts to allay the conflicts between the CCP and the KMT. The CCP launched campaigns to mobilize the masses to support their fight with the KMT, who were supplied with more advanced military equipment. In the communist liberated areas, most women remained in the rear and were less directly engaged in the battle. They ran supplies, produced subsistence for the PLA (People’s Liberation Army) and acted as a public health corps.

In 1949, the CCP defeated the KMT and drove Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan. More than several decades of bloodshed and military confrontation in China were finally brought to an end. The People’s Republic of China was established in October, 1949. China’s history turned a new page and women’s lives were to be substantially changed under the transformation of China’s economic, political and social structure after 1949.

Summary: Women in the Revolutionary Period

Judged from the historical process, the advance of social position of Chinese women under the CCP was one of the most remarkable achievements in the revolutionary period. Women participated in agricultural production and integrated themselves into the revolution. Gender equality was claimed as one of the social goals under the CCP’s direction. But women’s emancipation was far away from fulfilment. Here I identify some of the problems of women’s liberation during this period.

During the revolutionary period, a dominant idea among the CCP’s leaders was that,
as long as the general revolution was successful, women's liberation would be automatically achieved and there was no need for a separate women's movement. Kazuko concluded the position of the CCP on women's issues: "Thinking of women's liberation (was) not in terms of the relationship between the two sexes, but rather as being connected to the reform of the whole of society, particular the elimination of landlord" (1989 150). Gender inequality was attributed to class conflict. Sometimes, the Party even downplayed the urgency of fundamental change of gender relations and subordinated this issue to more "crucial" tasks. The revolutionary tasks were seen primarily as political and economic struggle, while the transformation of gender relations were kept in low profile. Most women's associations were not autonomous and were directed by the CCP. Some western researchers even raised their doubts about the CCP's sincerity and commitment to promoting gender equality. They argued that the CCP's propaganda about setting women free from traditional oppression was only an attempt to win women's support and strengthen its power in the revolution (Salaff & Merkie 1973 159).

During this period, the problem of gender inequality which had been deeply rooted in China's pre-revolutionary society was not given adequate attention. The CCP seemed to underestimate the stubbornness of the traditional customs and ideas which perpetuated the unequal gender relationship. Mao Zedong himself recognized that women were additionally subordinate to traditional male authority, besides the oppression under the political authority, the clan authority and religion authority as men were (Siu 1970 152). He assumed, however, that traditional male dominance would be automatically dismantled once the achievement of the general revolution: "As for the clan system, superstition and inequity between men and
women, their abolition will follow as a natural consequence of victory in the political and
economic struggle" (Selected works of Mao Vol.1 46).

Even though women were encouraged to participate in the revolution by the CCP, they were always assigned to perform gender-typed tasks. Not many women were recruited as the soliders in the frontline of the fights. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, of ten comrades in the People's Liberation Army who were honoured as the Generals of PRC, none were women, even though women's contributions to the Liberation were highlighted in the CCP's propaganda. The gender division of labour was perpetuated in the PRC's central government itself. Leith points out that there was "the tendency of the CCP leaders, who were almost all men to confine the women in the Party to women work and women federations, even though some of them ever expressed that they were more interested in military service, not women's issues or activities" (Leith 1973 67). One of the example is Kan Ke-Jing. Even though she had demonstrated her great talent in military work in the revolutionary period and expressed her preference to staying in military affairs, she was allocated to the Women's Department after 1949.

There is no doubt that during the revolutionary period from 1921--1949, Chinese women under the CCP had made progress. Seeking gender equality was acknowledged in the revolution agenda by the CCP, but women's liberation were subordinated to other revolutionary tasks and a separate women's movement was condemned. The redefinition of gender roles during this period was thus incomplete.
Chapter Three: Women and Development in Maoist China

In October 1949, the Chinese Communist Party assumed power and proclaimed the establishment of a socialist China. The CCP declared that it would follow the guideline of Marxism and would also take the social reality of China into account. During the period of 1949--1978, Mao Zedong was the most prominent leader and the final decision-maker in China's socialist development. I will refer to this period as "Maoist China".

Significant change occurred in almost every aspect of China after 1949. In this chapter I intend to discuss what were the effects of the broader economic, social and political transformation on rural women, and whether the implementation of social policies for socialist development in Maoist China brought with them a concomitant rise in the social status of women.

In order to demonstrate how such a broad transformation of the social-economic structure affected the change in the roles of women, I will follow the conventional divisions of contemporary Chinese history. In the following analysis, particular social program or/and policies in each phase will be examined, and their different impact on gender relations will be discussed. This chapter will include four phases and the following is the major policies/programs I will focus on each phase:

2. 1955--1965    Collectivization of Rural Economy, the Great Leap Forward,
                 The Three Hard Years, Reconstruction of the Rural Economy
3. 1965--1969    The Cultural Revolution

1. 1949--1954

The All-China Democratic Women's Federation was founded in March-April, 1949. Since its foundation, it has been the most influential women's organization in China. Under the CCP's leadership, the All-China Women's Federation and its local branches strictly followed the Party's policies and carried them out among women. The establishment of the women's federations represented a symbolic change in the social position of women. It conveyed a message to the nation that women were equal with men in the new regime and encouraged women to play more active roles in public affairs (Croll 1978 202; Hemmel & Sindberg 1984 8).

From the beginning, the new regime expressed its commitment to destroying the traditional institutions and values which oppressed women in both the private and public spheres (Croll 1978 323; Kazuko 1989 166; Davin 1991 32). The State made enormous efforts in trying to bring an end to the brutal behaviour toward women. Cases of violence against women, buying and selling of women dropped sharply after 1949. The custom of women's foot-binding in some rural areas was abolished completely. Prostitution and concubinage were forbidden. The State was also concerned about women's needs in health care. Medical care for women in rural areas was increased considerably. Medical programs sponsored by the central government, such as re-training midwives and setting up maternity stations, helped to reduce maternal and infant mortality. Due to the lack of medical supplies and personnel, folk
practices were still prevalent in remote rural communities in the early stage of post-revolutionary China (Davin 1978 132).

In the early days of the PRC, the first and also most profound efforts in promoting gender equality were from the perspective of legislation. The Marriage Law was the first law passed in the National People's Congress in 1950, and was designed to liberate women from "feudal" oppression. The Marriage Law outlined some significant changes regarding marriage and family relationships. Under the Marriage Law, marriage was defined as a voluntary union between a man and a woman. It declared that no parental interference occur in establishing a marriage and no money could be exchanged. The traditional practice of adopting child-wives and concubines was outlawed. Women's rights to property and inheritance were established and were protected by the Law. Minimum ages for marriage were specified: for men, no less than 20; for women no less than 18. Marriage and divorce were legalized, and the principals were required to obtain licenses from an official bureau (Sheriden & Saleff 1984 6).

During 1950--1951, the implementation of the Marriage Law aroused more public attention in cities than that in rural areas. During that time, in the countryside, the implementation of the Marriage Law was subordinated to another more "crucial" task--land reform. In the land reform movement, private property of landlords and rich peasants was confiscated. Land and other means of production were redistributed among peasant households. Most of the village officials were too busy with the local land reform movement to tackle the issues of the new Marriage Law. The implementation of the Marriage Law was subsumed under land reform in some ways, but the land reform brought about fundamental changes in production relationships and created a positive environment for promoting gender
equality in rural areas. In 1952, Deng Yingchao concluded that "Land reform has a most far-reaching effect on the political, economic, social and domestic status of women and of course, on their outlook as well" (Croll 1978 239; Hou & Li 1988 138).

After land reform, at least theoretically, both adult men and women of households had an equal share of land and other family property. This was, however, more a formality than reality: the peasant household remained the basic economic unit, the head of household was typically male, and the ownership of the land was most likely under his name. Since family structure retained many of its traditional forms (Parish 1975 613; Parish & Whyte 1978 236; Croll 1978 329--330), women's entitlement to land in law was not realized in practice and traditional gender roles in the household economy persisted.

When land reform was completed, more attention was paid to the implementation of the new slightly modified Marriage Law (1951) in rural areas. In 1953, the Party promoted an extensive education campaign for the new "Marriage Law" nationwide. Women's rights on marriage and family lives were asserted in rural areas. The old attitudes which discriminated against women were criticized as "feudal ideas". Before 1949, traditional ideology tolerated men who had more than one wife and men abandoned their wives rather frequently. It was a revolutionary idea in the Marriage Law that women had the rights to divorce their husbands. One of the most significant outcomes of this campaign was a soaring divorce rate, and over 75% of the divorces were brought about by women. For a while, the Marriage Law was called the "divorce law" by people (Kazuko 1989 180; Johnson 1983 Chapter 10).

Even though there was legal recognition and strong support from the Party, women in rural areas met with more difficulties than their sisters in urban areas when they appealed for
divorces. It was said that women in villages had to pass three obstacles when they sought divorces: their husbands, their parents-in-law and the village cadres. There were some reasons why women in rural areas met more resistance when they appealed for divorces. Before 1949, most marriages in rural areas were arranged by parents and match-makers; and the exchange of marriage gifts was essential. The groom and his family were often asked to pay certain amounts of money or contribute some goods to the bride's family as brideprice. For poor peasants, acquiring wives probably cost them all the saving of their families and resulted in a great debt. During the implementation of the Marriage Law, men were reluctant to accept the idea that their wives were granted the right of divorce. Thus, it frequently occurred that husbands and their parents tried to prevent wives from appealing for divorce. At the same time, the influence of kinship ties remained very strong. Many local cadres were kinsmen of male peasants and they showed their sympathy to the men. Sometimes they even assisted husbands to persuade their wives to give up their ideas of divorce, or to "educate" these women to sacrifice their individual interests for so-called "socialist consolidation". In some radical situations, village officials abused their power and made up some materials as the "supplement of marriage law" in order to set up more barriers against women's appeals for divorce. In many cases when women appealed for divorces, they were intimidated, beaten or even killed by their husbands, their parents-in-law or kinsmen (Salaff & Merkie 1973 165--168; Kazuko 1989 181; Johnson 1983 126).

Despite local reservations concerning the implementation of the policy, the divorce rate was still dramatically rising, largely due to the promulgation of this new Marriage Law. The Party became very concerned about the possibility that the rising divorce rate would have
chaotic consequence and jeopardise the new regime. In the second half of 1953, the Party stated that the granting divorce by the People’s Court should follow rules more strictly and that more mediation be required before the termination of marriage. With this shift of policy in the second half of 1953, the number of divorce cases granted by the People’s court declined significantly. Some local women’s federations were criticized by the authorities for abusing their power by exclusively supporting women’s rights, even implying that women’s oppression was partly attributed to men. Some of them were accused of turning the Marriage Law into a "women’s law".

In traditional China, marriage was primarily a family matter, a concern for the families of the bride and groom rather than the two principals. After 1949, however, the Chinese government transformed this perception and enunciated the position that marriage united public and private interests. The CCP suggested that marriage was not a totally private issue because men and women were constituent members of the state and the family was a "cell of society" (Merjer 1971 77-78; Kazuko 1989 179). Ocko argues that even the 1950 Marriage Law admitted marriage as "personal property", but in practice, marriage continued to be treated as "social property" (1991 314). He believes that the position of the CCP on marriage and family life remained constant in the following 30 years, in which "marriage has to be considered as social property, for it was the precondition for the formation of families and families promoted social cohesion and stability through their socialization of children" (Ocko 1991 320).

During the period between 1951--1954, land reform and the Marriage Law education campaign were used to attack the patriarchal family system in China. Women’s interests in marriage and family life were protected by legislation and women could literally get equal
access to land and other means of production as men did. During this period, substantial progress was made toward gender equality. But these two campaigns did not eliminate the attitudes and behaviour which discriminated against women or complete the redefinition of gender roles within the so called "socialist context". The family structure of peasants' households was retained (Parish 1975 616; Saleff & Merkie 1973 165) and "customary family relationships have persisted" (Sheridan & Saleff 1984 6). The CCP upheld its position that reforming marriage, family life and seeking gender equality should not interfere with the interests of the State. Even though the CCP displayed its determination to pursue gender equality, it seemed willing to compromise its promises for gender equality in order to avoid the high cost of it. The modification of divorce regulations after late 1953 indicated that the Party held back in its efforts to promote further progress on gender equality when the disruption threatened by the attempts were presented (Johnson 1983 217; Davin 1991 31).

2. 1955--1965 Collectivization Period

(1) 1955--1957: Collectivization of the Rural Economy

Land reform destroyed landlord–tenant exploitation and highly motivated peasants' enthusiasm in agricultural production. In cities, the socialization of private enterprises was completed by 1956. The CCP stated that the process of "socialist transformation" was virtually completed and from 1955 China would enter "socialist construction" period (Mersner 1977 125).

Greatly influenced by the Soviet Union's model of socialist development, the CCP believed that the crucial condition for establishing socialist agriculture was collectivization.
The peasants were called on to voluntarily organize cooperatives. In traditional agricultural production in many rural areas, there had always been some kind of labour-exchange among peasants' households at harvest time. To some extent, the co-ops and the mutual aid teams promoted by the CCP in the 1950s could be seen as the continuity of this traditional division of labour. After land reform, each household was allocated a piece of land. Because of limited resources and means of production, ownership of tools and animals was often shared by several households. Based on co-ops and mutual aid teams, peasants from different households coordinated their labour, tools and animals in their production. Initially, most of these small-scale co-ops and mutual aid teams were organized by the peasants and their relatives. Work was measured by work-points, which was the basis for income distribution after harvest time. Work-points were decided on by the characteristics of the jobs themselves, including different levels of skill and efforts required to perform them. The tools which were brought into collective production by individual household were also calculated as worth a set number of work points.

In the process of collectivization, women were seen to have great potential in the public sphere of production by the State. The CCP firmly believed that the independent economic roles of women would improve their social status after the elimination of the exploitation system (Saleff & Merkie 1973 168-169; Whyte 1984 208). The central government thus urged women to participate in economic production. The local administration also set up literacy classes and courses on farm work for women in the countryside, helping them to master some farming skills. By 1952, 60% of rural women participated in agricultural production. During the period of 1953--1957, more than 120 million rural women were involved in collective
work. In 1956, 25% of the total workpoints allocated by the co-operatives all over the country were earned by women (Funu Bao 9 Oct. 1989). This indicates the high involvement of rural women in public production.

In September 1957, the Third National People’s Congress promoted the "Five Good (Virtues) Socialist Women" campaign, which encouraged women to "build up the country economically, manage the household thriftily, and struggle for socialist construction" (Hemmel & Sindbjerg 1984 9). There were five criteria for the model of "Socialist Women": 1. being good at thrifty and industrious management of the household; 2. being good at mutual aid producing; 3. being good at bringing up children; 4. being good at promoting hygiene and health; 5. being good at studying. The campaign was intended to promote new roles for women in socialist countries. It was emphasized that women’s commitment to family should not interfere with their commitment to the State and the collective work. Many attempts were made by the CCP to raise women’s "class consciousness" and to inspire their enthusiasm in production.

During this period, such campaigns for the re-definition of gender roles were far from full-fledged. In public production, women were still discriminated against (Parish 1975 618). The work points system in collective work was decided rigidly by sex and age. The average work points for men were 7-9 points per day, while women only received 6-7 work points (Davin 1979 190). Women’s share of work in private plots was greater than their share in collective work. It was easier for women working in private plots to combine their housework with production. It was also because the lower pay in collective work discouraged the full involvement of women.
Any mention of women at work was referred to as directly producing surplus value, but unpaid housework was still primarily shouldered by women. The CCP did not recognize the unequal division of labour between the sexes as men still did not share housework. This seemed to fit into the usual pattern of socialist countries on the issues of redefinition of gender roles. As Whyte suggests "in the socialist bloc countries, no serious efforts were made to get men to help out around the house, comparable to the major efforts devoted to getting women out into the work forces" (1984 210). In China, it was elder women who played a significant role in liberating young women from domestic chores and therefore able to become full-time production workers (Wolf 1985 215). The CCP assumed that raising women's class consciousness would help them solve their individual problems. Women who could not handle their responsibilities in the private and public spheres were regarded as lacking in socialist spirit (Croll 1978 290). In reality, however, it was difficult, if not impossible, for women to live up to all five criteria and meet the standards of "socialist women".

(2) Great Leap Forward 1958--1959

During 1958--1959, the CCP launched the "Great Leap Forward" campaign. The small-scale collectivization of co-ops and mutual aid teams of the early 1950s was criticized as too slow to meet China's socialist development. The State decided to accelerate the process of collectivization and the People Commune system was established. Mao suggested that the advantage of commune system was that it combined "industry, agriculture, commerce, education and military affairs, thus making the tasks of leadership easier" (Liu & Wu 1986 233).

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access to land and other means of production as men did. During this period, substantial progress was made toward gender equality. But these two campaigns did not eliminate the attitudes and behaviour which discriminated against women or complete the redefinition of gender roles within the so called "socialist context". The family structure of peasants' households was retained (Parish 1975 616; Saleff & Merkie 1973 165) and "customary family relationships have persisted" (Sheridan & Saleff 1984 6). The CCP upheld its position that reforming marriage, family life and seeking gender equality should not interfere with the interests of the State. Even though the CCP displayed its determination to pursue gender equality, it seemed willing to compromise its promises for gender equality in order to avoid the high cost of it. The modification of divorce regulations after late 1953 indicated that the Party held back in its efforts to promote further progress on gender equality when the disruption threatened by the attempts were presented (Johnson 1983 217; Davin 1991 31).

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During the Great Leap Forward, peasants were obliged to join communes, otherwise
they would be charged as "backward elements". A People's Commune typically included ten to twenty thousand households. The input of tools from individual peasants household to the Commune was no longer counted as one of the criteria in income distribution because all tools and lands were considered public property (Ocko 1991 314). The payment to peasants was based only on the amount of their labour in production (Odgen 1989 47).

In the early 1950s, exploitation in the economic sphere and "feudal" ideas were identified as the roots of unequal gender relations. During the Great Leap Forward period, the existence of small-scale production was seen as the foundation of patriarchal system. The People's Commune was expected to weaken the economic function of individual households and thus reduce the economic basis for patriarchal relations within the household (Croll 1978 276). To eliminate the economic function of peasant households was perceived as a vital step in promoting equal gender relations by the State.

The State suggested that the People's Commune provided an excellent opportunity for women to work full time in public activities because their establishment was expected to redefine women's roles. First of all, the People's Commune would expand employment for women. With the introduction of double rice-cropping in many areas, more labour was needed in farm work. While at the same time, with the considerable development of "socialist construction" in urban and rural areas, many men in villages were recruited for construction projects, such as irrigation and flood prevention. While men were away, women took over agricultural production. According to Croll's estimate (1985 27), during the Great Leap Forward, a great demand for women's labour resulted in 90% of women in rural areas working in public production. In the People's Commune, the administrations began to issue payment
directly to women who did the work, not to the heads of the households who were typically male. The change in the way of payment was believed to stimulate women’s enthusiasm in production. Besides more employment opportunities for women in production in the commune, there were also more public services created to lessen women’s domestic chores. It was proposed by the communes that the socialization of some household work, such as day-care, nurseries and public canteens would help women free from domestic tasks and allow them to devote more energy to public production.

The People’s Communes adopted a series of strategies which attempted to re-define gender roles. The establishment of People’s Communes was often improving rural women’s social status more rhetorically than actually. While in public production, even though women’s entry into social production on a large scale and individual receipt of wages were expected to promote the economic independence of women, the actual amount women earned fell below that of men. The gender-segregated division of labour seemed unchanged. Whenever new projects of capital construction required more labour, it was men who were recruited and the agricultural production was left to women. The policy of "Equal Pay for Equal Work" met the most difficulty when it was applied to rural economy. The reason that women did not deserve equal pay was justified in such way that women did not do the same work as men did. The traditional lower assessment of women’s work basically still prevailed (Hemmel & Sindbjerg 1984 27; Croll 1978 284-285; Parish 1975 618).

Another rising problem left for women to encounter during the Great Leap Forward was their weakened earning power, particularly after the rigid restriction on cash-generating private production. It is estimated that in 1956--1957, before the introduction of commune system,
income earned from private plots ranged from 15% of peasants’ annual income in north China to 30% in south China (Parish 1975 618). Usually, women’s work made up a significant part in cash-generating sideline production. Since the introduction of the People’s Communes and the strict State-planning economy, commercial activities in rural areas were suppressed. The private sector of the household economy which was always taken care by women, such as livestock raising and small handicraft production, were condemned as production with a "capitalist tail". After the start of the commune system, women lost their autonomy in arranging their roles in public and private production.

In most of the People Communes, public services designed to alleviate women’s domestic chores were shut down before long, either because of the mis-management of these services or simply because some communes could not afford these services which were formerly performed by women without pay. The socialization of housework in rural areas turned out to be short-lived.

During this period, the All-China Democratic Women’s Federation changed its name into "the National Women’s Federation". The basic level of women’s organizations in rural area was in communes. These women’s organizations were directed by the CCP as a vehicle to implement the Party’s policies, and they lacked autonomy (Croll 1983 123; Zhang 1992 45). The central government required at least one woman be seated in the administrative position in the production team, brigade and commune, but it was only a token role. These women were most likely to be assigned to women work and few women were actually in key positions in the power structure. Women admitted to Party membership or women posted in government organizations lagged behind the increasing number of women in production. Overall, women
did not make comparable progress in the power hierarchy despite increasing involvement in production.

(3) 1959--1961: The Three Hard Years

The period of 1959--1961 constituted a disastrous three years in the history of the PRC. Numerous people in rural areas starved to death because of poor harvests for two consecutive years. Chinese officials attributed the collapse of agricultural production to many factors, such as natural calamities and the withdrawal of technicians and equipment by the Soviet Union, resulting from the intensified Sino-Soviet ideological and political conflicts. Another major factor which can not be denied was the mismanagement of the People’s Communes. Some of the strategies adopted in the commune system did not work well. The CCP expected to improve productivity by inspiring peasant class consciousness and developing their loyalty to the country, but this approach to spiritual reward did not successfully motivate peasants.

During the economic difficulties during these three years, the Party’s policy on women was modified. In the Great Leap Forward, with the shortage of labour force, women were encouraged to participate in public production as full-time labour. In the three difficult years, because of the shrinking of construction projects in both urban and rural areas, male peasants who previously occupied with grand construction projects, came back to the villages and took the place of women in agricultural production. Women’s roles in collective work were further discouraged by the demise of many public services of the People Commune. Women were urged to take care of all their responsibilities in both the public and private realms properly by themselves: "Collective production should be women’s main occupation, and the secondary domestic occupations should be carried out during their spare time, on holidays and during the
slack farming seasons" (China Women 1962 No.2). This document seems to suggest that women were suppose to sacrifice their spare time for housework as a perfect solution for their dual roles. Given the fact that rural women shouldered such a heavy burden as housework, without community services, they were more likely to retreat to the private sphere and let men take their place in the collective production.

(4) 1962–1965 Reconstruction of the Rural Economy

After the Great Leap Forward, some of the radical features of the People’s Commune were abolished and new development strategies were introduced. The process of decision-making in agricultural production was transferred from the commune level down to the brigade and then to the production team level. While the rural economy was still based on collective production, some new policies were introduced to revive production. The previous restrictions on private plots were relaxed and peasants were more autonomous in their sideline and cash-crop production, free markets reappeared. This period was characterized by the tendency to promote private enterprises in which the principles of profitability was emphasized and material reward was applied in production once again. The economic function of the individual household was also restored to some extent.

During this period, the government proposed the following concrete provisions aimed to protect women’s interests: a) During menstruation, pregnancy and child-birth, women were protected from heavy work; b) Women were granted 56 days maternity leave with full pay; c) There was free medical examination for pregnant women; d) Women were allocated to lighter work in the last month of pregnancy; e) Women’s nursing and child feeding during work-time were no pay-reduction. These provisions were intended to protect women, but they
also brought an unexpected negative impact on women in the labour force. In the document, it was emphasized that the division of labour should take into account women's "physiological characteristics, physical strength and technical standard". Consequently, women were more likely to be assigned to traditional women's work. The gender-segregated division of labour was rationalized in the name of protecting women and the discrimination against women's work was perpetuated. In rural areas, women's work and men's work were rated differently. Even for doing the same jobs, men and women obtained different work points. In collective production, men were regarded as the superior labour to women, and men's work were more remunerative.

During the period between 1962 and 1965, social policies which favoured later marriage were proposed. Women were encouraged to have fewer children and postpone their age of marriage until the late twenties. In 1964, Premier Zhou Enlai made a speech about the linkage of birth control, health of women and children (Davin 1992 98). Various means of contraception were introduced and health seminars were held to educate people that contraception was not harmful. Numerous commissions for promoting birth control were established in the provinces. It was still women, however, who were supposed by the State to be responsible for birth control (Wolf 1985 251, 258).

In post-revolutionary China, the traditional marriage pattern was persistent in many aspects. When women married, they moved away from their natal families to their parents-in-law's houses. In his study on the marriage and mobility in one commune in the Chengdu Plain, Sichuan Province, Lavely strongly argues that "the economic arrangement of the collective encouraged patrilocal marriage and have generally discouraged neolocal or uxorilocal
unions" (Lavely 1991 287). Peasants’ families did not count on girls as permanent family members or valued women’s labour as much as that of men’s. The preference of boys still appeared in cities, but it was much more prevalent in rural areas. This difference in the preference of son between cities and the countryside can be attributed to several reasons. First, it is because of the unequal estimate of man and woman in agricultural production. Since men’s work was rated higher than women’s work, it became a general pattern described by Parish in this way: "The more able-bodied labourers a family has--particularly male labourers--the more (the family) will earn" (1975 616). Another reason was the different welfare systems for senior residents in rural and urban China. The welfare system in rural areas provided far less support for rural residents compared to most of cities residents who were employed in state-run enterprises. In rural areas, most of the elderly parents still had to rely on their children’s support. While girls were most likely to marry out of the family, "the support for parents with girls is more uncertain than that for parents with boys...It is little wonder, then, that many parents would prefer to simply have sons" (Parish 1975 625). It is believed that genuine equality between the two genders cannot exist unless the man’s labour-power is no longer the most important means of subsistence.

Conclusion:

Between 1955 and 1965, the collective economy went through different stages. Collective production was the dominant economic pattern in rural areas until the late 1970s. It had a significant impact on the lives of rural women. During this period, women were encouraged to be fully engaged in the public production most of the time. At some time,
women were also pressed to withdraw from the labour force at times of excess labour supply in public production.

During this period, the CCP contended that all the unequal gender relations was a temporary phenomenon due to the backwardness economic production and the "feudal" ideology of male supremacy. It seemed to the Chinese leaders that the transformation of the mode of the production would bring about changes in the traditional social norms, and gender equality would be automatically fulfilled. While the State did genuinely intend to introduce a social program for improving women's social status, it did not anticipate the possibility that some of the social policies would maintain or reinforce old forms of gender inequality, and some even create new forms.

3. The Cultural Revolution 1966--1969

The long tension among the CCP’s leaders on the propositions of socialist development led to an extensive political struggle in the late 1960s. The practical, less orthodox Marxist development strategies adopted after the Great Leap Forward were replaced by Mao’s more radical development approach, characterized by the slogan "Politics in Command", and identified class struggle as the basic method for the transformation of Chinese society. While the development approach which emphasized economic growth during the rural economic reconstruction period was condemned in the late 1960s, the political and ideological transformation was asserted as the primary agenda by Mao, who claimed it was necessary to launch another political campaign to "revolutionize" people’s thoughts and belief system in order to resist the "capitalist restoration"(Mao 1966 634).
During this period, development policies singularly emphasized ideological cohesion and considered enhancing proletarian consciousness through class struggle as the means for developing socialist China. When people were required to identify themselves with their class associates, gender as another important social category was virtually neglected. "Women's point of view" was simply charged as "capitalist ideology". The Women's Federation was suspended in early 1967 probably because of the disagreement among female elites on women's issues.

The suspension of the Women's Federation did not mean the end of the CCP's concern with gender issues. During the Cultural Revolution, the Party conceived of women's issues from another perspective (Croll 1978 306). While in previous periods, the low level of production force and remnant feudal ideas were identified as the major obstacles for achieving gender equality, in the Cultural Revolution, it was increasingly asserted that the low proletarian consciousness of women was the major barrier for further gender equality. The ideal model of "socialist women" shifted from primarily concerning women's role in economic production to much more emphasis on their political performance. The role models for females in the mass media were most likely to be depicted as political leaders. One of the phenomena during this period was the "desexualization" of women's images. Women's domestic roles as mothers or wives were downplayed and women's centrality in uterine family roles were criticized as backward, selfish or narrow-minded. Women were asked to be exactly like men in all social spheres. Traditional gender typed works were challenged. Women were encouraged to form "iron girls" teams or take some typical "men's work" in order to demonstrate that there was no absolute gender division of labour. As women improved their class consciousness that they
could overcome any difficulties.

During the Cultural Revolution, the most distinguished approach for the CCP to promote women's social status was to increase the political recruitment of women in the rural administrative bureau. The representativeness of female leaders in national and local political organizations rose to the highest point in PRC's history. But much of these rising numbers of women's posting in the power structure was token (Croll 1978 315, Johnson 1983 186). Thus, even though there were more women appearing in the power system, these women were primarily identified as "poor and lower middle class peasants" and they did not represent women's specific interests. They also were consistently subordinated to the male-dominated power structure. There was still not much say for women as an interest group in power system.

While women were required to expand their public roles further, the existing burden on their shoulders was not alleviated. Given the enormous workload in collective production and household chores of rural women, they could hardly meet the demand to play more active roles in political activities, particularly for those married women. But the party did not take seriously the practical problems of women. It repeated that if women possessed proletarian revolutionary consciousness, they could fully handle all of their responsibilities without complain. (Croll 1978 314; Johnson 1983 180).

The Cultural Revolution was based in the big cities and the "actual impact of Cultural Revolution on rural women and the family was far less than the rhetoric and tenor of the times suggest" (Johnson 1983 178). During the peak of the Cultural Revolution, youth were called to destroy ancestral tablets and were encouraged to challenge the bureaucratic authority (Parish
But fundamentally, the Cultural Revolution did not touch on women’s problems which were embedded in the traditional power hierarchy in rural China. Women’s inferior social status was not attributed to gender inequality but merely to class inequality.

Rural lives had lagged behind the ideas promoted in the Cultural Revolution. Johnson concluded that "Rather than focusing on real, cultural and structural reforms that could help equalize women’s position with men in the private realm and make the terms of their public participation more equal, the Cultural Revolution insisted that the tension women faced could be solved or overcome once women adopted a self-sacrificing proletarian attitude and devotion to their public duties" (Johnson 1983 188). It was just symbolic progress for women’s social status in the Cultural Revolution when more women leaders appeared in the power system and more heroines were portrayed in the propaganda. The Cultural Revolution did not attach much importance to the gender relations or substantially enhance the social status of women as a social group.


The first and also the most violent part of the Cultural Revolution ended in 1969. There followed a series of power struggle in China’s central government. Lin Biao, who was the principal leader during the Cultural Revolution, and who was also recognized as Mao’s chosen successor, organized a coup and attempted to grasp Mao’s dominant position in the CCP. When the coup was discovered, Lin and his associates hastily fled on an ill-prepared plane which crashed in Mongolia. After Lin Biao’s fall, the central government was re-established
and some politicians went through ups and downs in their political lives, such as Deng Xiaoping, the most influential leader after 1978. With the removal of some long time leaders, there emerged some new faces in China’s central government. The most important political figures during the post Cultural Revolution period were the so called "Gang of Four"-- Wang Hongwen, Chang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Jiang Qing. After 1976, they were accused of a variety of offences and the policies that they formulated were seen to be responsible for the lack of economic progress after 1966. Their fall allowed the re-emergence of Deng Xiaoping and the new development trajectory.

In the immediate post Cultural Revolution period, Mao’s concept of China’s socialist development remained dominant. During this period, the anti-Lin Biao and anti-Confucian movement occurred, which was presumed to reform traditional family value and promote socialist moral system. The issues of family lives, marriage and gender relations which were neglected during the Cultural Revolution were given new attention in this campaign.

In the anti-Lin Biao and anti-Confucian campaign, the official media admitted that a genuine sexual equality in socialist China has not been fulfilled yet. In 1972, the widow of Sun Yat-sen, Soong Ching Ling, a prominent female leader in China, made an important speech and acknowledged that there still remained gender inequality in China. She pointed out that unequal gender relations in rural areas were revealed in different aspects, which included women’s low pay in public production, the preference of son and the continuity of bride price in marriage, and unequal gender-segregated division of labour (Soong 1972 2). Her account clearly presented a modification of the radical ideas in Cultural Revolution which identified women only in class category while gender interests were virtually neglected.
During this campaign, the failure to create new gender relations with the changed social system was attributed to the "remnant of the Confucian ideology advocating male supremacy and the division of labour into the domestic and public sphere and the persistence of old habits and customs underlying the discrimination against women was a reflection of the influence of the old ruling ideology" (Croll 1978 323). In an interview with the American writer Edgar Snow, Mao Zedong explicitly said that the preference of son in rural China was due to backward "feudal ideology and the traditional patrilineal structure" of the peasantry. Traditional Confucian ideology was identified as the major cause of existing unequal gender relations.

The anti-Confucian campaign attempted to combine both women's special interests and class interests. The Party indicated clearly that women's inferiority to men rested on a social foundation rather on a biological one. It strongly opposed Confucian texts which justified unequal gender relations as natural phenomenon. Women were urged to learn their own history and study the stories of heroines in order to improve their self-esteem. Women were expected to be able to do the same thing as men did with their raising class consciousness as men (Croll 1978 323).

During this period, some attention was also paid to women's practical problems, which were totally ignored in the Cultural Revolution. Redefinition of gender roles was emphasized in both public and private spheres during this campaign. It was not until this time that the Party urged men to share the household equally with their wives (Davin 1978 130). Women were also encouraged to take some traditional men's work in public production (Hemmel 27). The division of labour in both private and public realms were challenged in this campaign.
Later marriage and birth control received more attention and public health facilities for women were improved by the State.

One of the most significant changes in the gender issues during this campaign was to encourage matrilocal marriage. The major reason for promoting matrilocal marriage was the convenience of the implementation of birth control policy. It seemed easier to persuade women to accept birth control policies when they continued to live with their natal families instead of moving to their parents-in-laws'. It was assumed if the couple settled down in the bride’s natal house, there was less pressure for women to accept planned pregnancies. Despite enormous propaganda, most of the old custom and value lasted consistently. A patrilocal marriage was still prevailing in rural areas.

The anti-Lin Biao and anti-Confucian campaign indeed provided a different perspective to understand unequal gender relations in the context of socialist China. It was the first time since the early 1950s Marriage Law that women were as a special group in society. This campaign, however, did not effectively promote gender equality in rural areas. There are at least two important factors to explain this situation. First of all, the campaign was only intensively carried out in big cities and aroused only minor response in rural areas. Secondly, the political game played behind the screen by the "Gang of Four" and the abstract interpretations of the classical Confucian text books seemed far beyond the common peasants’ understanding (Johnson 1983 199).
Summary: Women in Mao’s China

From 1949-1978, women in rural China experienced enormous social changes. There is no doubt that the social status of women improved significantly. In the early years of the PRC, women’s social position was established through the implementation of the Marriage Law and Land Reform. Gender equality was highly promoted in the CCP’s agenda. In the collectivization stage, women were encouraged to participate in agricultural production as full-time labourers while the state attempted to socialize household work. During the Cultural Revolution, women’s roles in political affairs were emphasized and women were encouraged to improve their class consciousness. In the anti-Lin Biao and anti-Confucian campaign, the accounts of women’s inferiority in the Confucian textbooks were criticized and women were urged to raise their self-esteem. The unequal division of labour in the domestic sphere was called into question.

It is certain that gender equality was not realized. The development strategies adopted in Maoist China did not bring about women’s liberation as was promised. In the process of pursuing equality with men in all spheres, women in China seemed to meet similar barriers to those their sisters did in other socialist countries. Women’s expanded roles in production did not enhance their social position, and their bargaining power in the process of decision-making in both public and private spheres were not enhanced substantially. Women were still at the bottom of the political hierarchy. The acknowledgement of women’s equality with men in all spheres, in legislation, were not effectively implemented in practice. In Maoist China, women in China were still the inferior gender in society.
Mao Zedong died in 1976. Subsequently, there followed a series of political struggles for the leadership in China's central government. With the repudiation of the "Gang of Four" and the removal of Hua Guo-feng's "whatever faction", which claimed to follow whatever policies Mao had made and to carry out whatever instructions Mao had issued, Deng Xiaoping finally reassumed his dominant position in the central government. The Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Party in 1978 became a turning point in the PRC's history. Since then, the long-standing development model associated with Mao Ze-dong, which focused on ideological transformation, has been replaced by more pragmatic policies. Under the influence of Deng Xiaoping, socialist principles and Marxist-Leninism are still proclaimed as the guidelines in China's development. However, Chinese characteristics are urged to be taken more into consideration when the doctrine of Marxist-Leninism is applied to China. China's underdeveloped productive forces, large population and vast regional disparities are recognized as the crucial factors in government policy-making.

Under this new direction, developing China's forces of production (the economy) and improving people's living standard are identified as the primary tasks in the CCP's agenda. Class struggle is no longer perceived as a major means to accelerate China's socialist construction. The development model in Post-Maoist period indicates that decentralization and the gradual establishment of "market-socialism" is the key for the economic progress. The State attempts to abolish the absolute egalitarian distribution system, often called the "iron rice bowl", which means that everyone eats out of the same pot regardless of their output in
production. The new economic policies in Post-Maoist China emphasize profit and efficiency, in which material incentives are gradually adopted in the economic activities.

The new development strategies have brought about tremendous change in rural China. It is suggested here that the new development policies have also led to some significant change in gender relations. In this chapter, I attempt to elaborate on the impacts which Post-Maoist development policies have had on rural women since 1978. First of all, I will outline the official ideas on women's issues and the position of promoting gender equality in current development agenda. Later, from two perspectives, namely the legislative dimension and the economic reform policies, I try to illustrate the impact of the socio-economic transformation since 1978 on women's liberation in China today.

1. The CCP's Position on Women's Issues in Post-Maoist China

Official ideas on women's issues under the new development framework reveal a continuity of the dominant position in Maoist China in some aspects, while differences in other aspects between them are significant. In Maoist China, seeking gender equality was always proclaimed as an integral part in China's revolution and re-definition of gender roles was seen as one of the goals in China's socialist construction. Despite the occasional deviation and different emphases on women's issues in various stages from 1949--1976, which I described in the last chapter, the dominant ideas had always been to encourage women to participate in production and to play more active roles in political affairs. Even though it has been strongly argued that the CCP sometimes held back in its effort to implement its proclaimed principles of gender equality in practices, women's liberation was always included
on the development agenda. A separate women's movement, however, had been assumed as unnecessary.

In Post-Maoist China, the official ideas on women's issues seem to continue this version in some aspects. A feminist perspective on women's liberation is still disapproved and women's emancipation is conceived to be determined by the level of socio-economic development. The view presented by Hou Di, representative of All-China Women's Federation and Li Hong, professor in Beijing University, can be seen as the CCP's position on women's issues:

"The national plan for socio-economic development serves the interests of the entire population; and so everyone, including women, is motivated to work together for the common cause of economic and social development. That is too say, in socialist China, the interests of women are the same as those of the nations and the rest of the population. It is, therefore, impossible as well as unnecessary to separate indicators for women's development from the common indicators for the entire population specified in the State plan. Whether certain women-oriented indicators should be included in future, is closely related to other factors such as the level of economic, political, scientific and cultural development" (Hou Di & Li Hong 1988 136).

Jiang Zemin, the General Secretary of the CCP and the President of the PRC, enunciated the CCP's position on women's issues on the International Working Women's Day, March 8th 1990.

"Women's liberation is a historical process, the degree of women's liberation not only depended on the level of socio-economic development, but is also intimately linked to the non-economic, ideological sphere... Without the leadership of the Communist Party and without the guarantees of the socialist system, there is no way that women's liberation could exist" (Renmin Ribao March 8th 1990).

The long-standing woman leader, Luo Qing, who is in charge of women's affairs in China,
reiterated this official position on women in March 8th, 1992. She stressed that as long as China remains in the primary stage of socialism, the problem of gender inequality will persist. Thus, the interests of women, along with those of everyone else, always depend on the success of the central tasks, such as economic construction (Luo qing 1992 Seeking Truth No.5 19--23).

The continuity of the CCP’s position on women’s issues from the Maoist era to the Post-Maoist era is clear. The official ideas maintain that women’s interests are identical with the rest of the population and there is no need for a separate women’s movement or separate criteria to measure the progress of women in society. It is insisted that the fundamental change of the unequal gender relations should be based on the socialist system, while the process of women’s liberation be determined by the socio-economic development and ideological construction in China. In Post-Maoist China, however, perceptions of women’s liberation and approaches to promoting gender equality vary greatly in some aspects from that in the Maoist era, despite the continuities mentioned above.

In Maoist China, while women’s primary roles were typically identified as their roles in economic production and for some times in political participation, women’s familial roles and the biological difference between the sexes were always de-emphasized. It was assumed that once women attained economic independence and improved their proletarian consciousness, gender equality would be realized. In Maoist China, the most famous manifestation of Mao’s perception on women’s social position were that "Women hold up half of the sky in China" and "Whatever male comrade can do, female comrade can do too".

In Post-Maoist China, the official position on gender roles is revealed in a different
way. Some of the notions on gender issues in the Maoist period are modified. Women’s familial roles are re-emphasized. In the official publication of All-China Women’s Federation Women of China, it was declared that:

"The role of a virtuous wife and a loving mother should be valued. Since men and women are born to be different, they have different roles in society. A woman should be a good wife, mother and homemaker first, and then a participant in the work force... A ideal modern woman should balance her career and family life well...A women should take up double burden" (Wang Xiaoming 1987 March 18).

This seems to suggest that the difference between men and women is based on their biological characteristics. This perception about the fundamental difference along gender line becomes prevalent again, which leads to a rather dramatic change of women’s roles in the labour force, as I will discuss later.

In Maoist China, unequal gender relations were generally attributed to "feudal remnant", and sometimes to the low level of material production and/or women’s low proletarian ideology. In Post Maoist China, even though the notion of "Lack of education is the root of sexual inequality" (Wang Xiao-Ming 1987 March 18) becomes more emphasized, "feudal remnants" are continuously identified as the reason for the perpetuation of gender inequality in China. It is presumed that raising women’s education level will help them to break down and shatter the feudal remnants. In the National Women’s Congress held from September 1st to 6th, 1988, which was an attempt to raise women’s educational level, the All-China Women’s Federation promoted the spirit of Four-Selves for women: self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement. These four-Selves are regarded as the criteria for ideal Chinese women in the wave of the reform. The rising of women’s education level is addressed as the crucial for promoting women’s social status.
Even though a feminist perspective is still discredited in the official study of women in China, there have been more feminist voices to be heard in gender issues since 1978, particularly during 1986--1988 when ideological control was looser, more "liberal" and new ideas were raised in mass media. Some women activists implied that the lack of a women’s movement may be the reason for the unfinished women’s liberation in China. Many seemed to agree that:

"To a great extent, Chinese women were liberated with the help of societal forces rather than through their own struggle. The majority of them have gone through the consciousness-raising process and therefore lack of sense of self-reliance " (Wang Xiao-ming 1987 March 18)

It was also during this period that Women’s Studies were first introduced to China after its long isolation from western academic community. In February, 1986, there was a "Women in Development" seminar co-sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the All-China Women’s Federation in Beijing. The seminar is believed to have had some influence on women’s study in China (Li Xiaojiang & Li Hui 1989 458-73).

Among these new voices, the question of men’s roles, particularly in families, became an issue. According to a survey of 640,000 families conducted by the women’s federations in 1991--1992, it was found that, on average, a working woman spends two more hours a day than her husband on housework (China Today 1992 March 11). Some women commentators raised the question of women’s double burden, and argued that women’s emancipation must have the support of men. Men were urged to make efforts to change stereo-typed gender roles in society as well as in the family. Some also argued that, while economic independence is
critically important for improving women's social status, more leisure time for women to pursue social relationships outside of the family and attaining educational accomplishments may be also important. This also needed the cooperation of men. It was suggested that women's liberation also need to "liberate" men from the traditional patriarchal system. These points of views indicate a new direction for promoting gender equality in China today. They modify the orthodox pattern in Maoist China, which emphasized the need to expand women's roles while it was less concerned that men's roles should be redefined.

I have generally outlined continuity and change of the official ideas on gender issues from the Maoist era to the contemporary period and some new ideas emerging from the debates. One of the most profound changes, I believe, is that the intervention of the State in women's lives is becoming less significant. It seems that women have much more say on the way how they want to live, since ideological education and political campaigns are not launched as frequently as in Mao's period, and women become less affected by them.

All these changes, from the modified official position on women to the new voices emerging in recent time, may be largely credited to much-changed socio-economic realities since the reform. In the Post-Maoist developmental framework, with economic growth replacing political transformation as the primary task in China's development agenda, it is assumed that the dynamic between development and women's issues is displayed in a new way.

In the following part, from two perspectives--social legislation and economic reform programs in rural areas, I will discuss how the lives of women in rural China have been
Legislations on Women's Issues


The 1950 Marriage Law was revised in 1980 in accordance with the greatly changed social reality of China. In the 1980 Marriage Law, the minimum age for marriage was raised, in which men have to be over 22 and women over 20.

A significant change in the 1980 Marriage Law is the decree on divorce. In the 1950 Marriage Law, divorce would not be granted by the People’s court unless mediation was believed to be fruitless. In the 1980 Marriage Law, the individual’s right of divorce is strengthened. Divorce is most likely to be granted in the case of complete alienation of connubial affections and after the failure of mediation.

This is the first time in China’s Marriage Laws that the alienation of connubial affections is recognized as the determinant factor in the termination of marital relations. This is a revolutionary step because the Law implies that the connubial relations is the core of family life. The mutual affection of couples had always been downplayed in marriage from imperial China to the Maoist period. In the Maoist era, romantic love and connubial affections were often criticized as "bourgeois ideology". It was believed that the common ground for marriage was a couple’s comparability in class categories and their proletarian consciousness. Connubial affection was not taken into much account in the marital relations. In the 1980 Marriage Law, one of the fundamental changes is that the law not only recognizes the
importance of connubial affection in marital relationship, but also admits that it was wrong "to employ the law as an instrument to enforce the maintenance of the marital relations already broken" (Chu 1986 193-4). It implies that prolonging marriage and family lives with completely destroyed connubial affections will only generate more distress among family members.

According to the 1980 Marriage Law, if agreement on divorce and terms are reached by a couple, divorce can be granted by the neighbourhood marriage legislation office. Only if one spouse appeals for divorce and the other one refuses, or the couple can not reach agreement on terms of divorce, will the People’s Courts step in to mediate. Although the failure of mediation is too difficult to define or draw a clear line in practice, the People’s Court seems to suggest that the key point of the mediation process is to decide whether mutual affections between the couples have actually completely died out or not. Ocko argues that this revised decree on divorce in the 1980 Marriage Law indicates that in China today, marriage is considered more as "personal property" (personal issues) and less as "social property" (social issues). In the 1950 Marriage Law, initially, marriage was also seen more as "personal property" than as "social property". However, in the late 1953, when the CCP was worried about the possibility that the soaring divorce rate may harm the new regime, the CCP’s position on marriage shifted to emphasize the social function of marriage, in which stability of marriage and family lives would be essential for China’s development. It was claimed that the principle of freedom of choice in marriage and divorce should be incorporated with "socialist construction". After this switch, stricter legal procedure were required in divorce cases. In the Post-Mao period, even though the social perception of "family as the cell of society" is still
dominant and also promoted by the State, the 1980 Marriage Law seems to recognize the great
cost for individual lives when marriage as social property was placed ahead of personal
property. The new Marriage Law appears to take seriously the concepts of marriage as
personal property and the individual’s right of divorce.

Since the introduction of the 1980 Marriage Law, there has been a steadily rising
divorce rate. In 1979, there were 210,000 divorce case; in 1980, there were 225,000. The rate
of divorce rose sharply afterward: 1981 340,000 cases; 1985 400,000 cases; 1986 around
654,000; 1989 around 752,300 cases; 1990 around 800,000; 1992 around 900,000 (Ocko 1991
Poole 1992 1 China of Women 1992 Vol 4)). It was reported that in 1992, there was a similar
number of divorces that never reached the courts, because of the couples who agreed on
divorce terms processed in the neighbourhood marriage legislature office (Poole 1992 2). The
divorce rate in 1992 was almost five times higher than that in 1979.

Since 1980, at least 70 percent of the petitioners in divorce cases have been women.
In the divorce cases handled by the People Court, a special consideration for the interests of
women are highlighted (Ocko 1991 328). In Poole’s interview (1992 2), Professor Wu, the
executive committee member in All-China Women’s Federation and a specialist on the
Marriage Law, believes that the rising divorce rate and women being the majority of the
petitioners, are actually positive indicators for women’s liberation. She contends that": In the
past, particularly in rural area, women had to rely on their husbands, but this is no longer the
case. The present rise in divorce cases shows the rise of women’s social status". Her
argument is accepted by other observers. Ocko argues that the new Marriage Law helps
women to become free of the traditional taboo of divorce and pursue their independent roles.
In the Second National Symposium of Women’s Studies organized by the All-China Women’s Federation in October, 1987, it was agreed by most of representatives that

"(the rising divorce rate) shows that people are taking the quality of their marital relationship seriously and have come to see a union without love is best brought to an end. Most of the divorces suits are being filed by women. They have shaken off the feudal notions that a good women never marries twice and are exercising their rights to enjoy a happy family life" (Women of China 1987 March 18).

The government promotes "civilized " or "moral" divorces, in which couples are urged to cope with their divorce rationally and show more consideration to each other. The divorce cases which do not reach the courts but are finalized in the neighbourhood marriage legislation office, are often called "divorce by agreement". This is one of the models of "civilized" divorce that the government has called for the to-be-divorced couples to follow, because couples in such case often seem to deal with the situation more moderately. There is, however, a big problem embedded in this type of "divorce by agreement". Since such divorces do not go to the People’s Court, even though the divorce issued by the neighbour marriage legislation office is legal, the terms of divorce that couples sign have no legal effect. The most usual consequence is that, when one ex-spouse fails to pay "child support" as they are supposed in the agreements they have signed, the ex-spouse who has the custody of the children cannot do much about it. In China, it is typically mothers who get custody of the children. Many of these mothers complain that their ex-husbands fail to pay child support. Since the terms of divorces are not recognized by the courts, there is not much the legal system can do about it. Neither are there any social organizations which can help women to deal with this problem. Legal experts often advise the to-be-divorced mothers who gain the custody of the children that
they should ask the fathers to pay "child support" in one lump with the final re-allocation of
the marital property. It seems that even the legal specialists consider this as the only effective
way to protect the interests of women and children in the case of divorce (Women of China).
In reality, however, there are not many fathers who can pay such amount "child support" fee
in one lump. There is still a lack of legal facilities to protect the interests of divorced women.

After the promulgation of the Marriage Law in 1980, the general attitude toward divorce
became more tolerant and the alienated couple felt less compelled to maintain their broken
relationships. The family, however, not the individual, is still considered as the basic social
unit, and bears indispensable duties. The Constitution declares that it is the responsibility of
couples in families to support the young and take care of elderly parents. The government
urges people to take issues of marriage and divorces more seriously. The effect on children
in cases of divorces are widely discussed in the mass media.

Generally speaking, there is a much lower divorce rate in rural areas than that in the
cities. Women's appeals for divorce meet more resistance in the countryside than in cities, in
particular from those husbands and their families who have paid a large brideprice. Even
though the Marriage Law opposes "marriage by purchase", the law has not prohibited "gift"
exchange. It only highlights the exaction of money or gifts in connection with marriage, and
mainly targets those who fix a price for daughters. It is clear that in countryside some
traditional notions are much more prevalent than they are in cities. The 1980 Marriage Law
does provide a more positive environment for rural women to pursue their equality with men
in family lives, but it may take rural women longer to learn how to establish their rights.
2. The Inheritance Law (1985)

The Inheritance Law came into force in October 1985, and claims to support individual property rights. It indicates a fundamental change in the perception of private property. In the early 1950s during the land reform, the private property of landlords and rich peasants was believed to be the economic foundation of the exploiting system; so their land and their other property were thus confiscated and re-allocated among poor peasant households. During the early stage of collectivization, private property of peasants’ households was protected by law, but was still regarded as the collective belonging of the family and not generally identified as an individual’s property. The principle of gender equality in the inheritance of household property was recognized in the 1950 Marriage Law. But the precondition to implement the provision of the gender equality in inheritance was "the principle of benefiting the development of production" (1950 Marriage Law Article 23). This decree indicated that the principle of the gender equality of inheritance was subordinate to that of economic production. It is believed that this arrangement actually favoured the male’s control of household property (Meiji 1971 233--38).

During the Great Leap Forward, all means of production, such as land, agricultural tools and drought animal, were pooled in the Peoples’ Communes. The rest of private property still belonged to the household level. In order to accelerate the process of collectivization, the CCP wished to eliminate the right to private property regardless of sex. The CCP expected that the economic function of the peasants’ households would be weakened through collectivization, while all the means of production were pooled in the communes and became public property.

During the Cultural Revolution, the radical Red Guards destroyed much private
property. The legal system was paralyzed and there was no law protecting private property. There was no formal procedure to follow in property inheritance. The concept of inheritance of private property was condemned as "capitalist ideology".

With the demise of the People's Commune after 1983, many means of production became privately owned. Private ownership is protected by laws and the State allows private ownership to be expanded.

The 1985 Inheritance Law reiterated the idea of gender equality in the inheritance of private property. The Law eliminates the provision in the 1950 Marriage Law in which the economic production outweighed gender equality in inheritance settlements (Ocko 1991 304). The Inheritance Law and the general principle of civil law (1985) attempt to "reconstruct the marital property regime in a way that strengthened women's rights" (Ocko 1991 324).

The State made concerted efforts to implement the Inheritance Law in rural areas. One significant point of this Law is that it stresses the right of women to acquire their fair share of the property of the families they have lived in and have made contributions to. For example, a woman is eligible for an equal share of their parents' inheritance with her brothers if she can prove that she has taken care of their parents. A divorced woman is also entitled to claim an equal share of property accumulated by her and her ex-husband during their marriage. A widow can bring her inheritance from her deceased husband's family to her new marriage. If the widow has taken care of her parents-in-laws, she is categorized in the rank of her parents-in-laws' first-order heirs (Women's Law Article 29). This law is a breakthrough in women's inheritance rights, for women used to be either denied their rights or discriminated against in property re-allocation. The law details how women can seek help from the legal system to
defend their interests in the disputed inheritance settlement cases.

The Inheritance Law assures women equal rights with men in inheritance, but women did not always successfully acquire a fair share in the reallocation of the household property. The law is particularly far from being thoroughly implemented in rural areas. First of all, women's inheritance from their parents is still not so common, unless they can successfully prove that they were the major supporters for their parents financially and emotionally. As most marriages are still patrilocal in rural areas today, it is harder for married women to prove this point compared to their brothers who are most likely to live with their parents. While the principle of inheritance allocation is still based on filial responsibility, there are far less chances for women to successfully acquire a equal share with their brothers.

Secondly, for those widows who seek to take property they inherited from their deceased husbands' families into their new marriages, the resistance from parents-in-laws families and kinsmen are still very strong. The widow is always asked to make a choice between inheritance and a new marriage. Even though the State encourages widows and widowers to remarry (Barnes 1987 210, 213), many widows are hesitant given the dilemma they have to encounter.

Thirdly, there is another embedded problem in the Law. The law no longer explicitly suggests that economic production is the primary criterion in the re-allocation of private property, and rather emphasizes women's equal right with men in the allocation of "responsibility fields", "grain fields" and "contracted fields". There is still a tendency, however, which the purpose of benefiting economic production outweighs the principle of gender equality in inheritance in practice. With the reinforcement of the economic function
of peasant's household and identifying economic growth as the primary goal by the State, any other issue which may clash with these dominant directions will be compromised. In many inheritance settlement cases, the results always favour the interests of male members (Davin 1991 38, 1992 43, Ocko 1991 325). The means of production are always allocated to men. The social perception of women's being not as capable as men in production is prevalent. It is assumed that men can make better use of the means of production than can women.

Overall, in rural China, women's equal rights with men in inheritance are not widely recognized yet, and the Law sometimes tends to subordinate women's interests to the so-called "central task"--economic growth, by which the perpetuation of gender inequality in inheritance is justified.

3. The Law for Protection of Women's Rights and Interests (1992)

The Law for Protection of Women's Rights and Interests is also called a "Women's Law". According to Guan Tao, the General Secretary of All-China Women's Federation and the vice chairwoman in the Drafting Committee of this law, there are three highlights to this law. Firstly, based on the principle of gender equality, it attaches importance to the ratio of women in political bodies and attempts to protect women's special interests in the labour force. Secondly, the law indicates that severe punishment will be given to those guilty of violence against women. Thirdly, the law calls for the government and social organizations to play more active roles for protecting women's rights and interests (Women of China March 1992, 4).

The formulation and the implementation of this Law at this time is not accidental. It
is especially designed to help women to cope with the new challenges they have faced since the reform. Although the authority does not admit that women have been in a deteriorated situation since the reform, it seems to acknowledge that more attention should be paid to the problems concerned women's interests. In the following, I will discuss these new problems that women face in public production, political participation, education and in their daily lives.

Firstly, in economic production, it is believed the women workers are at a great disadvantage in the labour market since reform. It has been argued that the reforming of the economic structure has had a negative impact on female workers particularly (Hooper 1984 317-43; Robinson 1985; Jacka 1990 1-17). In urban industries as well as in some rural enterprises, a great number of women workers have been removed from the public production. These women workers were either laid off from enterprises or reassigned to other low-paid, less-secure or part-time work. This situation has not improved over time and I will later elaborate this issue.

Secondly, the percentage of women in political organizations has been declining sharply since 1978. The height of female representation in political institutions was in 1969 during Cultural Revolution period. In Post-Mao China, women's political participation has been in sharp decline, with the withdrawal of the radical rhetoric of an interventionist state on this issue. Women's lack of access to leading administrative positions has become very pronounced. In 1982, 10% of all cadres were women and most of these female cadres were assigned at the bottom of the political hierarchy. Less than 6% of the cadres at the most prestigious administrative bureau are women (Loscocco & Wang 1992 119-120). There is no woman in the top leadership (Women of China 1989 January 2). In 1992, in the Central
Committee, the highest power organization in China, only 10 out of its 177 members were women. In 1992, 3 out of the 39 national ministries were headed by women and only 150 women held the post of major or vice major of municipalities, compared to over 3,000 male counterparts (Polumbaum 1992 2). Women’s representativeness in the local political bodies in rural China has also been dramatically declining. Many local women’s federations branches in rural China are "in name only" (Zhang 1992 47, 51).

When Zhang overviews women in politics in the past 40 years of the PRC’s history, he argues that:

"Women self-awareness was not a precondition for being liberated in the development process: women’s liberation was given to them. But the artificial, planned and man-made opportunities for female participation in rural politics as vulnerable to policy shift in the very organization for women’s participation can be turned against their interests, and the achievements of these institutions are likely to disappear once the initiative ceases to come from the 'outside' or 'above' " (1991 51).

While it was shown in the last chapter that in Maoist China, the mobilization of women was an instrument for implementation of the Party’s policies and did not build up women’s political power, the current situation indicates that the economic reform is not sufficient to promote women’s independent roles in political affairs, either. It is suggested here that improving women’s self-consciousness about their position in society may be an effective way for them to grasp genuine power in political activities. The process of women’s empowerment is critical for women’s liberation.

In the education sphere, the situation of women appears complicated. On the one hand, there is no doubt that women’s education has made enormous progress since liberation.
According to one of the surveys conducted during late 1991 and early 1992 by the All-China Women Federation and the State Statistical Bureau, 11.78% of women under 40 are illiterate or semi-illiterate, while among women over 40 who were born before liberation, the illiteracy or semi-illiteracy rate is as high as 60.56%. This can prove that women who were born after liberation have received much better education than their mothers generations. On the other hand, women’s education in China is still very low. Among China’s 200 million illiterates, 70% are female (Huang Qizao, Women of China 1989 August 51).

The current poor educational level of women in China can be partly attributed to the low foundation of women’s education before liberation, but there are still other reasons to probe. For example, after 1949, girls still did not always get the same access to schools as boys. One reason is that the traditional bias against women’s education was still prevalent in rural areas. Girls in rural China are still regarded belonging to other families sooner or later, illustrated by an old Chinese saying: "To educate a daughter is to water another man’s garden" is perpetuated (Shirin 1992 30).

Since the 1978 reform, the drop-out rate for girls has become even more alarming. In 1987, over 2.7 million children between age of 7--11 could not go to schools, 83% of them were girls (ibid). One of the reasons for the rising rate of girls’ dropping out of school is the higher tuition fees since the reform. During the commune period, tuition fees for schools was minimal because schools in rural areas were highly subsidized by the commune. After the demise of the commune and the advent of profit-oriented management in the rural economy, peasant households have been required to pay more for their children’s education. Because of limited resources, some peasant households withdraw their daughters from schools and keep
the boys in school. However, in some prosperous areas, where tuition fees are not a problem, there are some parents who still ask the girls to stay out of schools. Under the household-management economy, the peasants try to fully make use of their labour resources. When household production needs more labour, it is typically the girls who are asked to help out. Girls’ labour is preferred to that of boys’ since girls’ education does not seem as important as boys’, also girls are considered more "obedient" in production.

In order to change this trend, some education experts propose some reform programs in rural schools. They suggest that schools timetables should be flexible in order to make provisions for young girls who are carrying out their household duties. There are now establishing experimental nights schools or half-day schools, specially designed for young girls. They also recommend that school curricula should be rearranged to make education more "relevant to the lives of peasants girls" (Rai 1992 30). Most of these special curricula for girls consist of handicraft-making classes or other female-typed works. I believe the reform of schools in such ways not only do not challenge, but actually reinforce, gender inequality in rural China.

Besides the problem of high school drop-out rates of young girls and neglected issues in the reform program of the school system in rural areas, the general curriculum in school also produces a negative impact on female students’ socialization. One of the most profound influences on teenagers to learn gender roles is from textbooks. According to one of the studies on the textbooks in primary schools which are universal versions nationwide (Nan Ning 1989 4-5), it yields some intriguing findings. In these textbooks, there are 82 male characters and only 11 female. Most of them have stereo-typed gender characteristics. The personality
traits of the male characters are exhibited in various ways, while there are only few roles for female characters. All the scholars and scientists described in the textbooks are, without exception, males. I believe that the content of the textbooks may be, at least partly, responsible for the low self-esteem of women in China. Even though women's low education level is now identified as the root of the perpetuation of gender inequality by the State, it seems that all these critical problems within the current education system have not been recognized yet.

In addition to these problems women face in economic production, political affairs and educational spheres, another important challenge women face in their daily lives is the increasing violence against them. With looser local control because of massive population migration after the demise of the People’s Commune system, women are exposed to more physical and emotional violence in their daily lives (Gilmartin 1990 205-19). The cases of abuse of women, rape, murder, buying and selling women are increasing considerably.

Some of these problems are attributed to the weak position taken by the legal system toward gender violence. Wife abuse is still quite common in some rural areas, but such "domestic violence" is not taken seriously unless it is linked to the loss of lives. The concept of "rape" is not applied to marital relations, and usually no legal sanction is imposed unless under certain situations, for example, during the process of divorce, the husband forces his wife to have sexual relation with him. Sexual harassment is barely recognized by the public. Women do not know how to defend themselves in such situations. If something like this happens, it is always considered of the woman’s fault because it is always assumed that a woman provokes a man first. So far, there is no legislation, regulation or guideline to protect women from sexual harassment.
There is another kind of violence, which is involved with prostitution. Prostitution, which was virtually eliminated after 1949, has returned to some of the prosperous urban and rural areas since the reform. The State has reiterated that it would severely punish those individuals and gang organizations who are involved in prostitution. Prostitution, however, does not seem to be under control. Many prostitutes are originally from rural areas and they had never been out of the village before. When they first arrived the cities, it was not easy for them to get a job because they had no social networks in cities. Some of them were forced to become prostitutes by some gang organizations. Even though such cases have been exposed in the mass media, no comprehensive investigation has been conducted so far. It is not so clear how widespread of prostitution is in China today, but its influence on social values and family lives has aroused more public interest today.

Of all the violence against women, the most shocking is female infanticide. It also receives the most publicity in the mass media. Even though the government forbids such brutal behaviour, such cases in some rural areas still occur sometimes.

Attempting to solve all these problems, from women's worsened situation in public production, to the barriers women facing in education sphere and the rising crime against women, the Law for Protection the Rights and the Interests of Women and Children was promulgated. The Law promises to support women to defend their rights, and offers more help for women. Women's equality with men in the political, economic, cultural, social spheres and family lives is re-emphasized.

The Law makes it clear that women should rely on the legal system and learn how to exercise their rights. This is important process for women to improve their self-consciousness
and realize their own rights in society. This is a significant step for women, turning them from passive recipients into active participants in society and learning how to rely on laws to protect themselves. For examples, in the past, women used suicide as a weapon to protest against maltreatment from their husbands, parents-in-laws or else from the work place, or when they felt helpless in the process of divorce or in disputed settlements of property. Suicide always seemed the only way for their voices to be heard or to draw more social attention to their cases. Now women are taught to follow legal procedures to protect their interests. It is assumed that the more women are aware of their legal rights and learn to follow the legal procedure, the less likely they will be to adopt the radical approach, such as suicide. The law also encourages social organizations to set up facilities to help women cope with psychological and social pressures during their difficult times. Most of the facilities, however, are located in cities, and rural dwellers have little access to them.

Despite the clear intention of this law, its influence is very limited. The law is only composed of certain general guidelines, and there are not many concrete provisions. Some of the provisions are so ambivalent that they can hardly applied in individual cases. In addition, there is a lack of mechanisms for the enforcement of this law. The promulgation of the law serves well for the purpose of making women more aware of their rights and proper legal procedure to protect their interests, but the law is not comprehensive and detailed. Thus, the effect of the law is relatively weak.

One of the unexpected negative outcomes of this law is its reinforcement of women's inferior position in the labour force. In order to "protect" women in the labour force, the law suggests that women should be assigned to suitable jobs and women's physiological
characteristics should be fully considered. The Law explicitly addresses the limits of women in production and implies a gender division of labour as "natural". After the promulgation of this law, women were barred from many heavy industries. This gender-segregated employment pattern seemed deliberately justified by the good intention of protecting women’s interests through this law. Despite the fact that the legal experts attempt to promote women’s social status, it seems they fail to recognize such segregation in work will help to perpetuate gender inequality in society.


The controversial population-control policy of "one child per family" was initially implemented in 1979. According to the official position on development, in order to construct China into a modern socialist country in the four sectors: agriculture, industry, science and technology and military defense, it was vital to decelerate population growth and ultimately reverse this trend. The goal was to keep the population at about 1.2 billion by 2000. On the basis of an average birth rate of 2.3 children per couple in the late 1970s, however, it was estimated that China’s population would reach 1.3 billion after 20 years and 1.5 billion after 40 years (Women of China 1989 September 12-17). The State believed that, if the birth rate continued, the cost would act as a formidable barrier in accumulating the necessary capital for economic development and modernization. With very little arable land per capita in China, which surpasses only Japan and Egypt in terms of average arable land per capital in the world, limiting the number of the children of each couple seems indispensable. In late 1979, the one-child per family policy was initially implemented nationwide.
It is generally agreed that this population-control policy has had negative impact on women's situation (Davin 1984,1985,1990; Croll 1984). It is argued that in the past it was husbands and parents-in-law who exercised their power over women's fertility. Now it is the State which takes control of this issue.

In the early 1980s, in order to implement this policy more effectively in rural areas, the Chinese government proposed the "two production responsibility" to peasants households. The first was the household responsibility system in agricultural production, which I will elaborate on later, and the second was household responsibility in following the one-child per family policy (Women of China 1982 November 2; December 41; 1983 January 7). If a peasant household failed to follow this rule, it could be fined or more than the usual production quota would be assigned to it by the State. Most seriously, its land be taken away by the production team. In the 1980 Marriage Law and the new Constitution (1982), the one-child per family policy was proclaimed as one of the fundamental elements in the strategy for China's development and it was the responsibility for every newly married couple to strictly follow this rule. The State launched a campaign to advocate the idea that "A Girl is as good as a Boy".

The implementation of this policy in the countryside turned out to be much more difficult than policy-makers originally thought. It created great resentment among peasants. Generally, peasants' households thought that having children was their own business and that the State should not interfere. Particularly after the reform program was introduced to rural areas, when more freedom was granted to peasants in their economic activities, they also expect more autonomy in the management of labour and the reproduction of labour. In rural China, it is still believed that more able-bodied, particularly male members, the more likely
they can take full advantage of the chances and become prosperous. A preference of boys is commonplace in the countryside.

The one-child per family policy met great obstacles in its implementation in rural China. Hostility was often created between the peasants and the rural officials who were assigned to implement this policy in villages. Particularly, when the first child was a girl, many peasants tried all means to escape from following the one-child policy and desperately wanted another chance. Some pregnant women fled from their villages to other villages which were not inspected so closely and give birth there. Some prosperous households were simply willing to be fined as long as they could have another chance to have a boy.

Another major reason that the policy was not effectively carried out in rural areas is the other responsibility system—the household responsibility system in agricultural production. With economic development and more autonomy of the individual household, grain for family consumption is no longer totally dependent upon allocation by the State. If peasants can not get grain for the new born because they violated the one-child policy, they can easily buy on the free market. The economic penalties against those refusing to follow the rule does not effectively prevent more births outside the plan. After January 1984, the central government issued an order that land contracts would be allowed to last as long as 15 years, in order to encourage peasants to take better care of their allocated plots and make long-term plans for them. This new rule obliterated the policy of the household’s dual responsibilities, which was proposed to combine the household responsibility in both production and reproduction. Since then, there have been few effective means to control those peasants who are determined to have more than one child.
The implementation of the one-child policy gave rise to some unexpected consequences. The most shocking is the rising number of female infanticide. This problem in some areas is so devastating that the sex ratio among the youngest age group is highly distorted. In 1982, the national census reported that among 0-5 age children, the national sex ratio was 108.5 males to 100 females, while in Guangxi Province and Anhui Province, the figure was as high as 110.7 and 110.5 male baby to 100 female respectively.

Before long, the State realized that it was unrealistic to implement this one-child per family policy thoroughly in rural areas, and decided to compromise. In the spring of 1984, the central government re-emphasized voluntarism and persuasion in the implementation of the policy locally. It suggested that a more flexible approach should be adopted. In most of the provinces, local governments allow the peasants to have a second children if the first one is a girl. Thus, the State compromised and modified the rigid population control policy. The new regulation gave up the original official line that "a girl is as good as a boy". This policy change seemed to admit it is much harder than it first expected to alter peasants' ideas that a girl is not as good as a boy.

The new modified policy does not challenge traditional notions of gender relations, either. After 1984, in some areas, the sex ratio of new born babies was still strikingly unbalanced. For example in one study, according to the Statistics of Shanxi Province, there are 108.4 male to 100 female in 1990. In 1991, the situation was even worse and there is 109.44 male to 100 female. In some rural areas, it reached to 122.76: 100 (Jiangle county) and 121.81: 100 (Ningwu County). In some areas, the sex ratio of children from 0-7 years old is 130 (male): 100 (female) in the 1991 census (Zhu 1992 25).
This population-control policy has had special implication for women in rural areas. The problems in implementing the population-control policies has highlighted the persistence of gender-inequality in the countryside. In the original policy of one child per family, women and baby girls became victimized in the conflict between the interests of the State and peasant households. Even though the government launched campaigns and attempted to spread the scientific ideas that it is not women who are responsible for the sex of children, it is still widely reported that women were beaten and abused after they gave births to infant girls (Women of China 1983 January to April). After the new policy, the situation of son preference in rural areas did not seem improved. In a 1991-1992 survey conducted by the All-China Women's Federation on gender issues, it is reported that "Women who give birth to baby girls are discriminated against" is ranked as the most common phenomenon of the gender inequality by rural women.

Summary: Legislation and Gender Relations

The legislation discussed above has been designed to alter unequal gender relations and promote women's social status in the legal, economic, social, political as well as family areas. In the 1992 national survey on gender issues (a national sample of 40,000), it was found that gender equality ranked highest with respect to legal rights. 81 percent of the interviewees agreed that in China men and women are equal with respect to legal rights. From this perspective, the Chinese government under Deng did show its sincerity to promote gender equality.

Some of the legislation, however, ignores fundamental questions in gender conflicts. Women's practical needs are emphasized in the new legislation, for example the interests of
divorced women in the allocation of marital property, or women's special needs in the labour force. But women's strategic needs are not always fully recognized in these laws. Many kinds of gender inequality embedded in society are not identified. The perpetuation of gender division of labour is justified in the name of considering women's "physiological characteristics". As Honig and Hershatter argue, "Except in the case of infanticide, violence against women was usually not linked in a systematic way to the subordinate position of women in society" (1988 274). I believe a lack of feminist perspective can be attributed to the problems in legislation.

It is clear that gender equality in legal rights does not automatically guarantee women's equality with men in other social aspects. This can be reflected in the 1992's survey (ibid). While 81 percent of the interviewees agreed that there was gender equality with the respect to legal rights, only 58 percent of them believed men and women were equal in family life; 54 percent thought men and women were equal in political life, 53 percent agreed men and women were equal in economic affairs. The lowest rating on gender equality in China today was with respect to social perception, where only 40 percent agreed that women and men were equal in terms of social perception, while 56 percent considered that men were superior to women.

Despite the limitations of legislation in both content and effect, it should be recognized that the legal system is making progress in promoting of gender equality. It is recognized in China today that the key to promoting gender equality today is to educating women to employ legal weapons to protect their interests. In some ways, as the government accurately points out, the raising of the educational level of women, and their increasing self-awareness are
critical for women to learn how to exercise their legal rights in pursuing gender equality. Another key issue, I believe, is that the government should re-examine its legislation and should highlight women’s strategic needs in the process of law-making and law-implementation which are largely ignored in the current legal system.

2. ECONOMIC REFORM

1. A Brief Introduction to the Rural Economic Reform in Post-Mao era

Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform first started in rural areas. With the demise of the commune system, collectivized agriculture was replaced by household responsibility systems. Peasant households once again became the focal point of the agricultural sector in the rural economy. Under this system, the ownership of the land still belongs to the State, but the peasants are granted more autonomy in the use of the land and the allocation of their labour. The policy allows peasants to lease their lands or hire labour for production activities. After peasant households sign contracts with their production teams, which represent the interests of the State, peasants are allocated land. In return, the peasants guarantee to fulfil production quotas assigned by the State. The key element of this system is that there is a close link between peasants income and their input in production. After the quota is submitted to government, peasants can sell their surplus on the free market. Peasants are encouraged to work hard and become rich.

In some cases, the household responsibility system is further developed into a specialized household system, in which the peasant household specializes in producing certain
kinds of products, such as vegetables, fish, fruit or poultry. The specialized households are usually not required to plant grain; instead, they can trade their specialized products with the production teams to acquire their food. The household economy is no longer for subsistence production but becomes part of an increasingly commercialized economy. A new division of labour in agricultural production has improved the productivity of agricultural production.

In addition to the introduction of the household responsibility system and specialized household systems in agricultural production, peasants are also encouraged to set up their own enterprises and develop rural industries. Before the reform, peasants were restricted from engaging in non-agriculture activities. Under the household responsibility system, there is large number of surplus labourers who cannot be absorbed by agricultural production. Township, village and private enterprises have been established to absorb these surplus labourers locally. This strategy is also part of China’s urbanization policy which attempts to avoid the massive, autonomous migration from rural to urban areas.

In rural areas, numerous joint-ventures have been set up in the last one and a half decades. In the macro-development plan, one of the keystones is to integrate China into the global economy and to participate in the global division of labour. China is eager to gain expertise from advanced industrialized countries on how to run a market-oriented economy. In order to attract foreign investment, absorb advanced technology and adopt new management styles, China offers favourable conditions for foreign entrepreneurs, including businessmen from HongKong, Taiwan and among overseas Chinese. In some rural areas, low-cost labour, inexpensive land, loose environmental or labour regulations have attracted large amounts of foreign investment in rural industries, particularly those labour-intensive industries.
2. General View of the Impact of Rural Economic Reform on Rural Women

The economic transformation has resulted in dramatic change in the landscape of the rural areas in the last decade and a half. The impact on women’s social status and gender relations has aroused great interest among Chinese as well as western observers.

Among these researchers, there is a debate in response to the question of how reform affects women’s lives. Most western researchers strongly argue that economic reform has had a detrimental effect on women and "it is hard to escape the conclusion that the rural reform will actually make it more difficult for women to improve their position in rural society" (Davin 1992 49). In September 1988, at an international conference in Montreal, Canada, it was reported in a study of the social position of women in various countries, that China was ranked 132nd in the world. This study employed six basic criteria to judge women’s position in society. The six criteria included the sex ratio of infants, the rate of schooling for boys and girls, the rate of employment of young men and women, the proportion of women in important leading posts of state organs, the position in their homes, and the percentage of women’s personal property in social wealth (Rosen 1993 1).

While most western scholars argue for a negative impact on the situation of women since the introduction of the reform policies, many Chinese researchers tend to believe that after the abandonment of imposing artificial gender equality, women actually face a more "non-discriminatory free market" to compete with men on the same footing. These authors insist that women’s development is advancing at a faster pace than that of men (Cao 1992 10; Hou Di & Li Hong 1988 136-146).

Besides these two groups who draw contrasting conclusions on women’s issues in Post-
Mao China, there are also some commentators who point out that the dynamic between economic reform and gender relations is very complex. They suggest that new development policies since 1978 have had an impact on gender relations in different, even contradictory ways. They argue that in some aspects gender equality has improved while in other aspects women are facing a more negative and non-supportive environment (Waston 1991 347--68).

Given the complicated social reality of China, it is hard to draw a firm conclusion on this issue. In the following part of this chapter, I will compare the different experience of women in urban and rural areas since the introduction of reform programs and try to search for common themes in their response to the much changed social reality.

I. Women in Urban Industries

Firstly, one of the most profound effects can be shown on female workers in public participation, which I have mentioned briefly above. In Maoist China, except for some occasional short periods, women's economic independence had always been highly stressed. The dominant idea on women's issues was to encourage women to engage in social production. The policy of low wages and high employment gave women virtually the same access to employment, if not equivalent status as their male counterparts.

Economic reform has shown some negative effect on women's roles in social production. Since 1980, the State has introduced the strategy of "optimizing the labour structure", which aimed to improve productivity of enterprises. It resulted in a disproportionately negative effect on female employees. Women workers were seen as less productive and more costly in terms of labour protection expense or more public facilities for them, such as women's maternity leave, breast-feeding rooms and day-care. Women have been
more prone than men to be laid off in cases of factories that have closed or merged after the reform of the employment structure (Women of China 1980 November 29). In 1985, the Law for Protecting Women’s Interests and Rights was promulgated and more requirements were issued to the enterprises on women’s special interests. This directly effected the employment policies of many enterprises. The well-intended ordinance resulted in women workers being removed from certain heavy industries and being re-assigned to traditional women’s work. Some of these "redundant" workers were either given long leaves with percentages of their original wage, or simply laid off. Some pregnant women were given maternity leave at reduced pay from the early days of their pregnancy until their children entered school. These seemed to be common ways for the enterprises to get rid of so called "surplus labour". According to one national survey conducted by the All-China Federation of Trade Union, among 660 enterprises nationwide from 10 professions and 11 provinces, women workers accounted for 63 percent of the total number of workers laid-off. In certain heavy industries, the figure was as high as 80 percent (Women of China 1989 August 51). These numbers do not include those women who were re-assigned to lower-income jobs or to those jobs with less financial security.

In 1988, women being forced to go back in the "kitchen" aroused so much concerns that the official publication of All-China Women Federation, Women of China, published a special edition on this issue which was entitled "1988--A Solution for Women". An enormous response nationwide confirmed the seriousness of this problem. Even though the debate was not able to change this trend, it represented a breakthrough in the mass discussion of women’s issues in some way. Different voices of women were heard and more valued opinions were
presented in the debate.

On the one hand, some participants in the discussion indicated that the current problem for women in the labour force lay in the fact that women’s reproduction role not only suffers from a lack of social recognition, but also becomes an excuse for undervaluing women’s capabilities in production by managers of some enterprises. The participants complained that women were never able to compete with men on the same footing under this socio-economic structure. On the other hand, some of the participants challenged the dominant ideas that the precondition of women’s liberation is women’s economic independence. They argued there is nothing wrong if women identify their primary roles as supportive wives and caring mothers.

In the conclusion of this debate, the All-China Women’s Federation persisted in its position that only when women raise their economic status can they raise their position in the society as well as in the family. Wang Shuxian, the member of the secretariat of the All-China Women’s Federation expressed this official line:

"whether or not women should leave their jobs and return to home is a subject much talked about today. I think the way to liberate oneself as a woman is to walk out the door, join in social production and participate in social development. This is the primary path to liberate for women. The recent phenomenon in prosperous areas of women returning home to do domestic chore does not meet the new trend of women’s liberation. Before long, women who do this will feel unsatisfied with their lives" (Women of China 1989 January 5).

Jacka analyzes some of the letters publicized in the Women of China and he argues that discriminated against women in this new reformed employment structure continues:

"Women were discriminated against in the urban industry, from making up of the surplus workers and fired (mainly married women with children), young single women were discriminated against seeking employment, female university graduates were rejected by enterprises and female students were required higher
II. Women in Rural Areas

While it is a common phenomenon in urban industries that female workers are most likely to face dismissal, the changed roles for rural women since the reform have varied.

In some areas, women are also seen to retreat from farm work to housework. In other areas, women replace men and bear the major responsibility in agricultural production. In some cases, women, particularly young unmarried women, become full-time wage workers in the village and township enterprises, and some migrate to cities and are employed in urban industries. It seems that the various patterns of rural women's changed roles in production since 1978 are dependent on factors, such as the level of regional economic development, the age of the women and their marital status. Here I will first briefly summarize the different patterns of the changed roles of rural women since the reform and then seek some of the common features among these different patterns.

(1). Women back to the "kitchen"

One of the widely known examples in this pattern is the case of Daqiu Village. Daqiu village, which is located in the suburban area of Tianjin municipality, has won high social recognition for its successful local economic reforms. During the national debate about the effect of economic policies on women organized by the Women's Federation in 1988, Daqiu village was one of central examples in the discussion. While female workers in urban industries were laid off because of the surplus labour, there was a shortage of labour in Daqiu village and it had to import extra hands elsewhere. Despite this, most of women in Daqiu village gave up their jobs in production. They seemed to leave paid employment and returned
to the private realms voluntarily.

Jacka suggests there are reasons for explaining this phenomenon. Jacka argues that village industry in Daqiu is dominated by heavy industry, in which women are assumed to be unsuitable and the current official theme does not encourage women in these areas. Secondly, with the prosperous economy of Daqiu, most of the male labourers in rural industries have well-paid jobs. The salary of men is high enough to support the whole family without financial contributions from women. This seems to answer why women in Daqiu are able to stay out of public production.

Daqiu village is a special case. In most of the countryside, women and men both have to work and support the family together with two income sources. Despite the publicity in cases like Daqiu village, it is not common for women to totally withdraw from public production and become full-time housewives. The majority of rural women still participate in production. What kinds of work women are engaged in appear to vary in accordance with regional economic development and the marital status of these women.

(2) Women in agricultural production

The second category in terms of women's changed roles since reform is women farmers. The All-China Women's Federation united with the Agriculture Department, the Forest Industry Department, the Education Department, the Science and Technology Department and the Commerce Department to launch the "Two studies, Two competitions" programme to promote rural women's integration into local economic production. "Two Studies" means "study culture and study technology", while "Two Competitions" means "compete with performance" and "compete with contributions". The program started in 1989.
and was designed to last five years (Women of China 1992 March 2-5). It has been reported that the campaign has achieved great progress for rural women's economic independence.

In some areas, women have become the major agricultural producers. In some rural areas, women now shoulder much of the farm work--up to 70 per cent (Women of China 1992 March 2) because of a male exodus to town or urban areas to pursue more lucrative jobs. In such cases, it is married women who make up the highest percentage of labour power in agricultural production.

The percentage of married women who transferred from agricultural activities to other non-agricultural occupations is still comparatively low. There are some studies which discuss how to enhance women's competence and help them to transfer to other occupations. The barriers are hardly overcome by these women as women's roles are primarily familial and household burdens restrict them in expanding their roles in paid work (Wu 1990 61-64; Cheng 1990 46-51).

(3) Women workers in industries

For unmarried women, they often work in village or township enterprises. Many of them are involved in labour-intensive occupations in the village, township enterprises and joint-ventures. Most of the jobs in these industries are unskilled or semi-skilled, such as in the production of textiles, toys, electronic and plastic products.

These unmarried young women not only participate in local industries, but also are employed in the state-run enterprises. When they first go to the cities, they always meet great challenges in the new environment. They are always looked down upon by urban dwellers because of their rural background. There are not many support groups to help them adjust to
the urban environment. The major reason why urban enterprises employ rural women is that most of the jobs are either too unpleasant or low paid, and urban residents are reluctant to do them.

When young rural women go to cities, they are not always treated fairly. They receive lower wages and few social benefits. They are segmented to work long hours. Sometime the work is so hard that these unmarried rural women would rather return home. In one report about the Wuhan Textile Factory in Hebei Province, it showed that "one third of the employees from countryside could not stand the terrible working condition and returned home each year, while the rest have to stay to earn enough money to get married" (Women of China 1989 January 6--8). In this report, it also recorded that these women textile workers went on strike in early 1988 to protest their unequal treatment by the factory. They complained they were forced to work as harder than those with urban "Hukou", but they could not enjoy the same living subsidies as the legal city residents. Besides the unfavourable working conditions and unfair treatment, young women from rural backgrounds have other difficulties in becoming fully integrated into the urban environment. Since they do not have urban "Hukou", they have to return to the countryside. They are not allowed to reside in the cities after the end of the contract of the enterprise. Even though the article expressed sympathy for these women, it seemed little has been done to change the social situation for these young unmarried women so far.

Summary: The Economic Reform and Gender Relations in Rural Areas

In Post-Mao China, there are more employment opportunities for rural women. Some
become full-time housewives once again, some seem to bear more responsibility for farm work and yet others become full time factory workers. Despite increasing alternatives for rural women, it seems that these various employment patterns can not escape one common feature in terms of gender relations: women definitely have less choices than men, even though the economic reform does provide more freedom for individual to re-define their roles in society. Women tend to take up lower paid jobs compared to men in all these cases. The gender-segregated division of labour is perpetuated more deeply and justified in the name of a rational division of labour within the household economy. Women do get benefits in the economic reform, but they do not get an equal share with men.

The fundamental problem in economic reform in terms of gender relations is that most of the economic policies are gender-blind. Even though some of the policies express a concern for the impact of the reform on women, women's interests are easily sacrificed when these policies are applied to pursue economic growth. A lack of re-assessment of these economic strategies from the perspective of women and development becomes a serious problem for improving gender relations in Post-Mao China.
PART III WOMEN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In Chapter Four, I provided a general picture of the dynamic between reform and the change of women's lives in rural China under the reform policies. When we discuss the impact of the new development model on rural women, there is one crucial factor—regional characteristics which should be taken into account. With the decentralization and the abandonment of the uniform development model in China after 1978, many regions have re-emphasized their local characteristics and pursued distinctive development strategies. The regional differences in geography, history and subculture have had a profound influence on the development process since reform. Apart from long existing regional diversities, special policies implemented in certain areas by the central government have led to more unbalanced development and processes of growth among the rural regions. Thus, when we try to analyze the issues of women and development at the regional level after the reform, distinctive regional characteristics and special policies in these regions have to be taken into account.

With the decentralization of the rural economy and the increasing autonomy of provincial and local governments, it has been demonstrated that particular regional characteristics have produced different responses to broad policy options (Johnson 1992 201). In the following chapter, I will focus this issue on the Pearl River Delta area and discuss how the dramatically-changed landscape of the Delta shapes women's lives in this specifically rural community.
Chapter Five

Women and Development at Regional Level: the Pearl River Delta

1. Local Characteristics

I. The Kinship System and the Emigrant Communities

The Pearl River Delta is located in the south of Guangdong Province. Guangzhou (Canton), the most important international trade centre in south China, is in the northern part of the Delta. The Pearl River Delta is very close to Hongkong and Macao, which are respectively British and Portuguese colonies. Its climate is semi-tropical and the delta is historically famous for its double cropping rice production and semi-culture. The delta is very convenient for in-land and water transportation. Local markets have been well developed. The economy of the Pearl River Delta region has long been involved in commercialized production.

Traditionally, one of the unique features in the social-economic context of the delta was its distinctive kinship and lineage system. Before Liberation, a village was typically made up of one or two surnames and most of the villagers were relatives. The landlords and the tenants were kinsmen and they performed ritual practices together. Most of the land belonged to the lineage and was managed by the prestigious families in the lineage. During land reform in the delta in 1950s, because of this complicated kinship system, it became very difficult to define the category of "landlord" since most of the land was not owned by individuals or their families, at least not "in name". Initially, given the complex kinship and lineage structure in the delta, the central government suggested the provincial administration take two years to sort out the problems of the ownership of the lands. When the Korean War broke out, land reform in rural Guangdong was rushed to completion. During the land reform, some cases were
misjudged because of the complex kinship and lineage organizations.

Another characteristic of the delta is that it has been an area of out-migration. Over 80 percent of overseas Chinese originally came from this area. Such a large number of overseas Chinese have had a profound influence on the social, economic and political lives of the Delta. In Sun Yatsen era, many overseas Chinese originally from the delta region provided enormous financial support for his revolution. After the establishment of the PRC, the position of the CCP on the overseas Chinese has been very ambivalent. In the early days of the PRC, dependents of overseas Chinese and their private property were protected by the government. But during the Cultural Revolution, many tragedies occurred in the families of overseas Chinese. Their property was confiscated and the dependents of the overseas Chinese were suspected of being spies by ultra-leftists.

Since the 1978 reform, the intimate links between local villagers and their kinsmen overseas have been re-established. The consequence for development has been significant. "Kinship connection and localities have become a central part of the local development initiatives (in the Pearl River delta) " (Johnson 1992 8). It has helped the delta to create the most impressive economic growth among all rural regions in China. With the delta area, there has also developed various economic strategies in its different parts. Johnson argues that these various responses to the reform in local villages are most likely determined by the location of their kinsmen abroad. There are distinguished effects on the general development process and the particular economic strategies between the village whose kinsmen most likely reside in Hongkong or Macao, and the other villages whose kinsmen are overseas Chinese who are living in North America or Europe (Johnson 1992 26). In Johnson’s works, he spells out these two
different categories of Chinese who reside outside China, and compares their different influences on local development. He argues that, for the villages whose kinsmen are residents of Hongkong and Macao, they fully take advantage of their proximity and invite them to come back to invest in their home regions.

Enormous investment has flowed from Hongkong and Macao to become the initial capital for local development (Guldin 1992 174-175). The mushrooming growth of these enterprises established by Hongkong businessmen has stimulated local industries, and they have gradually become integrated into the local economy. Other villages whose kinsmen are more likely living in North America or southeast Asia have not attracted much direct investment from their overseas kinsmen. But these kinsmen, who may not be as involved in the local economy as those kinsmen in Hongkong or Macao, have also made substantial contributions to local economic growth. First, the development of these villages has greatly benefitted from remittances sent back by their overseas kinsmen. Some local entrepreneurs made use of remittances as capital to start enterprises. These kinsmen also donate considerable amounts of money to build schools, hospitals, roads and other social facilities, which in some ways also help to improve the living standard of the villagers.

II. Women’s Traditional Roles in the Delta

Another unique feature in the social-economic context of the delta is women’s distinguished roles in both public and domestic spheres. Greatly different from women in most parts of China, who did not participate in public production before 1949, women in the delta area were traditionally engaged in farm work and played active roles in the economic activities.
This may be explained by the double cropping rice production in agriculture (Baker 1968) and the well-developed commercialized activities in the local markets (C. K. Yang 1964). In particular, in some communities where most of the able-bodied male, who went were abroad hoping to make a fortune, or migrated to the nearby towns and worked in non-agriculture sectors, women became the major producers in the agricultural economy. Traditionally, women in delta were much more involved in the agricultural production, compared to the women in other rural areas of China. Women’s foot-binding was never common in the delta area. Even though it is still a debate about the correlation between the customary practise of women’s foot-binding and women’s roles in production, there is not much evidence to indicate women’s foot-binding was the cause of women’s staying away from farm work. It was certain, however, that women with unbound feet in the delta were at least not physically handicapped in field work, which helped them to be more involved in production.

Besides the unusual position of women in agricultural production, the marriage patterns in the delta area before 1949 were also distinctive. Some evidence suggests that women in the delta had played an exceptionally active role against the orthodox marriage collectively. The pioneer work on this issue is Marjorie Topley’s study on women’s marriage resistance movement in the delta during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. She argues that this movement was at least partly attributable to the independent economic roles of women. During that period, with the booming silk industry in the global market, the Pearl River Delta, as one of the four well-developed raw silk bases in China, was also highly involved in the international silk economy. Substantial local silk factories were established and the household economy was also based on sericulture production. Women were essential for
labour in the silk production. These women silk producers, including young girls and married women, worked in the "girl’s house", which was usually the property of the lineage. During busy times, when they had to work from early morning to late nights, the female workers would live in the "girl’s houses". These close-contacts between female workers in the "girl’s houses" provided a natural environment for them to develop their support groups.

At that time, most marriages were arranged by parents and matchmakers. The distaste for marriage was easily spread among these women. Some of these women took some radical actions against marriage. A marriage resistance movement among women was apparent from at least the nineteenth century. Young unmarried women refused to marry and took vows of spinster-hood. They were helped by some of their "sisters" in the "girl’s house" to practise the ceremony of *sohei* (combing their hair into a certain style), and formally declared their position to the village that they would not marry. Their decisions were respected by the entire village, and even the parents of these young women could not intervene. These spinsters worked in the local silk factories and were economically independent. In most cases, these spinsters built houses with their savings, and lived together until they died. There were also some married women who participated in this marriage resistance movement. They refused to co-habit with their husbands and sought to free themselves from obligations as wives and daughter-in-laws. Some of them compensated their husbands and helped them to get a second wife. In return, when they were old and could not take care of themselves, they moved back to their husbands’ families and lived there until they died. After they died, they were entitled as one of the family members of their husbands’ in the ritual care. Topley suggests that women’s economic independence was doubtless one of the essential conditions for women’s marriage resistance.
movement in the Delta.

Topley's ideas about this unique marriage behaviour among women in the delta were revised and further elaborated by Stockard. Stockard argues the resistance to marriage discussed in Topley's work was only the radical manifestation of the dominant marriage pattern in the delta--delayed marriage. Stockard describes the delayed marriage, in which the brides would be separated from their husbands on the third day after the marriage. The newly-wedded bride, would not formally reside in her husband's household, except for spending holidays there, until their first child was born, which typically happened after three to four years of marriage. These women who have formally married but have not moved into their husbands' houses were often called "bride-daughters".

Stockard indicates that this marriage by delayed transfer was the dominant marriage pattern in the delta at that time. In fact, "marriage with delayed transfer was the cultural ideal" (5) and it was described by local people, including women and men, as the "custom", "rule" or "regulation". Stockard suggests that this delay transfer marriage pattern was an economic strategy which benefited women themselves and their natal families. During the delay period, the bride-daughters enjoyed more freedom and privileges in their natal families and their own community. Their earnings contributed to their natal families. She argues that this unorthodox marriage pattern was largely attributed to women's economic independence when they were engaged in the silk production, or in some villages, rice production. Both women and their natal families tended to prolong the period of delay.

Stockard also discusses other alternatives to the prevalent pattern of "delayed marriage", such as the practice of sworn spinsterhood for unmarried young women, compensated marriage
described in Topley’s study, and also spirit marriage, in which a young woman arranged to marry the spirit of a deceased unmarried man. These radical alternatives to delayed marriage were most likely promoted in the "girl’s house". However, no matter what pattern women followed, the delayed marriage or other radical approaches, it seems that the rise of women’s independence in economic production promoted these unorthodox marriage practices in the Delta. On the one hand, their distaste for marriage may reflect the unequal gender relationship in marriage. On the other hand, it seems to suggest that women fought for their freedom once they gained enough economic independence.

In the late 1920s to 1930s, with the Great Depression, the silk industry in the global market collapsed. The local silk production in the delta was severely affected. Many women who had worked in silk production migrated to Hongkong, Singapore and other southeastern Asia. Most of them became domestic servants and some worked in the local construction industry. Their independent character was also very impressive in the eyes of local people (Kwan 1992).

Stockard indicates that, since the early nineteenth century, delayed transfer marriage has been subject to political repression. During the KMT period, this particular marriage pattern was discouraged and the government attempted to institutionalize the orthodox Confucian form of marriage. After 1949, marriage was legalized in the 1950s Marriage Law and the CCP abolished the practice of delayed marriage.

In the paragraph above, I discussed some of the distinctive social features of the delta. Some of these local characteristics in the Pearl River Delta remain integrated in the local culture. In the following section, I describe how these features shape the economic
transformation and how the association between women and development has been constructed since Deng Xiaoping introduced rural reform in 1978.

2. Women and Development in Economic Reform Period

Since the 1978 economic reform, the progress made in Guangdong has been so substantial that the economic performance in Guangdong Province is recognized to be "one step ahead" of the rest of the country (Vogel, 1989). Among various rural areas in Guangdong, the Pearl River delta is the core of Guangdong’s economic development (Tukari Sawada 1991 1, Vogel 1989 161-196; Johnson 1992 185-220; 1993 1-48).

The agricultural economy in the delta has moved away from subsistence-grain production to commercialized production. The fruit, vegetable, fish and other cash-crop production has, once again, become very prominent in local agricultural activities. There are many specialized households which engage in raising fish, livestock, or in fruit production. Convenient transportation and well-developed local markets are advantages for developing these agricultural sidelines. These products are not only for local consumption but also exported to Hongkong and Macao. The economic integration between the Pearl River delta and Hongkong was first established in the agricultural sector, in which the delta became the biggest supplier of agricultural products to Hongkong residents.

Besides a flourishing commercialized agriculture, the village and township enterprises, especially the labour-intensive industries, have been developed at a spectacular pace. In the delta, "Non-agricultural activities, especially rural enterprises, have become the major growth points in the wake of decentralization and market-oriented production" (Johnson 1993 ).
According to Johnson’s observation, the forms of production management in agricultural activities and industrial activities in the delta are significantly different. While in the agricultural sector, the production is basically household-managed, while rural industry has remained under collective-management. Many of the local enterprises are the descendants of the former commune and brigade industries (Johnson 1993).

The fast growth of rural industries can be attributed to its proximity to Hongkong. Kinsmen in Hongkong and Macao play a vital role in establishing a link between local industries and the global market. The economic integration between Hongkong and the delta area further stimulates rural industrialization in the delta. Much of the light industry which was located in Hongkong has been moved to the delta area because of cheaper labour and favourable taxation offered by the Chinese government. The former commune or brigade enterprises are reconstructed by the local entrepreneurs and businessmen from Hongkong and Macao or overseas. These kinds of joint-ventures are becoming so overwhelming that they dominate the rural industries in the delta. "The Pearl River Delta, more than any other regions of China, has become firmly incorporated into the global economy and has assumed a particular role in the new international division of labour" (Johnson 1993 ). The prospect that Hongkong will be returned to China in less than five years accelerates the economic integration between Hongkong and south China, particularly between Hongkong and the inner land of the delta.

The transformation of the rural economy in the delta has brought dramatic change in women’s lives. In order to sketch a picture of how the lives of women in the delta have been changed since the reform, I will introduce three studies to discuss this issue. From different
perspectives, these three studies—respectively by Andors (1988), Woon (1991) and Siu (1993)—address women with various characteristics in the delta. The major theme shared by them is how the economic reform in the Delta brought about change to women’s lives and what the implications are for gender relations. Through their findings, I try to demonstrate both the negative and positive impacts of economic development on women in the delta.

(1) Phyllis Andors: *Women and Work in Shenzhen*

Andors depicts a picture of women workers in Shenzhen, the best-known Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in China. Women in Shenzhen have attracted so much public attention that *Women of China*, the official magazine of the All-China Women’s Federation, has reported these newly changed roles of women in the newly developed city-Shenzhen. These reports highly praised women’s performance and their contributions to SEZ’s development (*Women of China* 1984 March, April).

Andors is primarily interested in the implication of the development in Shenzhen on women workers who mainly come from the rural Guangdong. In Shenzhen, 70 percent of the manufacturing and service labour forces is made up of young women. While hotel and some professional occupations are occupied by young women from cities, women workers in textiles, electronics, toys, finishing and assembly operations are predominated by young women from the rural counties of Southern Guangdong surrounding Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (31).

In Shenzhen, enterprises established by foreign investors and Chinese businessmen from Hongkong, Macao, Taiwan or overseas Chinese, provide unprecedented opportunity for rural women to work in factories, and many of these women have become the first generation
of full-time workers in cities. Employment in Shenzhen also provides them with the opportunity to experience urban life, which there was almost no chance for them before.

In Shenzhen, a gender-segregated labour market is distinctive. Andors discovers that the overwhelming majority of the managerial staff and skilled technical labour in the enterprises are men, while the majority of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs are filled by women. Women are assigned to traditional female-typed jobs, which are often low-paid, and there is also a lack of opportunities for career advancement. In Shenzhen, there are few female workers of rural background who have moved to the managerial level. This seems to fit with the usual pattern of female labour in the extensive export processing zones in other Third World countries. Andors indicates that in these enterprises there are enormous barriers against women being promoted up the career ladder. "To the extent that TNC reinforces traditional Chinese attitudes regarding female roles, therefore the transformation become more difficult" (39-40).

While profit-oriented enterprises are in favour of a gender-segregated labour market, the administrative bureau—which represents the interest of the local government—does not seem to be making any efforts to change this employment pattern. On the contrary, it cooperates with the enterprises to take advantage of the inferior position of young women. The most typical one is the Shenzhen's Labour Service Company [LSC]. In Shenzhen, the LSC is the administrative bureau whose major responsibility is to recruit workers for all foreign-invested enterprises.

According to its employment policies, there are two categories of workers in Shenzhen: "contract" workers and temporary workers. Contract workers enjoys higher wages and more
benefits than the temporary workers. For workers who have a Shenzhen Hukou (official residency), they almost automatically become contract workers. The working status of workers from rural areas are determined by the joint decision of the administrative bureau and the enterprises. Both the LSC and the joint ventures tend to employ young rural women as temporary workers and try to prolong the process for them to become contact workers. Both the enterprises and the LSC gain the maximum benefits from keeping a temporary working status for women without a Shenzhen Hukou. For the enterprises, the advantage of this strategy is that they can employ or dismiss workers according to their cycle of production. For the LSC, it can gain more profit from temporary workers than from contract workers. "The greater the management fee paid to the LSC, and the less welfare money to be paid to the workers, the more money retained by the LSC. This gives the LSC an incentive to increase the temporary portion of the labour forces, which is overwhelmingly by female" (31). The management of the LSC, despite its being a administrative body, is profit-oriented. Even though the LSC probably does not mean to exploit women, its employment policy is typically male-biased and the interests of women workers are ignored. Those women workers who come from rural areas do not have much bargaining power to demand fair treatment.

With the cooperation of the enterprises and the administrative bureau, women workers with a rural background are always at the bottom of the career ladders. Few of them can successfully transfer their Hukou to Shenzhen, which means there are few chances for them to develop their employment status or become permanent residents in Shenzhen. The most common pattern for them is that, after a couple of years of hard work in Shenzhen, they will return to their home areas, get married and settle down in their husbands' families.
Andors concludes that "the sense of emancipation of women in Shenzhen is limited" (37). Most of the women workers do not develop a strong sense of seeking gender equality and "almost all of these women are politically uninvolved" (37). Working out of traditional households, and having exposure to urban life style, makes them become more active consumers, but little more than that. Some women workers become captured by expensive beauty products and they do not have much left to send back to their natal family.

From Andors’ study, it does not seem very likely that the women workers from rural areas can improve their social status because the environment in Shenzhen is not supportive. The employment pattern indeed reinforces women’s inferior social status and provides little chance for their career mobility. Women are pushed into unfavourable employment situation by the cooperation of the administrative bureau and the enterprises. In Shenzhen’s development agenda, promoting women’s social position does not seem to be recognized as important issue. Women’s interests are readily sacrificed in the pursuit of the economic growth. Some of the development policies have created more institutional barriers for women’s moving up to higher level in their professions. I believe that a lack of gender perspective in the official development policy is the most fundamental problem.

(2) Woon Yuen-Fong:

*Life Satisfaction among Rural Women: In an Emigrant Community in South China* (1991)

Andors spells out the structural barriers against women workers from rural areas in their career pursuit and concludes that the emancipation of women workers in Shenzhen is limited. Yuan-fong Woon studies the life satisfaction of rural women in Chikan zhen, in Kaiping
county in the western Pearl River delta, from a socio-psychological level. She suggests that women's narrow general view (low self-consciousness) as the major reason for a lack of fundamental transformation of gender relations in rural China.

While Andors discusses women workers who migrated from rural Guangdong to Shenzhen, Woon lay her eyes on the women who stay in the village. She is concerned with how women themselves have perceived the change in their lives since the introduction of Deng's development policy.

While the mobility of women from villages to towns or cities becomes more and more common, like the women workers in Shenzhen whom Andors describes, most of them are unmarried young women. The married women tend to stay in the village, particularly after the male members have left for the non-agricultural sectors in towns or cities. According to Woon's report (1989 1), there has been a great disparity in the migration's rate between women and men since reform. The percentage of men employed in Kaiping dropped from 78 percent in 1978 to 36 percent in 1987; about 37 percent of local men shifted to towns and about 16 percent of them to cities. Women have remained primarily village bound. Their village residency decreased only from 97 percent in 1978 to 88 percent in 1987. Since the reform, the difference in occupation mobility between men and women has been very marked. In Kaiping, the percentage of men engaged in paddy farming dropped dramatically from an average of 45 percent during 1949--1978 period to 4 percent during the decade between 1978 and 1987. Now few able-bodied male are full-time farmers. Women, however, are still highly involved in paddy farming, with their rate of participation dropping only from 46 percent to 37 percent during this period. Men remained 14 percent of the work force in the total
agricultural sidelines, with women dropping slightly from 46 to 42 percent.

Similar trends are also reported in Guldin's study of Huaxian, another county in the Delta area. Guldin discovers that those who continue farming are increasingly females and the elder, while their male and the younger relatives find more lucrative employment in rural industry or in the towns and cities. Guldin suggests that "the reforms have mostly enabled men to leave the agricultural sector" (1992 159). It is revealed as a general pattern that, while men leave the villages to pursue more lucrative works, most of the women still stay around the village to take care of the agricultural production and household chores. It is clearly shown that under the new development policies, women have not been granted the equal opportunities for women and men in their economic pursuits.

When some researchers suggest the new development policies have had detrimental influence on women, most of them judge women's social status by some objective criteria. Woon's study attempts to probe the issue of women and development in Post-Mao China from another perspective. She is primarily concerned with the self-assessment of local women about the effects of the reform on their own lives and tries to present an "insiders' view". In striking contrast to the general opinion of the western scholars on this issue, Woon discovers that most of the women "feel the Deng Xiao-ping era has provided them with their best opportunities and greatest life satisfaction" (143).

In Woon's study, women in Chikan are categorized into three groups, namely the female wage earners in village and town enterprises, women who remain in agricultural production and the female dependants of Overseas Chinese Qiaojuan. She describes what they think about the different changes in their lives since the reform and discusses the implications
of their self-assessment on life satisfaction.

For the female wage earners, there are about 25 per cent rural women now working in rural enterprises, which has increased from 6 per cent before the reform. It seems there have been more opportunities for women to become full-time factory workers. However, even though women are becoming more and more involved in non-agricultural activities, the gender-segregated employment pattern in rural enterprises remains intact. Women are still the inferior gender in the labour force. They are cheaper labour and there is not much room for advancement in their careers. Women have attained less benefits from the reform than men.

Despite the fact that women are still discriminated against in production, women workers express a greater sense of life satisfaction. Woon tries to explain this discrepancy between the positive self-assessment of life satisfaction and the negative condition women face in social reality. She argues that, because women get cash and receive direct payment from the enterprises, their earning power becomes more visible and their financial contribution to the family budget is recognized as significant. These changes make them feel satisfied. Woon believes that "To these female wage earners, the psychological feeling that they are more respected than before in the domestic sphere is enough to overcome the real discrimination against them in the public sphere" (154). Therefore, for these women wage earners, they feel grateful to Deng’s development polices despite the fact that they are still placed in an unfavourable position in the labour market.

For women who remain in agricultural production, they also express their appreciation of the change since Deng’s reform. In the delta, as I indicated earlier, women had traditionally been full-time agricultural workers. Particularly in emigrant communities, like Chikan, when
the male members were away from villages, women farmers always bore the major responsibility for agricultural production. These women regard their lives during Mao's period as the worst time. During the collectivization period, the work-points system did not allocate the same points to women even though men and women performed the same task. Generally, women were not recognized as being as capable as men. During this period, there was another reason which, also weakened women's position in farm work. Because of stricter migration regulations were implemented in the 1950s, men who used to be employed outside of villages were forced to return. When they came back, they took over women's roles and women became surplus in agricultural production. Suppression of the cash-generated sideline production and the free market during some periods further deprived women's earning power. Women's roles in sideline production became less significant and women's contribution to family budget also declined considerably.

Since the reform, men have had more chances to seek employment outside of the village. In Chikan, about one fifth of the men and four fifths of the women are engaged in farm work. With the abandonment of the workpoint system and collective production in the 1980s, the household responsibility and specialized households systems effectively motivate women's potential in agricultural production. Increased market demand for poultry, fish, vegetable and livestock provide these women with more opportunities to develop their skills in commercialized activities. In Chikan today, women are very active in sideline production and marketing, and quite a number of specialized households are headed by women. The agricultural transformation from subsistence to commercialized production enhances women's earning powers and expands their decision-making roles.
Before Liberation, in the emigrant communities in the delta, women farmers organized women's co-ops and helped each other in agricultural production. During the Maoist period, there were also some "women's teams" under the collective production. These "women's teams", however, were directed by the local women organizations. For most of the time, the ideological characteristics of these "women's teams" were more significant than their actual economic function.

Now, under the reform program, voluntary co-operation among women has reappeared. Women farmers now help each other in production. In the busy season, some co-hire male labour from poorer areas to the delta to do farm work. These women farmers seem satisfied with Deng's economic policies because they feel that have more opportunities to get rich by their hard work than they had ever before. They do not need to deal with the work-point system any more. It seems that the free market does in some way provide a more or less non-discriminatory environment for women to compete with men on an equal footing in agricultural production.

Qiaojuan women are the dependants of overseas Chinese. The Qiaojuan dependents had difficult lives during the Cultural Revolution because of their overseas connections. Some of them were charged as "spies" or "traitors" without any evidence and their private property was confiscated. After China's open policy began, overseas Chinese were welcomed to visit and invest in China. The central and local governments apologized for the previous wrong-doing to them. Some of their private property, including houses which were confiscated during the Cultural Revolution have been returned to them. Under the current policies, these Qiaojuan dependants also receive favourable treatment from the government; for examples they and their
children are accepted by universities with lower scores, and they have the priority in work allocation.

Since the start of China's open policy, there has been considerably increased remittance sent by overseas Chinese to their dependents in villages. When they come back to visit their villages, these overseas Chinese always bring all kinds of gifts to their dependents, including household electronic appliance. They also generously donate large amount of money to build public facilities in the villages.

Today, Qiaojuan households are a privileged group in Chikan. One of the most interesting phenomena about these qiaojuan households is that some first generation emigrants come back to look for brides for their sons abroad. Many local families who have unmarried daughters seem to prefer this marriage prospect. Many unmarried young women in Chika regard this type of marriage as the best choice, because they may have the chance to immigrate abroad, or at least enjoy the luxurious life in villages. Most women dependents in these qiaojuan families do not need to work. By remittance sent by their relatives, they can enjoy quite comfortable material lives in the eyes of the village. The women in this category appear to be envied by the other two categories of women.

With the considerable improvement of living standard since the reform, women in these three groups all express greater satisfaction about their lives. Few of them are conscious of unequal gender relations under the current developmental framework. Economic growth and the rise of living standard do not seem to bring about a positive environment for promoting gender equality. For women workers, the gender-segregated division of labour is prevalent in rural industries. They have few chances to advance in their career ladders or have less
possibility to transfer to other more lucrative occupations. For women farmers, the increasing earning power does not improve their position in either the domestic sphere or the public sphere. For the female qiaojuan dependents, their primary roles are familial ones and they rely on the support from male members abroad. However, the lives of this group of women are admired by the rest of women in Chikan. Seeking overseas Chinese or their dependents as marriage mate has become very prevalent in recent years. It seems as the perfect way for them to attain better lives. I believe this "social ideal" marriage pattern, which is constructed by current social-economic reality, can not do much good for promoting gender equality.

Woon suggests that "there is a great discrepancy between the subjective feeling of life satisfaction and the objective reality of discriminations and prejudice they have to face" (165). She attributes this discrepancy to rural women’s limited social horizons and narrow general world view, because the rural women in Chikan seem unaware of non-material dimensions of life satisfaction. Woon argues that "In fact, rural women’s narrow social horizon and their tendency to use concrete criteria for assessing their life satisfaction may become an obstacle to the realization of equality between men and women" (165).

In her conclusion, on the one hand, Woon indicates that western scholars such as Wolf, Stacey, Croll, Robinson, Johnson, Andors and Davin actually exaggerated the detrimental sides of Deng’s reform on women. She believes that development policies in Deng’s rural reform have genuinely enhanced women’s economic independence and have augmented women’s personal recognition, particularly for women farmers and workers. On the other hand, she also points out that increasing economic capability does not necessarily ensure an increase of women in the power structure in either the domestic or public spheres in rural areas. Women’s
familial roles are still identified as primary. No matter how women have expanded their roles in economic activities, it is still women who take care of domestic chores. In Deng’s China, women’s triple roles, in social production, in the management of household work and in the community sectors, have not been alleviated, and "the authority of men in both the private and the public spheres has been unchallenged" (167).

Woon presents an interesting "insiders’ view" on the issue of women and development and most of her arguments are very pointed. I am not convinced, however, with her assumption that the reason women use concrete material criteria to assess their life satisfaction is because of local women’s narrow social horizons, which may also become obstacles for women’s improving their social status. I would argue, instead, that the major problem in current women’s liberation is that women have not developed a great sense of gender equality. Here I have two propositions on this issue which are different from Woon’s argument.

First of all, I suggest that "women’s narrow life horizon" is not the most fundamental reason for them to assess life satisfaction from the material perspective. Currently, China is undergoing a initial stage of economic development. People are so eager to be economically prosperous after so many years’ material scarcity. It is little wonder that material criteria have become central for the assessment of life satisfaction. In addition, the development policies identifies the economic growth and improving living standard as the central task. The pursuit of economic affluence and material enjoyment are supported by official positions on development. It seems natural for women in Chikan to assess life satisfaction by the concrete material criteria. Women’s confining in the rural community and lack of chance to be exposed to the outside world may help them to internalize the dominant ideas. But I do not think it is
the fundamental reason that women use this way to assess their own lives. Instead, I suggest the low level of economic development and the current development policies should be responsible for women using concrete material criteria to assess life satisfaction.

Secondly, from a socio-psychological perspective, I would like to attribute women's low sense of gender equality to their socialization. In rural areas, traditional ideas on gender roles are still prevalent and women have never been inspired to pursue their personal satisfaction ahead of their family's interests. There is still a debate as to whether it is a cultural difference or whether it is indeed a false consciousness of rural women, when women in Asia are generally identified to "seek greater satisfaction by the improvement of her family economic situation and of her status within the family", compared to their counterparts in western countries who seek freedom "from the family responsibilities to achieve intellectual and emotional satisfaction from creative or professional activities" (Whyte & Whyte 1982 7-8). Here I can not generally judge whether it is a cultural characteristic, or simply an unenlightened traditional social perception, when women submerge their life satisfaction into improving the livelihood of the family in general. But it is certain that women in Chikan identify their life satisfaction from the perspective of their families. When women were asked to assess their lives, they probably considered the general interests of their households. Since they identify themselves as family members first, the self-assessment of life satisfaction may be also based on their sense of family lives. After Deng's new policies, most households have greatly improved their living standards, women, as one part of the family, are ready to judge the change of their lives from the perspective of the family, not from individual level.

I suggest that women's low sense of seeking gender equality is not necessarily linked
to their narrow social horizon, as Woon suggests. Instead, I argue that because of the development policy which emphasizes economic growth and the improvement of material standards for people's lives, women tend to use concrete criteria to assess life satisfaction. In addition, in rural China today, a similar process of socialization is maintained. Women are still primarily identified members of the family first. When they were asked to assess life satisfaction, they tend to consider it from the perspective of the family, not from the individual level. Even though the recent economic reforms have not changed women's inferior social status and women have not attained the equal benefits from the economic reform as men have, they still feel more satisfied because households in general have indeed achieved significantly from Deng's development policies.

(3) HELEN SIU

Reconstitution Dowry and Brideprice in South China (1993)

While Andors and Woon are both primarily concerned with women's changing roles in production and their implication on women's social status, Siu studies from another perspective, how the economic transformation effects the practices of marital transfer in Nanshi, another rural community in the Pearl River delta area. Her work reveals gender relations through examining social interaction in marital transfers practices.

In her study, Siu tries to demonstrate that the socio-economic transformation affects the practice of marital transfer. She indicates the changed and unchanged character of marital transfers in the town and villages of Nanshi through three historic periods: the imperial period, the Maoist era and the reform era. Siu suggests that "four decades of socialist politics have
underlain the mutual impact of marriage and the economy, changing and at times preserving cultural expectations, restructuring economic needs and at times reinforcing familial strategies" (171).

After examining marital transfers in three historic periods, Siu identifies one of the persistent features in the marital transfer in Nanshi community; different patterns still exist between town dwellers and villagers, despite forty years of social-economic transformation in China. Town dwellers have always emphasized the contribution from a bride’s family (dowry). For the villagers, they have been more concerned with the contribution from the groom’s family (brideprice). This village-town difference in the practices of marital transfers started centuries ago and it does not seem to have fundamentally changed.

Siu is particularly interested in the social function of marital transfer in Nanshi under Deng’s new development framework. For town dwellers after 1978, the dowry has been escalating in value. Siu argues that, with the economic prosperity and the gradual rise of the middle-class in the town, the emphasis on dowry in marital transfers becomes part of a strategy for families to strengthen their social networks and constructs their social status in the local community. The display of dowry in public to show off their wealth functions in the same way as it did for the elite class before 1949. In the town of Nanshi, the prestige building through dowry is so important today that, sometimes, if the bride’s natal family can not provide enough "respected" dowry to show off in the public, the groom’s family would contribute amount goods or cash to the bride’s family and let the bride bring them with her as "dowry" in the marriage ceremony. It is vital for the groom’s family in the town to show to the public that the bride is from an "appropriate" family. Through the display of dowry in public, the
families build up their social prestige in the local community.

In the villages, the practice of the marital transfer is emphasized in another aspect. While the dowry remains moderate, the bride price has increased considerably. Siu does not seem to be convinced by the proposition that the rising bride price is due to the more valued labour of young women in recent years. She attributes other social factors for the rising bride price in the villages. The first is the local marriage market. In the village of Nanshi today, there still exists a socio-economic hierarchy between town and villages. Young unmarried women still seem to prefer town-residents for their marriage choices. This creates an unbalanced sex ratio in the marriage market of the villages.

Another important factor which is attributed to the rising bride price by Siu is the development of the household economy since the reform. Under the household responsibility system, a plot of land is allocated to each household and it becomes a valued household resource. While male members migrate to the towns or cities for more lucrative work, a substantial number of peasants are hired from other poor rural areas to the relatively affluent delta areas for agricultural production. This makes the old generation feel particularly threatened by the increasing number of outsiders who currently reside in the local community. In order to secure land and settlement rights, they re-emphasize women's familial roles to protect the household interests. The male villagers are willing to pay a higher bride price in order to have more control of women's production and reproduction roles in the households. "It seems logical to assume that families are paying a high bride price in order to secure the right of women to argument long term field labour" (169). For young women after marriage, they are expected to stay at their parents-in-laws households and participate or supervise the
farm work. For these married women, staying in the villages and keeping eyes on the household property become their major responsibilities. These women are much more tied down to their husbands' families because they feel more obliged after their husbands offered high brideprices for them.

In the different socio-economic contexts of town and villages in Nanshi, the residents develop different strategies to perpetuate family wealth and status. But these two patterns of marital transfers reveal unequal gender relations. In both town and villages, women's familial roles are recognized as primary, and this perception has been further reinforced by the rural economic reform when the household once again becomes the most important production unit. Siu argues that "the involvement of women in the continuation of the house remain intact in both town and village after 40 years of socialism. In particular, when the family once again become the focal institution in peasants and town dwellers' lives, women's familial roles are once again reemphasized" (173).

In both town and villages in Nanshi, women are used as instruments to perpetuate the wealth and status of their husbands' families. To villagers, by offering higher marriage payment as bride price, they expect to have a dominant voice in women's roles as wives or daughter-in-laws, and more effectively tie women to the household economy. It becomes a general pattern that once women get married, they are most likely to give up their wage jobs and return to the domestic spheres in their husbands' households. The rising brideprice misleadingly justifies the right of husbands and parents-in-laws in having more control of women's lives. In the case of town dwellers, the escalating dowry indicates that a woman from an "appropriate background" is still regarded as the most important factor to groom's
family. The display of dowry in public become an essential part of prestige-building in the widened class stratification in Nanshi. In both town and villages, the patrilocality is still the dominant post-marital residential pattern and the idea of the bride as the property of the husband’s family is still maintained.

The different patterns of marital transfers between town dwellers and villagers are maintained and lavish dowries and extravagant wedding feasts are prevalent once again. In some ways, the traditional features in marriage seem the same as they were forty years ago. However, in both the town and villages in Nanshi, the change in the marital practices is significant in some aspects. For example, from pre-1949 history to Mao’s period, the families of bride and groom were much more involved in the marital transfers than the principals. Both bride and groom largely depended on their families’ financial support for dowry or brideprice and wedding ceremony expenses. In the 1980s, however, it is the young couples themselves who "take initiative in building their own conjugal funds". The self-accumulated dowries and bride price is becoming more and more common. One of the reason is that the younger generation earn a greater deal of money than their old folks. They tend to keep most of their wages and bonuses for themselves instead of handing them to their parents. This changing trend is also reported in Quan Yi’s research on Longmen, another rural community in the Delta region (1990 3) and Gilmartin’s report on the general view about rural China (1990 218). The self-accumulated conjugal funds may anticipate more freedom for young people to choose their marriage mates.

Despite some young people’s ability to meet marital expenses, most parents are still eager to make some financial contribution to brides and grooms. Siu assumes that parents’
contribution to marital transfers is a means for them to maintain inter-generational dependence. In China today, most parents in rural areas still have to rely on their children in their old age. Even though a young couple is financially capable for marriage, parents still see marriage as business of the two families involved, an important event for the two families’ prestige-building in the local community and for maintaining intimate inter-generational relations. Just as Johnson describes in his research about the changed and unchanged aspects of the social perceptions of marriage in the delta after PRC’s forty years’ history, "Marriage is central to family continuity. The patrilocal system of marriage has been little affected by the dramatic change of forty years...To be sure, marriage is no longer 'blind' and individuals have choices in the matter of whom they will marry. The decision to marry, nonetheless, occurs as past of clearly understood family consequences" (Johnson 1990 23)

Siu's study clearly demonstrates the complex implications of the economic reform on gender relations. In some aspects, the economic transformation seems to maintain traditional practices and even reinforce the unequal gender relations. In other aspects, it is evident that some positive changes in gender relations has occured since the reform.

**SUMMARY: The Indications of Three Studies on the Pearl River delta Region**

From these three studies, we can see the complex dynamic between economic development and gender relations. There is evidence that the reform program and economic growth provide more chances for women to increase their economic power, from unmarried women workers in Shenzhen to women workers in rural industries and women farmers in Chikan. Many of them feel happy with these recent changes in their lives. However, despite
the impressive economic growth, the current development framework perpetuates unequal gender relations. The unequal social status between women and men is persistent. From the new-management style introduced by the joint-venture to development policies of local authorities in Shenzhen, from the persistent gender-segregated division of labour in the rural industries of Chikan to the social interaction in marital transfers in Nanshi, there is no doubt a lack of constructive systems and supportive social environment for promoting gender equality under the current development framework. Women have not the same access to the opportunities provided by the reform as men have. Women’s increasing economic capability does not substantially enhance their position in the power hierarchy and they still face more barriers in the social structure after reform. It is sure that women have benefitted from the economic progress since reform, but they do not gain an equal share of the fruit. The social expectation of men being the more important participants and benefactors than women in the reform is also doubtless.
CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I discuss the issues of women and development at three levels: international, national and regional. Even though there are different revelations under each concrete social contexts, some common themes can be identified.

The most common feature is the gender-insensitivity in development planning. In advanced capitalist nations, women’s interests had long been ignored. It was not until the women’s movements in the 1960s that traditional gender roles were challenged. The general pattern which women submerge their own interests beneath those of men and children were also called into question. Feminist perspectives were proposed to raise women’s self-consciousness about their own interests, rights, needs and freedom. It was suggested that familial roles are not the primary of women and women should pursue their personal satisfaction through creative professional lives.

The feminist ideas, however, were criticized later as representing only the interests of women in the upper-middle class. With the development in these advanced capitalist countries in the past four decades, familial roles became even more heavily attached to women in the lower class. The disintegration of families in lower classes put these women into a more deteriorated situation. Numerous single mothers or divorced women in the lower classes became more socially deprived. It is true that more women now appear in the power hierarchy, but most of these elite women do not seem to represent the interests of the women in lower class. Among advanced capitalist nations today, the marginalization of women in development seem most prevalent among women in lower classes.

In developing capitalist nations, after learning the lessons from defining development
as "westernization", some seemed to realize the importance of socially adjusted strategies in their pursuit of development. But unequal relations in global markets between developing and developed countries put women in the third world into much worse situation. With the new global division of labour, the household economy in many third world countries were demised, which also weakened women’s economic power. Women’s marginalization in the process of development became a serious problem in the Third World countries.

In socialist countries, women did not seem able to change their social status successfully through another perspective of development—socialist construction. Different from that in advanced capitalist countries, in which pressure from some women organizations and women activists on the authorities was the initial force for promoting gender equality in society, in socialist countries, the socialist parties proclaimed that they were committed to liberate women from all traditional restrictions. Women’s liberation was recognized as a task in social revolution by most these socialist parties. Yet women’s special interests were not acknowledged by the governments. The experience of women in development in these socialist countries also indicated that politisation was not sufficient to pursue gender equality. The tendency in which the socialist parties subordinated women’s interests to the so called "the interests of socialist development" actually reflected the male-biases in the development planning of these socialist parties.

China provides me with a great opportunity to examine some of the assumptions on the issues of women and development. In three historic periods, I explore these issues in rural China. I believe that women in China have achieved remarkable progress under the leadership of the CCP. But a lack of the gender-consciousness in development planning and the denial
of the necessity of a feminist perspective should bear the major responsibility for the existing
gender inequality in China today.

I discuss regional development, in which the Pearl River Delta is my case study. It is
found that since Deng’s reform, women have been indeed provided more opportunities to
augment their participation in the economic sphere. Some express satisfaction for the recent
change, but the economic prosperity has not resulted in a more positive or constructive
environment for women to advance their position in the power hierarchy in both domestic and
public spheres.

From examining the issues of women and development at three levels, I suggest that,
as far as women have not raised their self-consciousness to challenge male-bias in development
policies, women will not have much chance to successfully pursue their equality with men
under any social context. Improving women’s self-consciousness is the key for women to be
genuinely integrated into the development projects and to share the fruit of development
equally with men.
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