MAKING GENDERED SENSE OF CIVIL SOCIETY: 
A STUDY OF CHINESE INTELLECTUAL POLITICS IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years considerable debate has taken place among Western scholars as to whether civil society is presently emerging in China. For many of these scholars, any movement away from state control and the assertion of individual autonomy is, for the most part, considered a positive political development and one that will contribute to democratic processes. This paper argues that state-society autonomy may not always be a progressive political force. Indeed, greater social autonomy can result in increased marginalization for different sectors of women in the context of both civil society, as well as democratization. For this reason, it is critical to analyze the connection between civil society and democratization in terms of the gendered implications of both processes. Only then is it possible to judge the extent to which the political transition is a positive political development for both women and men.

Specifically, this paper conducts a gendered analysis of the work of critical intellectuals in the 1980s and the work of Beijing women scholar-activists in the 1990s. Employing Joan Scott's understanding of "gender," it is my argument that each layer of political re-definition that the critical intellectuals undertook -- political subjectivity, political theory, and activism -- points to the emergence of a male, and very masculine, "new public." The assertion of the critical intellectuals autonomy was thus at the expense of others. The women scholar activists, on the other hand, have been simultaneously asserting their autonomy vis-a-vis the state while building close ties with the state-run All China Women's Federation. Not only have the women scholar-activists interacted with a wider range of social groups than their male counterparts, but their view is that the state can, and indeed does, play an important role in upholding the rights of women. Social and economic rights, I would therefore argue, must be emphasized alongside political rights if there is to be any real democracy in China's future.
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CHAPTER ONE

GENDER, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIZATION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In recent years considerable debate has taken place among Western scholars as to whether civil society is presently emerging in China\(^1\). For many of these scholars, any movement away from state control and the assertion of individual autonomy is, for the most part, considered a positive political development and one that will contribute to democratic processes. Gordon White, Jude Howell and Shang Xiaoyuan have argued, nevertheless, that the tendency towards idealizing the political potential of civil society should be resisted (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:216). On the one hand, the new private entrepreneurial strata are increasingly resistant to the prospect of radical political change because their interests are bound up with the stability of the current process of market reform (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:216). On the other hand, they note that while some underground political underground organizations may be in favour of liberal democracy, others advocate a return to Maoist politics or, in the case of ethnic separatist organizations, a break-up of the political community (White, 1996:220). The emergence of civil society thus has no necessarily logical follow-through of a peaceful, democratic transition for all of a nation’s citizens.

Like White, Howell and Shang, I would like to caution against the idealization of civil society -- but for different reasons. It is my argument that the emergence of civil society is a highly gendered process. Indeed, greater social autonomy can result in increased marginalization for different sectors of women in the context of both civil society, as well as democratization. For this reason, I would argue, we need to analyze the connection between civil society and democratization.

\(^1\)A recent review by Ma Shu-yun (1994) contains references to most of the relevant Western theoretical discussions as well as provides an overview of some of the theoretical discussions of civil society by Chinese intellectuals.
in terms of the gendered implications of both processes. Only then is it possible to judge the extent to which the political transition is, indeed, a positive political development and truly democratic for both women and men.

This paper provides a gendered analysis of the emergence of a public sphere amongst the intellectual elite in China over the last two decades. I have chosen to focus on this particular group because of their prominence in the civil society literature (particularly in the aftermath of the Beijing Spring) and the important role they have played over the last century during key times of political transition in China. By focusing on the activities of an elite group such as the intellectuals, however, I do not want to suggest that they are somehow the natural arbiters of political change in this country, or elsewhere. But by focusing on the dual workings of gender and elitism at play in intellectual activities during this period, it will be possible to begin to problematise what has largely been assumed to be progressive political change.

"Making Gendered Sense of Civil Society," is broken down into five chapters. This first chapter is concerned with establishing a theoretical framework for the rest of the paper. Here, I discuss the theoretical application of civil society and gender in the context of China. In the second half of the chapter, the relationship between Chinese women and the state since 1949 is explored. The way that the state has framed gender relations prior to and during the reform has had important ramifications for some of the gendered aspects of civil society as it has emerged in China over the last two decades.

Chapter two provides a contextual background in regards to gender, intellectuals and the public sphere in China over the last century. In this chapter I argue that when intellectual public

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2The elitism of intellectual activities has been argued in depth by a number of writers including Elizabeth Perry (1994), Timothy Cheek (1994), Li Cheng and Lynn White (1991) and Edward Gu (1996) among others.
spheres have emerged in the past century, they have done so in a highly gendered and often exclusive way. The consolidation of the Chinese Communist Party, in particular, points to the way that seemingly progressive intellectual publics can create contradictory, and even sexist, government leadership.

The third chapter examines the emergence of a “public” sphere during the 1980s in China. While literature espoused a return to humanistic values, humanism often contained misogynistic threads. The political theory of the era also ignored women’s issues and political activism did not include nor acknowledge women either. The absence of women (in print and activism) are the result of a backlash to socialist ethics, on the one hand, and structural obstacles to their participation on the other.

Women did not remain silent for long, however. Chapter four discusses how new women’s studies programs and women’s organizations began to address some of the real problems women have been facing under reform. While still situating their work to a certain degree within the framework of the critical intellectuals of the 1980s (and all the elitist and post-Cultural Revolution reactions that that has entailed), the women’s activism, I would argue, contains the seeds to challenge the dominant alternative political discourse of the era.

The final chapter returns to the question of the gendered nature of civil society and political transition. It is my conclusion that when thinking about civil society, “autonomy” cannot be the defining criteria of progressive political change. Given the absence of women and women’s issues in the critical intellectual debates of the 1980s on the one hand, and the cooperative state-NGO relationships of the women’s intellectual public in the 1990s on the other, state-societal autonomy alone will not ensure the development of democracy. Indeed, I would argue, it is more important to emphasize the “civic” aspects of civil society, aspects which may in fact include some measure
of state involvement.

(Male) Individuals and the State

The Western discourse on civil society and China emerged largely after the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe and China's own Beijing Spring, when millions of students and citizens took to the street. As already noted, for the most part, emphasis has been placed on activities that have demonstrated autonomy from the state. Underlying this approach has been the assumption that political transition is a gender-blind process.

A recent example of this is The Individual and the State in China. The book focuses on, "key areas and specific relationships that are not only important for their role in the social, political, and economic development of the state but also in the shaping of individual identities." (Hook, 1996:2) Articles focus on the relationship between workers, managers, and the state, the peasant farmer and the state, the soldier and the state, the intellectual and the state, and youth and the state (Hook, 1996:2). Interestingly, no section is accorded the topic of "women and the state" or "gender and the state." Even more interesting is the fact that women as a social category were mentioned only three times throughout the entire volume -- and in passing at that. It would seem that according to the editors of this volume, the female individual is not shaped by economic and political developments.

I would argue, nonetheless, that women are fundamentally affected, and often affected differently than men, by drastic change in the political and economic spheres. Indeed, twenty-five years of feminist scholarship clearly attests to the fact that no political system is gender neutral, including liberal democracy. With the exception of the Nordic states, the representation and socio-economic standing of women in liberal democracies remains appalling low (Phillips, 1993:96). Anne
Phillips has argued, nevertheless, that feminists must not give up on liberal democracy but rather challenge current versions on offer (Phillips, 1993:109). I would agree that this is crucial not only for women living in liberal democracies, but for those living in nations that are shifting in that direction.

There are two ways I would suggest that we need to “challenge current versions on offer.” The first is to rethink our understanding of civil society as a means to obtain democracy, and the second is to rethink what we mean by democracy itself.

White, Howell and Shang have set out a useful framework of the application of civil society to China’s transition in their recent book, *In Search of Civil Society* (1996). In order to avoid the pitfall of labelling all activity autonomous from the state as necessarily equalling the seeds of democracy, they differentiate between a sociological model of civil society, and a political conception of civil society. The sociological model is, “that of an intermediate associational realm situated between the state on the one side and the basic building blocks of society on the other (individuals, families, and firms), populated by social organizations which are separate, and enjoy some degree of autonomy from, the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:3). The political conception involves, “the establishment of a civil society in the sense of a political society which legitimizes the free operations of social associations through the rule of law and guaranteed civil and political rights (in effect some form of liberal democracy).” (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:215). In their study of the emergence and evolution of social and business organizations in China, White, Howell and Shang conclude that sociological civil society in China contains both the seeds of political construction and collapse (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:215).

In this paper, I will be focusing on the political potential of both the public of the critical
intellectuals in the 1980s and the public of the Beijing women scholar-activists in the 1990s. In order to do this, however, I wish to expand upon the political conception of liberal democracy, as described above. First, like White, Howell and Shang, I wish to point out the danger of emphasizing autonomy as the most important aspect of democratization. As Heath B. Chamberlain has argued, the state can play an important role in facilitating more empowering socio-economic and political relations for women. Chamberlain argues that the laws and policies of the PRC have made, “some measurable progress toward civil society.”(Chamberlain, 1993:117) Second, and unlike White, Howell, and Shang, I wish to emphasize the importance of introducing/maintaining socio-economic rights alongside political rights during a process of democratization.

Both Anne Phillips writing on older liberal democracies and Georgina Waylen writing on democratization have argued about the importance of socio-economic provision for the political empowerment of women (Phillips, 1993; Waylen, 1994). Indeed, we know that as the state has withdrawn its support of women and women’s issues in Russia and Eastern Europe in recent years, women have become increasingly politically and economically marginalized. Whether suffering from the first-fired, last-hired syndrome, or whether struggling to keep their families emotionally and physically intact during times of extreme social stress, it has arguably been women whom the dismantling of socialist economic structures has hit hardest. The combination of physical and emotional exhaustion, the withdrawal of quotas for the political representation of women, and a resurgence in traditional beliefs about gender roles, have all led to the absence of women in running the economic and political affairs of the new democracies.

In her comparative work on Eastern Europe and Central America, Georgina Waylen has

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pointed out several factors which may contribute to or ameliorate the negative impact of reforms on women. First, she has pointed out that the length of a period of reform may affect the capacity of women to shape a political agenda. According to Waylen:

In Brazil the longer period of transition and the greater space for organization appear to have allowed women greater impact in transition politics than was the case in Argentina. There the military's control of society and the rapidity of the transition seem to have militated against women's groups gaining significant influence (Waylen, 1994:343).

Waylen similarly suggests that in the case of Eastern Europe, the rapidity of reform may have worked against women influencing the process of political transition (Waylen, 1994:350).

Georgina Waylen has noted two other potential scenarios during times of transition (Waylen, 1994). First, women's activities are often not perceived as political by the authoritarian leadership and as such can lead to the opening of the transition itself (Waylen, 1994:338). On the flip side, however, women may become increasingly excluded from shaping the transition as the practice of male particularistic ties is re-introduced to public life and the institutionalisation of politics takes hold (Waylen, 1994).

While there are many differences between China, Eastern Europe and Latin America, a comparative analysis amongst these regions provides us with a clearer understanding of the gendered nature of civil society and democratization. Prior to exploring how the Chinese state has influenced the construction of gendered identities in the past and during the present two decades of economic reform, nevertheless, it is important to first establish what is meant by “gender” in this paper.
"Power as Relation" or Conceptualizing an Alternative to the Feminist Gaze

Rey Chow, in her essay, "Violence in the Other Country," writes:

The image of the Chinese intellectual I often have in mind is that of a tiny person weighed down with a millstone, much heavier and much older than she is, as she tries to fight her way into the "international" arena where, if only perfunctorily, she can be heard. This millstone is 'China' (Chow, 1991).

Writing shortly after the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square, Chow critiques the ways in which the experiences of "Chinese women" have been reductively approached by Western feminist scholars. According to Chow, China has frequently either been used as a "case study" of the socialist experimentation of women's lives, or treated as a "culture garden" in which Chinese people are locked into an ossified past, with nothing to say beyond China. When Chow refers to the millstone that is China I believe she is referring as much to patterns of power within China, as she is to the manner in which those patterns are analysed and understood/misunderstood in the West.

Rey Chow is not alone in her observations. Indeed, Chandra Mohanty draws similar conclusions with respect to her critique of Western feminist writing on third world women. According to Mohanty, "the assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally."(Mohanty, 1991:55) Furthermore, through focusing on the "needs" and "problems" of women, it is impossible to discern agency, resistance or collusion. According to Mohanty, "it is only by understanding the contradictions inherent in women's location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised."(Mohanty, 1991:66)

Ellen Judd has critiqued the notion of applying a "feminist gaze" to the Chinese context. Like Rey Chow (see below) she is concerned that the application of Western feminist models prohibits Western scholars from perceiving Chinese women as agents in their lives and political practice (Judd, 1995:38-48).
In this paper I will be employing the analytical term "gender" in order to try and avoid some of the problems Rey Chow and Chandra Mohanty identify. According to Joan Scott, gender is a "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes ... and is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated." (Scott, 1988:42-45) I believe this concept will afford greater visibility on three fronts.

First, through using the term gender, it is easier to avoid the difficulties associated with the term, "woman". Because it does not focus on one subject, gender allows us to better see the interconnectedness of social relations including race, class and sexuality. Moreover, gender affords us the opportunity to see how these relations can change over time. Similarly, it is due to the variation in gender relations that I have also chosen not to apply the Western feminist conception of public and private to the Chinese context. Indeed, many Western feminists have for the most part rejected applying this uni-causal explanation for women's oppression (Rosaldo, 1980:389-417). Instead, I will draw upon the work of Dorothy Ko who has applied the concept of "inner/outer" to her study of early Qing gender relations (Ko, 1994). According to Ko, although men are associated with the outer realm beyond the family and women the inner within the family, the construct, in fact, does not demarcate mutually exclusive social and symbolic spaces; "instead, the two define and constitute each other according to shifting contexts and perspectives." (Ko, 1994:12-13) Indeed, as will be shown shortly, elite women in the Qing did not always remain cloistered in their homes nor without female networks that ranged across fairly large geographical boundaries. Moreover, men in the late Qing often conducted official affairs in their homes. In the early twentieth century while elite women were to move with increasing freedom outside of their homes, I would argue they were nevertheless still associated with matters of the inner world, symbolically and physically.

Second, and related, the analytical term gender affords greater visibility in terms of agency.
According to Joan Scott, within the processes and structures, “there is room for a concept of human agency as the attempt (at least partially rationally) to construct an identity, a life, a set of relationships, a society within certain limits and with language - conceptual language that at once sets boundaries and contains the possibility for negation, resistance, reinterpretation, the play of metaphoric invention and imagination.” (Scott, 1988:42)

Third, employing the term gender, combined with approaches influenced by post-modernism and post-structuralism, allows us to challenge understandings of what constitutes the political. Whereas political activity often refers to (male-dominated) formal politics, Georgina Waylen has argued that political action can also be seen as a struggle over dominant meanings, including dominant ideas of woman, and an aim to change those meanings (Waylen, 1996:18). In a similar vein, Joan Scott has argued that to question or alter any aspect of the “divine order” of high politics, is to threaten the entire system (Scott, 1988:48).

In this study I am employing a relational approach to power\(^5\) with respect to both my understanding of state-society relations and gender. Just as civil society cannot be understood as a phenomenon in isolation from the state, neither can “woman” be understood in isolation from changing social dynamics that she both contributes to and is affected by. In order to gain a better understanding of how intellectual public activity is emerging in the present, therefore it is necessary to first map how the state has influenced the construction of gendered identities in the past and during the present two decades of economic reform. Although I define “state” as the decision-making bodies and bureaucratic structures of both the Chinese government and Communist Party, I do not see it as autonomous from women or genderless. In my view, a gendered analysis of the

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\(^5\) Tani Barlow has used the concept “power-as-relation” in order to emphasis the importance of the constant engagement of women with hierarchical networks (Barlow, 1989a:325).
activities of present-day Chinese intellectuals reveals the state as a complex site of oppression and agency, with many women both identifying as part of its structure and in conflict with it.

The Woman Question: the PRC Policy on Women 1949-Present

When the Chinese Communist came to power in 1949, one of their first goals was to liberate women from feudal constraints. Their success in meeting this goal, however, has been compromised on several fronts.

First, there were a number of ways in which the state-initiated policies impacted positively on women's lives. To this end, new laws gave women the right to property as well as freedom to marry and divorce. Prostitution was eliminated, education for girls and boys was promoted, and many women were encouraged to work outside of the home. In addition, the Party established a mass organization, The All China Women's Federation (ACWF) in order to better implement its policies as well as support women. Home support services, such as child care and canteens, were also established in some work units and communes.

The Chinese Communist Party offered many women an opportunity to invert previous societal expectations and the ability to feel pride in their new roles as revolutionary liberated women (Rofel, 1994:226-249). Furthermore, many women felt that they were active agents in this process. For example, in her studies Ellen Judd discovered that rural women spoke of change in their lives during this period as resulting from personal initiative in an altered political climate rather than as the implementation of a campaign from above and outside (Judd, 1995:37-51). In another context, Delia Davin notes that one former prostitute who was given training and later employed as a factory worker felt that she was also offered an understanding of all that had happened to her which exonerated her of responsibility and gave her self-respect (Davin, 1989:278-279).
But not all women have been satisfied, or remained satisfied, with a liberation that has largely been defined and orchestrated by the state. Part of the problem stems from the state adopting a theory and practice that primarily recognizes and attempts to rectify women's economic inequality, but does little to alleviate oppressive gender relations in other contexts. Expected to maintain their domestic duties while working full-time, women were being asked to become more like men, especially during the Cultural Revolution when the focus on the emancipation of women was greatest. Perhaps most limiting, and indeed it was the criticism most frequently put forward by the women I interviewed, was the fact that "women's equality" in China has been a bestowed equality. And what is given can be taken away. Maxine Molyneux argues that the policies of socialist states prioritised economic development over women's emancipation (Molyneux, 1984:59). Examples of this in China include the CCP asking women to return home in the late 1950s to create jobs for unemployed men (Andors, 1983:103).

Ironically, the state has also turned some Chinese women away from women's issues as well. This became very apparent in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. During the social and political upheaval of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) women's liberation received new kinds of state support. On the one hand, Chinese women, both rural and urban, were provided more homemaking services than they were during any other period. Women also achieved their greatest level of political participation and were encouraged to become “iron women.” Slogans such as, “women hold up half the sky,” and “whatever men comrades can do, women comrades can do,” encapsulated the state’s assertion that women were equal to men (Andors, 1983:104). On the other hand, as we will see in chapters three and four, while some women embraced the new opportunities of this time, many others grew to resent an equality that forced them to be exactly like men, and they therefore rejected women’s issues entirely after the Cultural Revolution came to an end.
In 1978 the Chinese state embarked upon a new era where it has slowly directed the nation away from a central command economy to one in which the market is allowed to regulate and guide change. At the same time the state has retreated from providing various forms of social support as well as from a number of its previous efforts to promote women's equality with men. Although some women have been able to take advantage of the drastic economic changes and prospered, a number have suffered greatly.

Some of the effects of the economic reforms that have become particularly acute since the mid-1980s include reduction of social benefits, such as housing, medical and child care, by many state-owned industries and the absence of such benefits in the rapidly growing collective and private sectors that are the biggest new source of employment. This has had a particularly dramatic effect on women who previously were able to rely on some measure of support from the state for assistance in their domestic responsibilities. In addition, a number of women have been hard hit in the employment sector. Although sexual discrimination in the form of job allocation persisted throughout the first twenty years of the People's Republic, with the commencement of the reforms, these practices were exacerbated and have been largely left unchecked. As a result both university educated and working class women are facing sexual discrimination in the form of biased hiring practices and lay offs (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:243-272). As of late 1993, for example, over 70% of those made redundant in Shanghai had been women (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:71) The rate of political participation for women has also dramatically declined during the 1980s and 1990s due to the combined impact of the elimination of gender quotas in the legislative bodies (Rosen, 1995:315) and the retirement of elderly cadres (Croll, 1983:119). Indeed, whereas female representation at the Fourth National People's Congress in 1975 constituted 25.1%, the number had declined to 12.8% by the Eighth National People's Congress in 1993 (Cited in Rosen, 1995:320).
Finally, a resurgence of prostitution in the urban areas and bride-selling and female infanticide in the rural areas has also contributed to the exploitation of women. The one-child policy, in particular, has also affected rural women’s lives, in often harsh and punishing ways.

From an examination of the state’s policies on women it becomes immediately apparent that individuals have been far from “genderless” since the CCP came to power in 1949. On the one hand, under Mao, the Chinese state provided women with the opportunities never available before, albeit within a male model of liberation. On the other hand, with the introduction of economic reforms, Chinese women have become increasingly economically and politically marginalized. The following chapter discusses the gendered dimensions of intellectual public life from 1900 until 1978. It is my argument that just as the state works to produce highly gendered subjects, so have the emergent intellectual publics in China. Although women became increasingly active within the intellectual publics after the turn of the century, the publics until the reform era have for the most part been dominated by men and a masculinist discourse.
CHAPTER TWO
GENDER, INTELLECTUALS AND STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS: 1900-1978

Ron Eyerman has argued that the common understanding of the role of the intellectual results from the incorporation of traditional understandings of an intellectual within modern-day realities (Eyerman, 1994:14). The category, intellectual, thus refers, "at once to an historically constructed, contextually bound role and to a set of ideals and traditions which provide long-standing models for action for those who do the constructing" (Eyerman, 1994:16). Eyerman emphasizes that this category is not a fixed quality, but a situated social practice embedded in specific social relations which constitute that practice (Eyerman, 1994:6).

In the Chinese context, the role of the intellectual emerged from an imperial tradition which advocated a scholar's providing advice (and at times dissent) to the emperor. This chapter will examine how understandings of the role of the intellectual and state-society relations have evolved over the last century. It is my argument that the scholars who shaped political discourse during key periods of transition at the end of Qing Dynasty, during the May Fourth movement, and during the CCP Consolidation did so along gendered lines. Not only have they repeatedly redefined political boundaries in such a way that women are marginalized with emerging public formations, but they have recast women's roles symbolically and physically, to meet their goals as well.

Late Qing Gender Relations

Late Imperial China was more marked by a hierarchical form of inter-relationship between different facets of state and society than by its separation. Authority was centralized in an emperor, whose claim to rule was buttressed by his spiritual role as the intermediary between human society
and heaven and legitimized by Confucian ideology (Rankin, 1986:10). The populace was linked to the emperor by a bureaucracy of officials who believed that the best way to serve society was through serving the emperor; or serving Tianxia. Similarly, in the home, morality codes of filial piety and chastity were instructed with the belief that upright deportment led to the stability of the state. Key to the functioning of all these relationships was the Confucian logic of reciprocity and interdependence, "male and female, Confucian subjects always appeared as part of something else, defined not by essence but by context, marked by interdependency and reciprocal obligation rather than by autonomy and contradiction." (Barlow, 1989b:10)

The concepts *yin* and *yang* (female and male energy) lay at the heart of the Chinese social system. "While women were associated with *yin* (female energy) and men with *yang* (male energy), neither were "composed" of it (Barlow, 1989:10). Thus, for example, a pregnant woman was *yin* in relation to her embryo's *yang*, regardless of its sex. Moreover, *yin/yang* also indicated a subject's position in relation to others; *yin* being the subordinate and passive, and *yang* being the dominant and active. For example, an older friend was *yang* in relation to a younger friend's *yin* (Barlow, 1989:10).

What defined gender relations in the Qing world, then, was not biology, but one's role in relation to others. According to Tani Barlow, "what appear as "gender" are *yin/yang* differentiated positions: not two anatomical "sexes," but a profusion of relational, bound, unequal dyads, each signifying difference and positioning difference and analogically." (Barlow, 1994b:259) As I shall show shortly, while some women did identify themselves as belonging to a sex (read -- biology), more important was the overriding identification with role in juxtaposition to others.

Relations between state and society prior to the Qing were primarily broken down into two categories, official administration (*guan*) and private (*si*) interests. While official administration
remained the purvue of the imperial bureaucracy, private interests were defined as activities of individuals, families, religions, businesses, and organizations that were not identified with the whole community (Rankin, 1986:15). Toward the end of the Qing a third category of activity, or gong "public", began to appear in documents. In Confucian theory, public concern was a general good defined by the state, as opposed to the private, selfish (si) interests of one or a few (Rankin, 1986:15).

**The Outer World: Official Administration (Guan) and the new Public (Gong)**

Scholarship lay at the heart of the late Qing imperial bureaucracy. Because the role of the official was held in such high esteem, and because becoming an official depended upon success in the civil service exams, many young men spent years in scholastic preparation. If successful, scholar-officials entered their positions prepared to provide "advice" and "dissent" to the imperial administration. As previously mentioned, serving the emperor was believed to be the best and most appropriate way to serve society. This did not mean, however, that Chinese officials could not disagree with a ruler. Indeed, it was an official's moral obligation to object where he saw the ruler making inappropriate decisions. According to the Mandate of Heaven, an emperor was entitled to rule through the approval of Heaven. If Heaven was displeased, then the Mandate could be withdrawn. Many officials cautioned rulers on this basis. Moreover, if an official did not recognize the emperor as in receipt of the Mandate, he could withdraw from his duties (or commit suicide) as an act of political protest (Dull, 1990:59-79). Indeed, over the centuries a number of scholar-officials withdrew to their ancestral homes and wrote poetry expressing their dissatisfaction with a ruler. According to Goldman, Link and Wei:

When a principled literatus remonstrated with an abusive ruler or official, he hoped to persuade him to rectify his actions so he could rule more effectively. Thus, to criticize a ruler or official was to express one's true loyalty to the ruler and state because the criticism was meant to improve governance and, therefore, society (Goldman, Link, & Wei, 1993:126).
Because the time and cost involved in preparing for the municipal, provincial or national exams could be prohibitive, the exam system only provided upward mobility for some. Until the late Qing, nevertheless, those who could scrape together the funds sought to get ahead through the civil service. Loyalty to the emperor as official, or official want-to-be's, thus effectively co-opted the middle to elite classes.

Women were not entitled to write the civil service examinations and thus were for the most part excluded from official administration. Indeed warnings against *femme fatale* abound in historical and political writings (Feuerwerker, 1975:147). According to Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, “nuhuo (disasters due to female influence), the fatal face that overturns kingdoms and destroys cities (*qingguo qingcheng*), is a standard explanation for moral decline and hence dynastic ruin.” (Feuerwerker, 1975:147) There are stories, nevertheless, of young women cross-dressing in order to write the exams and serve as officials. Several elite women also played important-political roles. Ban Zhao (A.D. 41 - ca. 115), for example, a female historian and teacher, authored parts of the official dynastic history of the former Han (Ko, 1994:54). Ban Zhao also wrote one of the earliest moral guides for women (Beahan, 1980:6). Moreover, it would seem that at least one elite woman identified so closely with a dynasty that she was willing to lose her life for it. When the Manchus overthrew the Ming Dynasty in 1644 an elite woman starved herself to death in an act of protest. In her dying words to her godson she declared:

> Although only a woman, I have received favour from the (Ming) dynasty. To perish with the dynasty is no more than my duty. Do not serve another dynasty (Spence, 1990:62).

Thus while the outer world was primarily occupied by men, some women not only identified with the politics of the outer world but managed to participate in it as well.

The mid to late Qing was an intense period of economic and social transition. Although open civil service examinations were established in the Sung Dynasty (to men), it was not until the late
Qing that more than a small minority of wealthy elite, and the few less wealthy but resourceful, could afford the years of training that the exam preparation required. Commercialization and literacy rates were both on the rise, particularly in the Jiangnan region of China (Ko, 1994:29-31). Not everyone who passed the official exams, however, could obtain placement in the 20,000 positions available in the bureaucracy (Rankin, 1986:10, 20). Moreover, because the Qing government was chronically underfunded and unable to fully cope with destructive events like the Taiping Rebellion, non-official elite began to take on certain tasks in the community.

According to Mary Rankin, the word public was perhaps first applied in water control and later extended to other activities such as famine relief, education, and care of the aged, poor, and sick. Furthermore, she argues the significance of the category lay in providing an intermediate arena where the state and society met (Rankin, 1986:16). Rankin calls the individuals who assumed these tasks, "elite managers" (Rankin, 1986:18). She writes:

members of the managerial elite reflected the characteristics of the local societies in which they operated, and they frequently moved into other occupations or combined management with scholarship or trade. They were connected by horizontal personal networks that cut across the conventional social divisions between upper and lower gentry, merchants and gentry, or sojourners and local inhabitants. We may best envision the managers as members of small, and often self-perpetuating, elite networks, who claimed (accurately or otherwise) community sanction for their activities (Rankin, 1986:18).

There has been some dispute with regards to the extent of autonomy these elite managers were eventually able to accrue. On the one hand, William Rowe has similarly argued that there were indeed a variety of "public utilities" and "public services" emerging during the late Qing (Rowe, 1993:142). Moreover, both Rankin and Rowe posit that these activities emerged outside of state control and later were "further appropriated to legitimate a "critical" public sphere of

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6Rowe's work is based upon his study of commercial guilds and philanthropic associations in nineteenth-century Hankou (Rowe, 1989).
extrabureaucratic political debate. (Rowe, 1993:142, see Rankin, 1986) On the other hand, scholars such as Frederic Wakeman have called into question whether these activities amounted to "the assertion of civic power against the state" because of the heavy involvement of the state (Wakeman, 1993:133).

As already noted in the first chapter, the question of autonomy is of prime importance to many scholars concerned with political transition in China. While I will return to this question in the following chapters, for now I would like to make three points in regards to the new public of the Late Qing. First, not only was the new public in contact (to disputed degrees) with the government but it was also in contact with what were considered private/selfish interests -- for example; business and local organizations. Second, "horizontal personal networks" were critical to cementing contact both with the official and private realms. Third, although both "public" and "official" activities often took place within homes, women were not participants of the extra-bureaucratic public, nor the personal networks that helped to create it. Indeed, as I will show shortly, the social fluidity of the Qing, while opening up educational opportunities and the possibility of female networks, primarily served to reinforce Confucian understandings of the proper roles of women.

**The Inner World of Women**

The loyal official does not serve two dynasties. 
The virtuous women does not have two husbands (Cited in Ropp, 1976:7).

This saying comes from an instruction book for women on proper deportment. While the world of elite women was supposed to be protected from any kind of outside contact, in fact, the Qing state played a significant role in regulating the gender system in this world. Moreover, because of increasing educational opportunities and socio-economic change, the roles of women were being called into question in societal debate. Just as in the "outer world," then, the gender system was not
fixed but subject to question and movement -- within certain bounds.

According to the *Book of Rites*, a major text of the Confucian canon, a woman’s life must evolve according to *sancong* or "thrice following." As translated by James Legge: "The woman follows (and obeys) the man:--in her youth, she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son." (Cited in Ko, 1994:6) The *Book of Rites* furthermore defines the roles that women and men should play in relationship to one another, their families and society. Whereas at the age of ten, boy children were "capped" and sent to school, girls "ceased to go out from the women's apartments." (Cited in Mann, 1991:207) While marriage for men meant a significant step toward a career in the larger society, for women it meant being transferred into her husband's household and centering her activities on the needs of his family (Mann, 1991:207-208). In addition to the *Book of Rites*, many other instruction booklets for women were written or re-published during the Qing. Amongst them was Ban Zhao's *Nujie*, in which she emphasized the importance of female chastity.

How much of an impact these texts had on women’s lives is still open to question. On the one hand we know that many elite women led extremely constrained lives. Not only did they undergo the excruciating process of foot-binding as children but were then married out of their own families into another. The internal politics of the extended kin families of the period was particularly difficult for a young wife as she not only had her husband, but her mother-in-law and the rest of her new relatives to please. Matters were made even more complex if a young woman

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7 Dorothy Ko chooses to translate *sancong* as "thrice following" rather than the "three obediences." Ko makes the distinction because it is her contention that, "in practice *sancong* deprived a woman of her legal and formal social identity but not her individual personality or subjectivity." (Ko, 1994:6-7) Ko's recognition of female subjectivity during the Qing is critical to understanding an elite woman's interaction with her family and the state and is a point I will return to shortly.
were a concubine rather than a wife, or if a wife had to cope with the addition of her husband's concubines to the household. On the other hand, as a woman grew older, particularly if she produced male sons, it was possible for her to accrue more power in relation to others within the family. According to Susan Mann, because propriety forbade striking relatives or children, elite married women sometimes took out their frustration, boredom, and jealousies on their servants (Mann, 1991:220). But not all attempts at negotiating within the kinship system were based on the manipulation of power nor limited by moral dictates. Qing scholar, Chen Hongmo's, outraged account is a case in point:

A woman's proper ritual place is sequestered in the inner apartments. When at rest, she should lower the screen [in front of her]; when abroad, she must cover her face in order to remove herself from any suspicion or doubt, and prevent herself from coming under observation. But instead we find young women accustomed to wandering about, all made up, heads bare and faces exposed, traveling the mountains...We even find them parading around visiting temples and monasteries, burning incense and holding services, kneeling to listen to the chanting of the sutras. In the temple courtyards and in the precincts of the monasteries, they chat and laugh freely. The worst times are in the last days of the third lunar month, when they form sisterhoods and spend the night in local temples; and on the sixth day of the sixth month, when they believe that if they turn over the pages of the sutras ten times, they will be transformed into men in the next life (cited in Mann, 1991:221).

It is thus apparent that some women not only perceived being female as less desirable than being male, but that they also found ways to subvert the Confucian precepts of the day.

During the Qing dynasty, literacy rates were on the rise, including those of women. In her work Dorothy Ko notes that elite women were not only writing and publishing works during this period, but they were travelling outside of their homes to meet with other non-kin women on visits. At the same time, due to political changes, men were conducting political activities in the home.

Ironically, however, the increase in printing and reading/writing did not undermine Confucian values during this period, particularly, it would seem, in the eyes of women. According to Ko:

Tales of moral exemplars, now vividly illustrated and presented as vernacular stories, reached more homes and perhaps hearts and minds than did dry treatises. Even more
persuasive was the advocacy of educated women, as they composed poems and songs to teach other women the virtues of fidelity. The rise of the woman reader-writer, in other words, was a sign largely of the strength of the Confucian gender system, not its demise (Ko, 1994:67).

During the mid to late Qing, the strength of Confucian morals to influence societal relationships, and the state's willingness to reinforce them only increased. One of the most noted manifestations of this trend was the increase in commemorative "chastity arches" in order to display a community's faithful women (Elvin, 1984; Mann, 1987). Official support and regulation was provided in the erection of these arches. Indeed, the imperial objectives were the "education of the (moral) atmosphere," and "the transformation of the (moral) atmosphere." (Elvin, 1984:135) Women who committed suicide after losing their husband or being raped, or never remarried after being widowed, were amongst those recognized on the arches.

Susan Mann has identified several factors which may have contributed to the growing concern with women's chastity and deportment in the late Qing. First, concern may have emerged partly as a result of the need to control women's sexuality in order to stabilize extended family politics (Mann, 1987:48). Second, Mann believes that the Qing state was building the arches to imprint a moral code firmly in the minds of commoner families (Mann, 1987:50). Finally, the focus on chastity was also partially due to the literati's fear of losing its social status. As a result of new legal codes outlawing debased-status groups and increasing social fluidity, women became the focus of much of the discourse. According to Susan Mann, women became a metaphor for anxiety about status shared by all men of the scholar class (Mann, 1991:221).

*The Intellectual Elite in the Early twentieth Century: National and Gender Identities Reconstruct*

The first two decades of the Twentieth Century in China was a time of national crises.
Destruction wrought by movements such as the Taiping (1850-1864) and Boxer rebellions (1900), the Opium Wars and the establishment of treaty ports, in addition to many internal problems called for drastic solutions. By 1915, the 1911 Revolution that had overthrown the Qing Dynasty had already failed. Not only was the new republic divided by warlordism and foreign intervention, but the new government did not have the resources nor knowledge to push the country forward. According to a number of well-educated intellectuals of the day, the only way to address these problems was to rid China of its feudal past. Students and professors thus banded together to publish journals devoted to the topic, and in the process ushered in the May Fourth Movement (1915-1921).

Within *New Youth*, the most important of the new journals, and other similar publications, Confucian values came under sharp attack. The young writers sought to overthrow the deep bonds of interdependence and develop autonomous lives. National liberation thus meant liberating sons from fathers, individuals from the family, and intellectual liberation of new modes of thought from Confucian orthodoxy (Witke, 1973b:33). Influenced by the Western liberal tradition of individual rights (indeed, many had studied in the West and Japan) the young scholars sought to overthrow patriarchal authority. Unlike the majority of their Western counterparts, however, the young male scholars chose to make the emancipation of women one of their most important struggles.

Pre-occupation with the position of women in Chinese society did not begin with May Fourth Intellectuals. A reform movement began at the turn of the century which sought to transform the imperial system rather than overthrow it, supported anti-footbinding initiatives as well as women's education. Protestant missionaries, in the meantime, had established schools for girls in different places.

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8The Taiping Rebellion was the first initiative for any kind of gender focused social reform in China (Ko, 1989:22). Indeed, women fought as soldiers and generals, worked as officials, and were allowed to own land (Spence, 1990:174). The Rebellion was led by a Christian convert who had failed the civil service examinations and supported by thousands of peasants in the South of China.
pockets of China as well as in the treaty ports. By 1902 there were over 4,000 women students studying in missionary schools for girls (cited in Beahan, 1976:40). Soon schools were not only multiplying in Beijing, but young women were travelling to Japan, and later to Europe, for their educations as well. In the eyes of the men supporting such initiatives, however, women's education was critical to strengthening the nation, rather than a goal in and of itself. According to Ono Kazuko, "Women's liberation was not something derived from rights women intrinsically possessed as human beings...Rather, the aim lay in raising women's knowledge and improving their physical strength so as to develop their qualities as productive labourers or as child-bearing machines." (Ono, 1989:28) It is important to note, nonetheless, that just as women were seen as a means to an end, so was democracy as well. According to Martin Whyte, "democracy was interpreted first and foremost as a means to make the government stronger so that China could hold its own in the world again." (Whyte, 1992:83)

When the young scholars of the May Fourth Movement focused their attention on the plight of women, they also did not see women's emancipation in isolation from other social issues. Moreover, the articles they produced were primarily directed toward a masculine audience as 90% of women in China at the time were illiterate (Witke, 1973b:8). Writers such as Mao Zedong, Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi targeted the marriage system, women's lack of property rights, as well as illiteracy as contributing to the women's oppression.

Tani Barlow has argued, nevertheless, that when male May Fourth writers addressed women's oppression in their work they created a new gender discourse with nationalistic objectives. Whereas in the past both men and women associated more closely with their roles in relation to kin and society, the May Fourth scholars chose to represent women as an identifiable grouping; "nuxing." According to Barlow:
Nuxing was not a self-reference. It was not initially an "identity" for women at all. Like the recuperation of nu as a trope of nationalist universality in masculinist discourses, nuxing was a discursive sign and a subject position in the larger, masculinist frame of anti-Confucian discourse (Barlow, 1994b:265).

Although the May Fourth Movement was dominated by male scholars, a few educated women were participating in the political discourse and protest as well. Indeed, since the turn of the century and the establishment of schools for girls, elite women began actively engaging in nationalist and social-political struggles.

Political activism among women originally took the form of publishing women's magazines. According to Elizabeth Croll, "although these magazines were short lived and circulation limited to new schools and a small percentage of urban literate women, their appearance marked the first significant expression of a collective feminist consciousness - an awareness that women were oppressed and that they could constitute a potential force in influencing the direction of public affairs." (Croll, 1978:59) A few women managed to participate in revolutionary and suffrage activity as well. Anarchist Qiu Jin, for example, left her husband and child to fight for national liberation prior to the 1911 Revolution. During the Revolution itself many girls schools secretly carried out revolutionary work (Ono, 1989:76). Other women became doctors and nurses on the battlefields, made bombs, conveyed messages, and smuggled arms and ammunition (Ono, 1989:78-79). After the revolution, women quickly mobilized to advocate for women's suffrage among other other demands. Despite their efforts, however, not only was women's suffrage not included in the new constitution, but the national government issued an order to dissolve the Women's Suffrage Alliance and passed a series of laws that explicitly prohibited women from publishing magazines and joining in political groups (Ono, 1989:92). Women's activity during the May Fourth Movement not only included writing and publishing but also participation in the many student protests of the era. In the early 1920s, as the May Fourth movement came to a close, suffrage efforts focused on provincial
legislatures as well as the national government. Although several women were elected to the Hunanese legislature, the national effort failed a second time.

While the Republican government of the late nineteen-teens was not open to women’s political activism, most of the founding members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were supportive of women’s issues. Indeed, many of the strongest proponents of women’s issues in the May Fourth era, such as Chen Duxiu and Mao Zedong, were among the first founders of the Party in 1921. Over the first few years, the Party leadership supported the running of a school for girls, the establishment of a party journal that represented women's voices, and the creation of a women's organization called the Central Women's Bureau (Gilmartin, 1995:55-67).

Most of the women who joined the party between 1921 and 1925 came from gentry, intellectual or commercial families, had been educated in one of the provincially run middle and normal schools, and had participated in the May Fourth Movement (Gilmartin, 1995:97). These young women were not only attracted by Marxist ideology but also by their perception that the Party was a vigorous proponent of women's equality and would provide the possibility of an alternative lifestyle to those resisting conventional gender norms (Gilmartin, 1995:101). During the early to mid-1920s, female CCP members were to effectively build female networks amongst schools, women's groups and eventually in factory and rural locations as well. Despite the importance of this work, new gender codes were effectively kept women from wielding significant power.

First, women CCP members found it difficult to hold positions outside of “women's work.” This meant that women were confined to the Women's Bureau or to carrying out Party support activities. From 1922 to 1925, Xiang Jiangyu, for example, one of the most important women communists of this period, managed many of the day-to-day details of the Central Committee because she was seen as more capable than male members in such matters (Gilmartin, 1995:112-113).
Many male communists also expected their spouses to assume domestic duties alongside their political work (Gilmartin, 1995:110). Second, a female CCP's leadership role within the Party was dependent upon her spouse's power in the organization. According to the unspoken CCP "family rules," women were encouraged to find a spouse in the Party. Whereas marrying a non-communist was out of the question for women Party members, it was nonetheless acceptable for male communists (such as Qu Qiubai) to marry a non-Party member (Gilmartin, 1995:109). Women party members similarly rose and fell alongside their spouses' position in the Party. Thus when Li Da was not re-elected to the Central Committee at the Party's Second Congress, his wife, Wang Huiwu, lost support for running the Shanghai Pingmin Girl's School (Gilmartin, 1995:67).

Although Xiang Jiangyu played a critical role in drawing nearly one thousand women into the Party in 1925 she fell victim to the persistence of gendered Confucian morality within the Party leadership. As a result of the deterioration of her relationship with Cai Hesen and romantic involvement with another high-ranking Party leader, Peng Shuzhi, Xiang was relieved of her duties and sent to Moscow for "further study." (Gilmartin, 1995:141). This pattern of Confucian morality has continued to influence leadership practices, and state policy, to this day. Indeed, during the 1940s, its seems to have only become worse. Ge Yang, an army reporter during the anti-Japanese and civil war, for example, has noted that one of the limitations placed on women during that era was to pledge to keep out of politics altogether while they were married to officers or leaders (Afkhami, 1994:69). She also notes that Liu Shaoqi, who became a very important leader in post-Liberation politics, "married a new woman in every town through which our forces passed." (Afkhami, 1994:69) Indeed, in her study of women and sexuality in China since the 1950s, Harriet Evans argues that, "official and dominant discourses of sexuality have constructed women as the main agents responsible for patrolling general standards of sexual morality and family
Perhaps the most significant break with the past made by the Chinese Communist members and their May Fourth Predecessors was not their re-thinking of gender codes, but their direct challenge to class issues and the rural/urban divide. From the eighteenth century onward, rural conditions in China had consistently deteriorated. Problems such as the growing population, mounting incidences of opium addiction, mismanagement of dike maintenance, commercialization and official inefficiency and corruption contributed to natural disasters, political instability and civil strife (Spence, 1990:165-166 & Johnson, 1983:30). The lives of rural women were particularly brutish. While peasant women were not always necessarily subject to the strict restrictions that elite women were (such as the ability to work outside of the home), many faced accelerating hardship in the form of social dislocation and family break-up. According to Kay Ann Johnson:

The suffering of women under conditions of poverty and family disintegration took especially cruel forms; if not drowned in infancy, they often found themselves bartered and sold, deserted and starved. As the lowest, most dependent members of traditional society, they were the most vulnerable and suffered the most from its disruptions (Johnson, 1983:33).

As part of their effort to make China stronger, May Fourth intellectuals, and later the CCP, supported mass education for urban workers and peasants. In particular, during the nineteen-teens, intellectuals began to write in the vernacular (as opposed to the classical tradition) in order to express their ideas for change. In the early nineteen-twenties the Chinese Communist Party sought to improve the conditions of workers in urban areas and that of the rural peasantry through direct political action. Women party members joined in this struggle as well. The combination of class and gender based activism, however, had mixed results. On the one hand, urban female workers were reluctant to involve themselves with the Chinese Communist Party because of the CCP’s bias toward male workers (Gilmartin, 1995:130). Indeed, when women communist organizers, such as Xiang Jingyu were able to focus on women workers rights, they were often extremely successful.
(Gilmartin, 1995:90). On the other hand, rural women and men did not necessarily embrace the gender component of the CCP's emancipatory vision. According to Kay Ann Johnson, "for too many rural women, the weakening and disintegration of the traditional family and the loss of the ability to live properly by its norms did not have liberating consequences, but led to greater humiliation, poverty, and insecurity." (Johnson, 1983:34) Conflicts based on CCP gender policy arose in rural areas in the mid-1920s, the 1940s and the 1950s and were often resolved the Party backing away from an adamant position on women's issues.

For those intellectuals who joined the CCP, mass based interests grew increasingly important as expressed in their attitude toward fighting rural and urban injustice, and toward their usage of the written language itself. In their own eyes, this commitment to class equality, nonetheless, did not relieve intellectuals of their special role vis-a-vis the ruling elite.

**Intellectuals, Gender and the CCP (1927 - 1978)**

The late nineteen twenties was a time of extreme danger for most intellectuals. In 1927, the coalition that had been forged between the nationalists and the communists exploded, and the Communists were forced to retreat to the rural areas. In this post-May Fourth period of extreme social upheaval and betrayal, writing proved an extremely precarious activity. For women, literary activity was even more precarious (Feuerwerker, 1975:144). In the twenties and thirties, not only did a number of women writers suffer imprisonment, expulsion, financial deprivation, and emotional blackmail from mothers trying to arrange their marriages, but also uncertainty in self-identity (Feuerwerker, 1975:156-162). Only two decades had passed since small handfuls of women were educated in girl's schools, and only since 1919 were women allowed to attend Peking University. Moreover, the personal obstacles of trying to manoeuvre within a culture still infused with Confucian
morality was for some, almost overwhelming.

After the May Fourth period, nonetheless, several women began to publish novels and short stories. Unlike a number of their male counterparts, who went on to produce sharp societal satires and political commentaries, many women chose to focus on the themes of love, marriage, sexual relations and the emotional states these engendered (Feuerwerker, 1975:149). These women writers were young (many published around the age of twenty-five) and their works were largely autobiographical. With the exception of Ding Ling, the literary careers of these women writers were also remarkably short. The reason for the relatively immature content of most of the women writers work, argues Yi-Tsi Feuerwerker, is due to the extremely difficult environment in which they lived (Feuerwerker, 1975:158). - According to Feuerwerker, "having broken so drastically with authority, both literary and social, and with the older order and values that would have regulated her life, the woman writer was suddenly on her own, with nothing to fall back on but her feelings or uncertain new relationships, which were also dependent on tenuous feelings." (Feuerwerker, 1975:161-162)

I question, nevertheless, whether the work of women writers was "immature" or rather focusing on the problems relevant to those women at the time. Indeed, women writers were also under attack by male critics for not replicating male writing, on the one hand, and later for not shifting to emulate the leftist focus on society on the other (Larson, 1993:64-65). Mao Dun, for example, criticized Bing Xin for hiding under the "rubber raincoat" of "motherly love," for her mysticism and lack of a wider social context (cited in Larson, 1993:66). In the 1940s and 1950s, the work of women writers became increasingly void of a women’s voice or focus (Meng, 1993).

In the early 1930s, Ding Ling fled to Yan’an where she continued to write as well as played multiple roles in Party life. Among her many activities:

Ding Ling was also a government cadre, a bureaucrat. She taught periodically at Party universities, wrote about popularization of the arts, encouraged young writers, advised on
women's policy, lobbied for family reform, and edited the literary section of the Party's official government newspaper, the Liberation Daily (Barlow, 1989b:35).

 Unlike many of her male counterparts, nonetheless, Ding Ling suffered and spoke out on what she saw as a double standard within the Party. Single women, she argued, are a target for rumorous and slanderous gossip. Married women who bear children, however, are derided as "Noras who have returned home." (Ding, 1989:318) When Ding Ling published an essay on this subject on March 9, 1942 she was chastized and ended up leaving her "editorship under fire." (Barlow, 1989b:40) In 1957, after involvement in power struggles within the state bureaucracy, she lost all of her positions (including her Party membership) and spent nine years in exile. Although the attacks were probably personally motivated, the content of the most damaging charge against her was as highly gendered as Xiang Jing Yu's fall had been. In short, Ding Ling was accused of "unchaste activities" during earlier years spent under house arrest in Nanjing (Barlow, 1989b:43).

 The relationship between Chinese intellectuals and the State after the CCP founded the People's Republic of China in 1949 was largely shaped by pre-twentieth century conceptions of advice and dissent (Goldman, 1981). On the one hand, the Party elite sought to use intellectuals as a kind of political tool. On the other hand, the practice of "serving Tianxia" was revived. According to Goldman, Link and Wei, "Chinese intellectuals, almost without exception, have wanted to be of service to their country and have had difficulty conceiving their ultimate vocations in any other terms." (Goldman, Link & Wei, 1993:126) Like their literati predecessors, the intellectuals saw themselves as a conduit through which the political leaders learned of the defects of their interpretations of the people's murmurings and could therefore respond accordingly.

 9Henrik Ibsen's play, "A Doll's House" was widely discussed by intellectuals during the May Fourth Era. The central character, Nora, was central to these discussions; in particular the question of what would happen to Nora once she left home.
Many intellectuals thus joined the Party, held official posts and some managed to establish elaborate connections within the elite leadership as well. Tani Barlow sums up the relationship from the 1920s onward in this way:

Writers of the generations after the May Fourth giants became proxies for Party officials, the voices of future orthodoxies. Networks of discreet politicians produced texts through "writers" who subtly criticized opponents or sought out allies. Upright officials sacrificed themselves on behalf of heterodox truths and texts. Dissident writers claimed extra-bureaucratic powers, claiming the allegiance of readers (Barlow, 1989:7).

According to the work of Merle Goldman, the most prominent networks formed between intellectuals and the Party elite during this period were male (Goldman, 1981).

While intellectuals could serve as a valuable political tool to the Party elite, they could also be very dangerous. In 1942, Mao had already set down parameters for artistic endeavours in his essay "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art." In the late 1950s, after opening up to feedback from intellectuals during the Hundred Flowers Movement, the Party leadership clamped down on intellectuals even further. Indeed, the Anti-Rightist Movement stripped a number of intellectuals of their official positions and banished many to remote regions for up to twenty years of labour and/or prison. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), radicals within the Party, including Mao Zedong, gained strength and nearly every intellectual in the country came under attack. Not only were many intellectuals sent down to the countryside for re-education, but many were also tortured, imprisoned, and even killed. Not a few committed suicide. Middle-school students, known as Red Guards, who had been encouraged by the radical leadership to eliminate China of all its feudal elements, were sent down to the countryside in the later years as well. While this period brought a certain kind of freedom for the students, both Marilyn Young and Delia Davin have noted that some female Red Guards were raped and, in Young's example, subsequently held responsible for the assault (Young, 1989:259-260; Davin, 1989:287).
Conclusion

China has gone through enormous change in state-societal relations over the past century. In particular, in the years of upheaval that followed the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, intellectuals played a key role in challenging many assumptions surrounding politics, society and the family. And yet, a close examination of the consolidation of the Chinese Communist Party reveals that a number of traditional assumptions regarding both class and gender were only challenged to a certain point, or, in some cases, were simply rewoven to meet the needs of the new political era.

There are two points I wish to make about this. First, the movements that led to the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and the formation of the CCP, were intellectual movements. The participants, for the most part, met with other intellectuals and wrote about their ideas for the benefit of other educated individuals. Although a number of the participants in the May Fourth intellectual public incorporated understandings of class into their activism, many nonetheless maintained a belief system that held that intellectuals should serve as conduits between society and the state. Because of the class specific nature of the intellectuals, and the introduction of the term public at the turn of the century in China, I prefer to label their activities as constituting “new intellectual publics.”

Second, although understandings of gong, guan and si were challenged at the end of the Qing, and the Confucian patriarchal family was challenged during the May Fourth movement, conceptions of the inner world and the outer world were being reformulated in such a way as to effectively exclude women from full participation in the new intellectual publics. On the one hand, small groups of educated women were entering and influencing the outer world through involvement in national revolution, writing and publishing, student demonstrations, the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party as well as advocating for greater political freedom for women. On
the other hand, I would argue, women were still being associated, physically and symbolically, with the realm of the inner world. Ironically, therefore, while notions of what constituted "official", "public" and "private" were being challenged in the late Qing, female chastity was being reinforced by state-funded measures, in part to alleviate class-based anxiety about the socio-economic changes of the period. The role of women in mediating sexual relations became reinforced during the founding years of the Chinese Communist Party and in Yen’an, and continues to be advocated by state authorities today. According to this prescription, women must control their sexuality, through marriage and avoidance of politics, in order to maintain societal stability. When women were afforded opportunities for political involvement in the CCP, they were often based upon traditional sorts of housekeeping roles, or predicated on their husband’s political position, rather than being afforded leadership positions in their own right. Finally, women’s writing was ostracized for being too subjective and non-political in the late 1920s and early 1930s. I believe this is partially due to a belief by critics that personal issues, or inner matters, were not important for the revolution. In order to achieve recognition in the outer world, women therefore had to abandon their struggle to achieve subjectivity and any association with their sexuality, and present themselves and their characters as “neutered” female revolutionaries.

Public spaces that offer protection from state control, I would argue, as in the case of the late Qing, the May Fourth, and even the Cultural Revolution are not necessarily empowering or safe places for women. In the following chapter I will show how the intellectual public space that emerged during the 1980s also did not address women’s issues, nor incorporate the voices of women. Significantly, the new intellectual public of the 1980s did not incorporate the concerns of non-intellectual sectors of the population either. If public activity is to contribute to democratic processes, therefore, it must be much more than merely autonomous from the state.
CHAPTER THREE
THE CRITICAL INTELLECTUAL PUBLIC OF THE 1980S

When Mao Zedong passed away and Deng Xiaoping assumed the primary leadership role in Chinese politics, a new era was ushered in for Chinese intellectuals. Promised freedom from the intensive persecution they had suffered since the late 1950s, the majority of Chinese intellectuals supported Deng Xiaoping's leadership and attempted to reconstruct their role within the Chinese state. Once again Chinese intellectuals reaffirmed their faith in the state's ability to guide the people to prosperity and freedom. Once again Chinese intellectuals perceived their role as supporting the state in achieving its goals. Blame for atrocities committed during past political campaigns was therefore not placed on the Party or the leadership but at the feet of the Gang of Four and the extreme leftist practices dominant during the period.

In the 1980s, literature remained a principal means for expressing criticism of the regime (Goldman, 1992:207). Novels, newspapers and journals, nevertheless, no longer served as the only site of political discourse. Due to the economic reforms and the relaxed political climate, debates raged in university forums, special think tanks, and new-style salons from the early 1980s until 1989. The explosion of written word and new relationships forged during this era proved liberating for many struggling to come to terms with China's recent past and for those searching for a renewed vision for the nation. Intellectual politics in the 1980s, however, did not guarantee new self-defined forms of liberation for everyone. Not only were hierarchical assumptions regarding the role of intellectuals maintained but gender roles were also re-articulated in such a way that it made it very difficult for women to be active participants in this process. Just as the new public in the late Qing was forged on the basis of men's private networks, I would argue, so was the new public of the 1980s
created on the basis of private networks of men and a re-articulation of women's subordination.

As of the late 1980s high-level intellectuals, or those with a university degree or some university education, composed about .6% of the population (Goldman, 1992:193). I will refer to the intellectuals in this chapter as "critical" intellectuals (Hamrin, 1987 and Goldman, 1992). By this I mean high-level intellectuals who were somehow seeking to either liberalise the political system or to dismantle/replace it altogether along liberal-democratic lines. As Carol Lee Hamrin notes, there were other active conservative intellectuals during this period, such as Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun, with important ties to the conservative leadership (Hamrin, 1987:282). Far more high-level intellectuals, did not choose to become involved in politics at all. Because I am focusing on the effects and potential effects of a liberalising regime on gender relations, however, I will only discuss the work and activities of the critical intellectuals.

This chapter is divided into three main sections; the post-Mao political self (literature and literary criticism), public ideas (political theory) and public spaces (sites of activism and relations between critical intellectuals). Although deeply linked and very much overlapping in the reform period, I have divided my analysis of literature and political theory because I believe it is possible to gain greater insight into understandings of political subjectivity and the self through an examination of literature alone. Similarly, despite the interconnection of ideas and activism, I have separated these two sections in order to emphasize the theoretical basis of political change on the one hand, and political methods on the other. It is my argument that each layer of political re-definition -- political subjectivity, political theory, and activism -- points to the emergence of a male, and very masculine, "new public."
The effects of the Cultural Revolution upon women and men intellectuals was for the most part, devastating. A large part of the early efforts of post-Cultural Revolution literature, therefore, sought to somehow come to terms with what had transpired. This form of literature, known as Scar Literature, was pursued during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Informing Scar Literature and much of the other literature to follow, was a profound commitment to "humanism." Humanism asserted that individuals had personal, emotional and sexual needs, that consumerism was acceptable, and, for some, a rejection of politics altogether. When one looks carefully at the ways in which men and women articulated their views, however, there is a sharp gender discrepancy.

Tonglin Lu argues that in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution a number of male writers chose to adopt an oppositional politics grounded in a misogynistic discourse (Lu, 1993, 1995). This form of politics is similar to the May Fourth discourse in which women are used to represent a past of which they are taken as either perfect victims or official voices (Lu, 1995:159). As male writers sought to re-locate their own sense of self and break with CCP representation, therefore, they simultaneously cast women as weak creatures, as if that, "were all it took to empower men" (Lu, 1993:8).

One example of a text that explicitly derides women is Zhang Xianliang's Half of Man is Woman. The hero of the story, Zhang Yonglin, is a political prisoner incarcerated during the anti-rightist campaign and again during the Cultural Revolution. Through constructing "human nature" around issues of sexual desire, the author attempts to show how political repression twists human nature (Zhong, 1994:177). In the hero's attempts to regain his "true" self and restore his "male dignity", however, human nature is linked to patriarchal relations of power and the women in the novel are objectified, scrutinized and patronized (Zhong, 1994:177-179). Returning to a
"normalized" post-Mao life for this author, therefore, entails a return to the "normal" social structure of patriarchy where women are objects rather than political subjects in their own right (Zhong, 1994:182).

Another example of a male writer using female representation in order to achieve his own symbolic liberation can be seen in a story by Liu Yiran, a thirty-three year old writer in the People's Liberation Army. The text is called, "Rocking Tiananmen" and was published in 1988. The following excerpt contains the first two paragraphs of the story:

Now, this is what I call turmoil.
Can anyone really describe just how fuckin' good this feels? This is, like, the longest kiss I've ever had in my whole life. It's even longer than the Avenue of Eternal Peace. It knocks my soul right out of my ears and sends it flying into the ozone. I relax and feel something totally wild sprouting in every cell of my body. Hot desire leaves my more rational impulses groping on the floor for their teeth. In the dim light, I get a second wind and pull her closer to me.
She has this incredible smell, it drives me wild, it psychs me up, it's a scent with hersignature on it. My lips are locked to her warm fragrant mouth by an electric current; sparks are going to start flying any second now. Trembling has become an indescribable pleasure; nothing else exists. I don't know where this amazing high comes from. The skin on my face is about to blister under her hot breath. Its like I'm dead or dreaming. The face of the goddamn moon is green, and the sun is coarse, no way you'd catch me kissing them. Nothing exists outside this kiss. I silently savour every lingering detail. I feel like her soul is mingling with mine, pulsing through to her tips of my fingers and toes, riding on the blood that is racing through my veins faster than a spaceship through the galaxy. I feel it: uproar, rebellion in my most private parts. Vaguely, distinctly, I can smell it now too, that elusive smell of life itself, unbearable and real comfortable - you figure it out. There's a milky-white fog floating before my eyes, and I ride a roaring surf out to the realm of pure nothingness. I swear my heart's stopped (Liu, 1992:5).

Here, the protagonist can be seen to identify his own "uproar and rebellion" through sexual pleasure. This theme is developed throughout the story where the reader can perceive the protagonist coming into his "political-own" as a result of his superiority over, and ultimate rejection of, his girlfriend. The story not only reveals the protagonist developing notions of self in relation to an objectified woman, however, but also in relation to those of another race:

Recently I've really gotten into break dancing and rock 'n' roll. I've heard that millions of
break dancers think that tall, ugly black guy in the American film Breakin' is a superstud. They just about go down on their knees in front of the screen. But what's he got that I don't? I'm one funky kinda dude, and one day I'll be in some movie or I'll do a benefit gig in Tiananmen Square for African famine victims. Then you'll know who's king (Liu, 1992:8).

Tonglin Lu's study of the work of three male authors writing experimental fiction in the late 1980s points to a continuation of the theme of objectifying women in male fiction (Lu, 1995). Experimental Fiction (shiyan xiaoshuo) began in about 1985 and is characterized by a common desire to subvert the conventions of socialist realism (Lu, 1995:13). For a number of male writers, however, literary subversion uses women's bodies as a site of protest. Not only do Mo Yan, Su Tong and Yu Hua employ rape as a "favorite and favourable" (Lu, 1995:16) theme in their work, for example, but they also consistently repress women's subject voices (Lu, 1995:187). The "search for self" in the male literature of the reform era was established on a highly gendered understanding of subjectivity. According to Tonglin Lu:

an individual hero in contemporary fiction very often reaffirms his masculinity or individuality in opposition to women's inferiority and subordination. In other words, in order to regain his individuality repressed by the communist domination, the male individual of contemporary fiction needs to use the female body as a scapegoat for communist ideology (Lu, 1993:3).

I would add that in the case of Liu Yiran, and as shall be shown shortly, in the case of many young Chinese males of the time, notions of racial superiority played a part in achieving a sense of political subjectivity as well.

Whereas male writers for the most part focused on re-affirming their individuality and masculinity in their texts, women writers strode in another direction. Prior to discussing women's fiction, however, it is important to note the still real limitations on women's access to literacy and educational opportunities, let alone fiction writing. As of 1990, women made up 70% of the illiterate and semi-illiterate, and only one-third of the total enrollments in institutions of higher education in China (Croll, 1995:133-135). Second, women's academic opportunities were more
limited than men's. As of 1980, women made up only 25% of those admitted to university (Cited in Honig and Hershatter, 1988:248). In addition, according to a 1990 study of returned scholars from overseas, women were not nearly as represented as men in faculty opportunities to study abroad (Hayhoe, 1990:296). Finally, opportunities for securing employment and even a husband do not improve, and may be jeopardized, by a higher educational level in the 1980s and 1990s in China. While there has been considerable discrimination in the job market against female college graduates on the one hand, the continuing belief that a husband's educational status should be equal to or exceeding his wife's has also limited the number of women wanting to take up academic careers (Broaded and Liu, 1996:84). For women to become established writers in the 1980s, therefore, was an achievement in itself.

In the early 1980s, instead of focusing on identifying individual subject positions, Chinese women fiction writers focused on the themes of love, marriage and family (Davin, 1996b:66). Zhang Kangkang's *The Right to Love* and Zhang Jie's *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, both reintroduced the importance of relationship into societal discourse when they were published in 1979. Reacting to the fact that for thirty years personal issues had been muted by political issues, women writers sought to reclaim the inner worlds of women. According to Delia Davin, female authors:

saw themselves as part of a broader project to base literature on humanistic values. The writing of the early 1980s in particular tended to be Utopian in its treatment of love and marriage. It implied that if people were allowed to run their lives free from political interference, they could find happiness (Davin, 1996b:73).

Similarly, Shen Rong's novel, *At Middle Age*, places a self-sacrificing super-woman giving all to her family at its centre. While the protagonist is a female doctor, the work was read as a call to improve the treatment of intellectuals rather than any kind of commentary on women's issues (Davin, 1996b:70).

Indeed, the work of women writers up until the mid-1980s rejected any association with
feminism whatsoever. While I will expand on this theme in greater detail in the following chapter, it is important to note that most educated Chinese women in the early 1980s adopted this position for two reasons. First, feminism was largely associated with Western "bourgeois" ideas and was considered too radical and inappropriate for the Chinese context. Second, and related, women writers were reacting to the intense politicization of the previous era when women were supposed to be exactly like men and all personal issues were up for political grabs. Wang Anyi, a Chinese woman writer publishing in the 1980s, articulated her views in a 1989 interview in this way:

In China women are only now beginning to have the right, the luxury to talk about the differences between men and women, to enjoy something that distinguishes women from men. That is the reason I absolutely deny that I am a feminist (Wang, 1993:165).

According to Wang, people have things "hundreds of times more significant than gender confronting" them (Wang,1993:168). Another literary critic and writer, Meng Yue, told Tonglin Lu that she accepted the misogyny manifest in the works of a great number of male experimental writers since it was simply a sign of their attempt, "to overcorrect the wrongdoing (of the CCP)"(Footnote:Lu,1993:1).

While never claiming feminist allegiance, several prominent writers, such as Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin, began to present women as victims of structures more profound and more difficult than the politics of the Communist Party (Davin,1996b:73). Zhang Jie's *The Ark*, published in 1983, presents the possibility of a collective female consciousness (Liu,1993:48). In the novel, three middle-aged women live together and ward off the nosy head of the neighbourhood committee (representing the All China Women's Federation and the State) and intrusive ex-husbands. In this novel not only are notions of female single-hood subverted, but female protagonists are also able to guard their subjectivity and dignity (Liu,199348-49). Zhu Lin, author of *Female-Human Beings*, also consciously writes about women's issues. According to Zhu, her goal is to "arouse the quest for

Literary criticism and popular reception of women's writing has differed from work produced by men. Among critics and writers alike there exists a strong belief that women's writing is influenced by their "feminine nature." This "feminine nature" naturally leads women writers to focus on issues of concern to women; love, family life, and the conflict between family and career and is thus considered personal/emotive fiction rather than political. Moreover, it is believed that women writers are continuing in the "women's tradition" established in the late 1920s (Liu, 1993:34). As in the case of their predecessors, however, the work of present-day women writers is subject to a highly gendered scrutiny.

On the one hand women's writing has been praised for its sensitivity, delicacy, refinement, and beautiful metaphors and its ability to replenish people's emotions in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (Thakur, 1997:95-97). On the other hand, however, their work is considered more limited than the more "universal" perspective of male writers. In the words of one critic:

In life it has been proven that whether women are daughters, mothers, or wives, their love is stronger than men. This imbues their writings with feelings. But this emphasis on feeling leads them to individualism and does not allow their context to be deep enough." (Cited in Thakur, 1997:97)

One woman writer, Wang Anyi, stated in a 1989 interview that she generally ranks male writers higher than female writers in all of world literature and strives to become a writer like a male writer herself (Wang, 1993:172). Indeed, among all the women writers, only Shen Rong is praised for her ability to handle themes which depict overall reality, not just women's subjectivity and position. Because of this some critics say, "In her outlook of life and breadth of vision, she possesses the characteristics of male writers." (Cited in Thakur, 1997:96)

When women writers have developed particularly strong female protagonists, or female protagonists whose sexual behaviour is deemed questionable, or challenged language norms itself,
their work has come under attack by critics. According to Thakur:

Strong women characters in the stories of Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin are criticized for going against nature, among other things. Thus, these women characters, essentially described as lonely, intellectual women, are to be pitied not emulated. They are not necessarily representative of womanhood; rather they are masculinized women (Thakur, 1997:99).

In Yu Luojin's *A Winter's Tale*, a woman character who was twice divorced and had a love affair with a senior cadre, was described by critics as immoral, individualistic and contravening the spirit of socialism (Thakur, 1997:94). Moreover, in 1985, when a new edition was being prepared, Yu spoke out against censorship of a rape scene\(^\text{10}\). After being ignored, Yu Luojin sought political asylum in Germany (Davin, 1996b:75).

One of the only women experimental writers, Can Xue, has also come under attack. Tonglin Lu attributes the male criticism of her writing to the fact that it simultaneously subverts two norms; orthodox communism and the male monopoly on experimental fiction (Lu, 1995:77). Lu also argues that Can adopts a fluid-feminine language that offers no firm ground on which the subject, male or female, may search for an origin (Lu, 1995:96-97). According to Lu, a number of male critics attribute Can's originality to madness (Lu, 1995:77). Indeed, the editor of *Selections of New-Wave Fiction in China* calls Can Xue a "paranoid woman." (Lu, 1995:77) When Can gave a speech ridiculing the misogynistic speech of most of her male colleagues, moreover, all major Chinese literary journals decided to reject her manuscripts. As a result, some of her most recent stories have been published first in Japanese or English (Lu, 1995:102).

Not all Chinese literary criticism essentializes the writing of women. Indeed, Lydia Liu notes

\(^{10}\)Unlike her male colleagues use of rape for misogynistic purposes, Yu describes her protagonist's rape by her husband in order to attack the sexual ignorance in which millions of Chinese girls are brought up, showing that it leaves them vulnerable to trauma and misery (Davin, 1996:74).
that two critics have argued that women have made important break-throughs in broad social and political themes in fiction (Liu, 1993:33). Moreover, the effort to establish a women's tradition, or women's literature, on behalf of some critics and writers, has been a part of the building of women's studies -- which I will return to in the following chapter. In the meantime, I would like to emphasize two points. First, two Western scholars have noted the seeming "insecurity" in a number of works of fiction by present-day women writers. Tonglin Lu has observed that because "the "female voice" was for so long appropriated by communist discourse, women writers seem unsure about the position(s) from which they can speak."(Lu, 1993:11) Elisabeth Croll similarly finds "tension and confusion" openly expressed repeatedly in women's short stories (Croll, 1995:171-172). I would relate these observations directly to the differing costs and benefits of political transition for women and men. Just as in the late 1920s when women were struggling to develop a sense of subjectivity, many women writers today are confronting more internal obstacles on the road to subject-hood than are their male colleagues. Second, in the literature of the 1980s, a clear pattern of gendered understandings of the political can be mapped. On the one hand, men's literature, in all its "universal" applicability, is considered political. Moreover, political agency is, more often than not, erected on the absence/exclusion/objectification of women. On the other hand, while most of women's writing is not considered politically (or "universally") relevant, it is believed to have helped the population emotionally re-equilibrate. Women's literature thus serves a political function (albeit a function encoded with inner world association), while not being attributed a politically relevant voice in literary discourse.

Public Ideas

During the 1980s intellectual political discourse achieved a breadth and intensity not seen
since the May Fourth Movement. Although most theoretical explorations in the early 1980s attempted to re-align Chinese Marxism in accordance with reform, theoretical discussions soon exploded into a plethora of ideas that ranged from individualism to Western Marxism, from Nietzsche to Freud, from existentialism to Christianity (Goldman, 1994:9). Although I have separated literature from theory for the purposes of this study, in reality they were closely linked. Writers like Liu Binyan presented their political ideas in fiction, and in Liu's case, was punished as a result. Unlike the 1950s through the 1960s, however, political discussion outside of the Party leadership was no longer primarily confined to literary texts. As I will show in the following section, a plethora of new spaces within academic and non-academic environments allowed for much expanded room for discussion. Both the "public" ideas, and the "public" spaces in which they circulated, nevertheless, were to a large degree exclusive and highly gendered. In the following I touch on four critical debates that circulated during the 1980s and early 1990s. While these debates by no means encompass the range of discussion, I believe they provide some insight into the ways in which politics has been re-conceptualized by intellectuals during the reform period.

**Marxism, Alienation and Humanism**

When prominent intellectuals first began to re-think politics, why the Cultural Revolution took place, and how to create a better political framework for the future, they turned to Marxism for answers. Specifically, Wang Shiwei, deputy editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily*, re-introduced the notion of alienation, claiming that alienation can exist in any system that produces forces that oppress people. He argued that the system of socialism that had developed in China diminished human worth instead of enhancing it. Noting the flood of writing about humanism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and drawing on the ethical precedence of revolutionary humanism (*geming rendaozhuyi*) of the liberation war period, Wang called for a revival of humanism within Marxism
While discussions of alienation faded in the mid-1980s, understandings of humanism continued to inform political theory and literature for much of the decade.

By focusing on “humanism,” Wang Shiwei and many other intellectuals sought to counteract some of the excesses they had witnessed in previous eras. In so doing, nevertheless, they merely created another totalizing theory that had as little room for difference as the Marxism they were trying to change. Mayfair Yang has noted that:

...the universal human subject posed by humanism is a rational, naturally moral, unified, and internally coherent subject. There is no sense of conflict, division, or amalgamation between the more socialized and individualized coexisting segments, between tradition and modernity, between desire and the death instinct, or between good and evil. Finally, to define human essence as individual freedom and to pit it against social relations is to adopt a position that is exactly opposed to that of the state, and thus to remain caught up in a rigid and polarized state discourse of total freedom versus total subjugation (Yang, 1994:281).

Women, unseen and unheard, I would argue, get caught between the poles of Marxist and Humanist discourse.

Culture Fever

From the mid to late-1980s, a trend known as "culture fever" took hold of intellectual discussion. Culture fever had two basic themes: criticism of traditional Chinese culture and criticism of Chinese national character. Goldman, Link and Wei note that similar to the May Fourth Movement, Chinese intellectuals sought to borrow ideas from the West to supplement the "deficiencies" of Chinese culture (Goldman, Link, and Wei, 1993:143-144). While Party elders emphasized the authoritarian elements of traditional culture in their efforts to block Western ideas, many intellectuals blamed these same aspects of the tradition for the stagnation of Chinese civilization (Goldman, 1994:258).

The culture fever movement culminated in the appearance of a television series entitled "River Elegy" in the summer of 1988. A six-part documentary, the series addresses such issues as
Chinese xenophobia and national pride, isolationism and wall building, authoritarian rule, and the contrast between a backward hinterland and a thriving, outward looking coastal economy (Link, 1992:79). Moreover, it implicitly supported Zhao Ziyang's reform leadership while simultaneously criticizing the party's efforts to maintain ideological control and isolate China from Western culture (Goldman, 1994:258-259). It is important to note, nonetheless, that neither the series nor the larger culture fever debate addressed women's issues. This is one very important way in which culture fever differed largely from the culture movement of the May Fourth era.

**New Authoritarianism**

New authoritarianism was first raised in 1986 in the wider context of the discourse on political reform, but did not seriously enter intellectual debate until the fall of 1988. Basing their views on the success of the four little dragons of East Asia, advocates of new authoritarianism believed that the state needed to move to a neo-authoritarian stage, in which a strong leader and the development of a market economy would produce a middle class. This class would then provide a social base for democracy (Goldman, 1994:275). Advocates advanced their position on the basis that new authoritarianism was suited to China's authoritarian traditions, backward economy and "unenlightened populace" and that democratic means would prove slower, less effective and likely to end in chaos (Link, 1992:284).

Like the humanism and the culture fever movement, new authoritarianism did not address women's issues as part of its debates. A gendered analysis of "new authoritarianism," nonetheless points to the clear danger of a paternalistic and patriarchal government emerging out of this kind of political arrangement. A situation of "strong-man" leadership would be just that; one man, or a small group of men, making decisions that would affect the citizenry of the whole nation. At best, women's issues would receive little, if any, attention. At worst, gender norms would be reinscribed
in such a way that women would not only have little political power, but very little social and economic leverage either.

**Democracy and Civil Society**

The leaders of our nation must be informed that we want to take our destiny into our own hands. We want no more gods and emperors. No more saviours of any kind. We want to be masters of our own country, not modernized tools for the expansionist ambitions of dictators...Democracy, freedom and happiness are the only goals of modernization. Without this fifth modernization, the four others are nothing more than a new-fangled lie (Cited in Barme & Minford, 1988:277).

Wei Jingsheng, a former Red Guard, wrote this during the 1978 Democracy Wall Movement. Wei's conception of a "fifth modernization," or democracy and human rights, was a fairly lone, radicalized call in the late 1970s. It was not until the early 1980s that older and more established intellectuals began to seriously discuss possibilities for democratic political reform. Moreover, the discussions that have taken place since have covered a wide range of possibilities -- ranging from internal Party reform to the establishment of a liberal democratic system in China. The work of the political reform think-tank, founded by Zhao Ziyang in 1986, is one example of a concerted effort to analyse and reform the system from within. The studies of the political reform think-tank ranged from Plato to Napoleon, Washington to Lincoln, and Sun Yat-Sen to Chiang Kai-Shek (Chen, 1995:146). The group also kept abreast of political reform in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Between January of 1987 and August 1988, the political reform think-tank published 40 million words of text and made a number of recommendations. Interestingly, one of the recommendations included increased autonomy for the mass organizations, including the All China Women's Federation (Chen, 1995:149). Of all the Western texts examined, nonetheless, there is no mention of critical intellectuals referring to feminist approaches to political participation and democracy.

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11 The four modernizations that Wei is referring to were Deng Xiaoping's program to reform agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence.
Merle Goldman has argued that while many intellectuals sought political liberalisation within the government during the first half of the 1980s, this changed as campaigns against intellectuals and reform-minded Party leaders continued into the late 1980s (Goldman, 1994). By 1989, many intellectuals were convinced of the need for a new, more democratic system to replace the Party dictatorship.

As can be seen in the discussion of new authoritarianism, the route to and manifestation of democracy, was perceived in multiple ways. Some intellectuals believed in the need for intellectuals to play a predominant role in any kind of democratization. One article published in the *Economic Weekly* in May of 1989 argued that the fundamental way to achieve political stability was “to endow intellectuals with the rights to conduct public, institutionalized criticisms and evaluations of the policy measures in regard to the national economy and the people’s livelihood” and in so doing, “intellectuals and experts could design feasible plans for carrying out genuine reforms and for promoting the cause of modernization.” (Cited in Gu, 1996:885). Others argued for the participation of the populace. Liu Xiaobo was one younger intellectual who was adamant that democracy not involve a continuation of patronage (between leaders and intellectuals) that was very much in effect in the 1980s. According to Liu, "to use privilege to protect people fighting for democracy is an antinomy and self-parody, for the protector as well as the protected." (Cited in Barme & Jarvis, 1992:36). Liu also argued for the need to expand understandings of democracy into personal relations. Liu writes, "We can...carry out studies of the nondemocratic way we live in China and consciously attempt to put democratic ideals into practice in our own personal relationships (between teachers and students, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, and friends." (Cited in Barme & Jarvis, 1992:45)

Discussions of civil society to a certain extent mirrored discussions of democracy. As early
as 1986, writers were articulating the need for transforming "the mass" into a citizenry. Some intellectuals emphasized civic awareness, or duties, while others emphasized rights (Ma, 1994:182-186). Shun-Yun Ma has noted that in the aftermath of June Fourth, "civil society" has become a particularly fashionable concept among exiled intellectuals (Ma, 1994:191). Chen Kuide, for example, has argued for an alliance between intellectuals and entrepreneurs towards the formation of civil society. In specific, he sees the need to create a "substitutive political force" that would involve the "replacement of existing Communist leaders with intellectuals, whose activities in the 1980s have made them the vanguards of the construction of civil society." (Cited in Ma, 1994:188)

Chen's definition of civil society is a "public sphere consisting of private enterprises, universities, newspapers and magazines, trade unions, churches, newspapers and magazines, and other social organizations that are independent of the state." (Cited in Chen, 1994:187) Other exiled intellectuals have seen the need to reinvigorate aspects of China's past. In an about-face Su Xiaokang, who spearheaded "River Elegy", believes that since construction of civil society may result in revival of some of the folk institutions, the endeavour is both anti-communist and pro-traditional (Cited in Ma, 1994:189). Su furthermore believes that illegal social forces such as the Triad Society positively contribute to the development of civil society (Cited in Ma, 1994:189).

It would seem that according to the democratic theorists of the 1980s, and some dissidents who are writing in exile in the 1990s, women's issues are not relevant to the debate. Moreover, through adopting a view that state-societal autonomy is a precursor for democratic development, the Chinese theorists are ignoring the gender dimension in the same way as their Western colleagues. Women's issues are thus not only ignored, but the gendered dimensions of democratic change as articulated in the West are not questioned either.

Intellectual debate on political change in China in the 1980s and 1990s is notable for its vast
coverage of ideas and theories. It is also notable, however, for its exclusiveness. Whether arguing for new authoritarianism or the creation of civil society, many intellectuals (including some now exiled overseas) have continued to maintain a belief in the intellectuals as vanguard. Similarly, intellectual discussion has not incorporated any understanding of gender or women's issues. Particularly ironic in this regard is the culture fever movement. I assume that the participants in the culture fever discussions, like a number of the men (and some women) novelists previously discussed, no longer viewed women as oppressed by traditional culture. Women's liberation, therefore, remained the state's arena and had nothing to do with the political objectives of culture fever. Likewise, other than Liu Xiaobo's lone call for democratizing personal relationships, no discussion of the gendered implications of privatizing multiple facets of life has been considered. Equally troubling is the more recent trend of emphasizing China's traditional past to resolve present problems. Revitalization of certain folk institutions and the Triad society may be empowering for some, but more than likely liable to prove problematic in the long-term creation of civil society. Indeed, Shirin Rai has observed how the revival of certain local practices has reinforced the de-valuing of women (Rai, 1992).

Perhaps most disturbing is not what was being proposed in the political arena, but what was being said about the roles of women in the economic sector. Early in the 1980s several important economists proposed that in order to achieve higher male employment, women should return to the home. Although this issue was widely debated, and in some arenas (such as the All China Women's Federation) loudly protested, the economists suggestion sent a clear message in regards to who they believed should rightfully occupy the new emerging public and what roles best suited women.

The unconscious, or conscious, neglect of the differing perspectives and needs of women in the dominant critical intellectual discourse of the 1980s mirrors the absence of women
intellectuals in positions of importance during the same period. In the final section of this chapter I will explore the gendered composition of political relationships formed during the 1980s. It is my belief that the "public" spaces that emerged during this period largely rested on masculine and male private ties. As a result, I would argue, just as conceptions of individual political subjectivity and theories of political change were being articulated around a male model, the public spaces that emerged in the late 1980s were male in tone and substance as well.

**Public Spaces**

Over the first decade of reform in China a number of sites of political discourse opened up. Some of these sites opened within the state or semi-attached to the state while others were constructed on the margins or were independent of the state altogether. The critical intellectuals who debated and articulated new political possibilities can be examined on the basis of those who had strong ties to state institutions and leaders and those who struck out on their own to create more independent organizations. I will call those who identify with the state and work within its structures as "establishment" intellectuals (Hamrin/Link, 1986), and those with fewer institutional ties, and often a more critical perspective, "dissident" intellectuals. To a certain degree, establishment and dissident intellectuals can also be separated on the basis of age (the elder the critical intellectual, the more likely to be an establishment intellectual) but as will soon be shown, there is a great deal of overlap as well as transition over the decade. As the 1989 student demonstrators had neither the institutional links nor organizational basis of the establishment and dissident intellectuals I will consider their activities separately in the final section of this chapter.

Prior to examining the activities of the critical intellectuals it is important to note the changes that allowed for various kinds of social organizations to emerge in the 1980s. I will also
differentiate between the organizations according to a model Gordon White, Jude Howell and Shang Xiaoyuan have used in their work.

The Political Workings of Social Organizations

The 1980s proved a time of deep ambiguity in regards to rules surrounding the establishment of social organizations. Under Mao, all social organizations, such as the All China Women’s Federation, public welfare groups, and literary and art groups, were required to register with the now defunct Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Chinese state strictly controlled the activities of social organizations, and outlawed any autonomous forms of organizations (Whiting, 1989:1-22).

With the advent of the economic reforms, Chinese leaders have recognized that it is no longer feasible, nor advisable, to maintain a monopoly over social organizations. Self-organizing citizens, it was deemed, could play an important role in ameliorating some of the effects of modernization such as the loss of the accustomed level of social services and the widening inter-regional and inter-class inequalities (Cooke et al, 1994:4). Despite the recognized need for social organizations, no formal universal system of regulation was established until 1989 (White, Howell and Shang, 1996:102).

In October of 1989, the Standing Committee of the State Council Issued the Management Regulations on the Registration of Social Organizations (White, Howell and Shang, 1996:103). According to these regulations, each social organization must be affiliated with a supervisory body known as guakao danwei. Often times this supervisory body, referred to often as a popo, or mother-in-law, serves as an umbrella group and may provide the social organization’s staff, office space, and funding. According to the regulations, the counterpart must also approve the organization’s choice of leaders and activities (Whiting, 1989:12). Some groups, including an unknown number of
religious, environmental, women and gay men’s organizations, choose not to *gua kao*. If groups choose not to register, however, they are illegal, and remain even more vulnerable than registered organizations to potential reprisals.

White, Howell and Shang differentiate among organizations according to the extent of their proximity to the state. The first is the caged sector; or the mass organizations of which the All China Women’s Federation is one. These organizations are bureaucratized and its cadre-officials are appointed and renumerated by the state. The incorporated sector, on the other hand, is a mixture of social organizations and the state sector and includes friendship, recreational, academic and cultural groups. The sector that White, Howell and Shang identify as the “counter-culture in waiting” is the interstitial pattern of association. Intellectual and business elites primarily compose this sector. Finally, the suppressed sector is made up of those groups who do not, or cannot *guakao danwei*, and are subject to official repression (White, Howell, and Shang, 1996:30-36).

According to these criteria, the activities of the establishment intellectuals lie somewhere between the incorporated and the interstitial sector, and the activities of the dissident intellectuals somewhere between the interstitial and the suppressed sector.

**Establishment Intellectuals**

When Deng Xiaoping first initiated his reforms in the late 1970s he desperately needed help. In order to meet his goals; Deng Xiaoping rehabilitated three million intellectuals, branded during the anti-rightist campaign and the Cultural Revolution, and returned them to public life (Goldman, 1994:28). Specifically, thousands of intellectuals were placed in key positions in academia, the media and, in some cases, government. In turn, the rehabilitated intellectuals were charged with the responsibility of expanding and modernizing their institutions. In academia,
between 1978 and 1980 several new disciplines were created or greatly expanded beyond their original scope. These included international relations and foreign area studies, demography, law, sociology, anthropology, and political science (Halpern, 1988:218). Furthermore, in 1977 the leadership established a separate Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) which conducted research and offered policy advice to the state (Halpern, 1988:227). By August of 1984, CASS had thirty-two research institutions, a post-graduate school, and a publishing house. At that time CASS also employed more than 5,000 researchers and had 3,000 staff members (Cited in Goldman, 1992:206).

The creation of new academic departments in the early 1980s was complemented by a growing set of vertical and horizontal relations between certain leaders and intellectuals, and amongst intellectuals themselves. Foremost among the party leaders involved were Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Whereas Hu Yaobang chose to cultivate a loose network among older political theorists, poets, and newspaper editors, Zhao Ziyang relied upon the more structured think tank which consisted largely of younger academics. There are two points I wish to emphasize about these networks; first, the power of the networks and second, the gendered dimensions of this power.

A number of members of Hu Yaobang’s network dated their relationship with the party leader back to pre-Cultural Revolution days. Liu Binyan, for example, an investigative reporter and novelist had been allied with Hu Yaobang during the 1950s. Moreover, a number of participants in Hu Yaobang’s intellectual network held high party and government positions. The proponent of alienation/humanism, Wang Ruoshi, was deputy editor of the People’s Daily (1977-1983). Similarly, the two founders of the Economic Herald, one of the most independent Chinese newspapers in the 1980s, were also high party cadres. Connected to both Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang’s networks, the Economic Herald proved staunchly pro-Zhao (Li and White, 1991:378) and
Zhao, in turn, provided political protection and funds when needed (Yang, 1995:187).

There is no question that many of the intellectuals allied with Hu Yaobang were extremely powerful. Of all of the most prominent individuals, nonetheless, it is important to note that only one, Ge Yang, was a woman (Goldman, 1994:xii-xiv). Moreover, many of the establishment intellectuals held views that foreclosed the consideration of a number of social issues, not to mention excluded the participation of those concerned with those issues. The political opinions expressed in the *Economic Herald* provide several examples. On the one hand, many of the articles that appeared in the journal either supported new authoritarianism or a form of democracy that was clearly anti-populist (Li and White, 1991:374). On the other hand, the domestic issues that received little attention in the newspaper included social welfare, the environment, labour and domestic trade, women, the elderly, and urban housing (Li and White, 1991:364).

Unlike Hu, who primarily, though not entirely, drew upon an older generation of intellectuals, Zhao Ziyang looked to younger academics to help him achieve his reform goals. According to a participant in several of Zhao’s think tanks, Chen Yizi:

Zhao was the first Chinese leader in his generation to sincerely embrace the younger generation and open up to fresh ideas: He would often summon young economic specialists to his office and listen to their ideas for hours. This is very rare in a system that emphasizes seniority and rank so much. His economic think tanks were filled with talented young people, so he wanted to do the same with the political reform. Zhao acted as a bridge in connecting two generations (Chen, 1995:142).

Although Zhao Ziyang sought to break down certain hierarchical barriers in terms of age, he did not fundamentally challenging hierarchical relations of power. So while Zhao gave younger intellectuals opportunity to explore theoretical and practical problems facing the state, he still maintained connections to a number of intellectuals in Hu’s network, and made no effort to introduce younger, or older women, to the debates.

The intellectuals involved in Hu or Zhao’s networks were by no means isolated from one
another. As can be seen in the *Economic Herald* which published articles by and interviewed important intellectuals in both networks, there were many fora for exchange amongst different groups of intellectuals. In 1989, in particular, these ranged from small informal discussions to large university debates over key concepts. These horizontal networks, however, were superseded in importance by the vertical networks between intellectuals and Hu and Zhao. Indeed, after Hu was deposed as General Secretary of the Party 1987, many of Hu’s allies directed their efforts in support of Zhao. Furthermore, the establishment intellectuals were not always safe from political persecution. Campaigns against spiritual pollution and bourgeois liberalization were waged in 1981, 1983 and 1987 and as a result, intellectuals like Wang Ruoshi were dismissed from their posts. Most dangerous was when the leaders lost power themselves, as Hu did in 1987 and Zhao did in 1989. Indeed, many establishment intellectuals fled overseas in 1989 to escape persecution. It is important to remember, nevertheless, that for the years the establishment intellectuals worked closely with Hu and Zhao they were able to influence the course of China’s political and economic development. Moreover, this course did not include the concerns, nor the participation, of women.

**Dissident Intellectuals**

Whereas the establishment intellectuals worked closely with Party leaders and state institutional frameworks, in other words, primarily in the incorporated sector, the dissident intellectuals operated primarily on the margins within the interstitial sector. The greater autonomy of the dissidents, nevertheless, does not seem to influence their conceptions of gender any differently than their establishment counterparts.

One of the most prominent dissidents in China during the 1980s was Fang Lizhi, a world-renowned physicist. Unlike many of his contemporary establishment critical intellectuals, Fang
chose a different route to political liberalisation than through working within the system. Although Hu was drawn to members of Hu's intellectual network, he differed from them in his outright rejection of Marxism-Leninism (Goldman, 1994:197). On a cross-country tour of universities, Fang openly advocated respect of human rights and the establishment of democracy to students (Goldman, 1994:197-198). In the fall of 1986 at Shanghai's Tongji University he told students:

Democracy is first and foremost the rights of individuals, and it is individuals who must struggle for them. Expressions like 'extending democracy' and 'loosening up' would have you think that democracy can be bestowed upon us by those in charge. Nothing could be further from the truth (Cited in Williams, 1990:478).

Despite Fang's break with Marxism and refusal to work directly within the system to advocate change, he still advocated the special role of intellectuals within a political leadership (Li & White, 1991:376). To my knowledge, Fang did not address women's issues in his work either.

One of the non-state organizational structures with which Fang Lizhi was associated was the "Salon." In the 1980s salons were composed of groups of intellectuals who gathered together, often in university settings, to discuss a wide variety of topics. Fang Lizhi and his wife, Li Shuxian, alongside several students (who later became leaders of the Tiananmen movement), established the first salon to claim public existence as a political entity on May 4, 1988. Entitled, Minzhu Shalong (Democracy Salon), the salon's purpose was to open a political sphere in an open contest with the existing political order (Bonnin & Chevrier, 1996:154). Although the Minzhu Shalong was the first to claim institutional autonomy, salons were an extremely active site for political dissidence throughout the 1980s. Moreover, most were founded by the zhiqing (educated youth) of the Red Guard generation; a point I will return to shortly.

In the mid-1980s, a new phenomena developed that lent a whole new edge to dissident politics; the involvement of entrepreneurs. The most notable was the establishment of the Beijing Research Institute for Sociology and Economics by Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao. Former
democracy wall dissidents, Chen and Wang sought to bring about change from the bottom up with colleagues and skills acquired during the Cultural Revolution (Goldman, 1996:46). In addition to other activities, Chen and Wang organized a nation-wide survey of "the Political Culture of Chinese Citizens," published a *Yearbook on Chinese Political Science* and a bi-monthly journal on politics and public administration, conducted a number of public opinion polls and organized a number of conferences (Bonnin & Chevrier, 1996:165; Goldman, 1996:47) The institute was able to remain financially independent from the state due to a smaller array of businesses which supported their work.

One of the most important initiatives of the Beijing Research Institute for Sociology and Economics was the purchase of the *Economic Weekly (Jingjixue Zhoubao)*. The *Economic Weekly* was China's first non-official newspaper since pre-1949. Unlike the *Herald*, the *Economic Weekly* attempted to provide commentary or analysis of economic and political events rather than align itself with "reform ideology." (Gu, 1996:878) According to Edward Gu, although Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao were deeply involved in the student movement in 1989, the Weekly expressed non-conformist, rational opinions even after the declaration of martial law (Gu, 1996:883). Despite the institutional and editorial independence of the *Weekly*, both the newspaper and the activities of the Beijing Research Institute interacted with the think tanks, former members of Hu Yaobang's network, Fang Lizhi and Peking University salons (Goldman, 1996:48).

According to Edward Gu, the *Economic Weekly* consistently expressed anti-populist and elitist sentiment with regard to the political role of intellectuals (Gu, 1996). Moreover, the activities of the salons, the Beijing Research Institute for Sociology and Economics, and the *Economic Weekly* did not discuss women's issues nor involve women. Indeed, among the dissident intellectuals I can only identify Li Shuxian, wife of Fang Lizhi; Luo Diandian, daughter of Luo Ruoqing, former
general chief of staff of the PLA, and vice-editor in chief of the Economic Weekly (Gu, 1996:862); and Chen Ziming’s wife who headed a small enterprise that helped support her husband’s Beijing Research for Sociology and Economics (Bonnin and Chevrier, 1996:165).

*Where are the Women Critical Intellectuals?*

An analysis of the work of both the establishment and the dissident intellectuals of the 1980s reveals that the degree of autonomy from the state seems to have little bearing on the consideration of gender or involvement of women in these intellectual public spaces. In order to determine what measures would offset the gender imbalance, it is necessary to consider the primary obstacles to the participation of women in the intellectual public of the 1980s.

First, the absence of women may be partially explained by some of the reasons that have excluded women from formal politics; in particular, child care and housework obligations. Second, I would argue, the introduction of the economic reforms impeded women from joining the intellectual public. As already noted, women’s employment opportunities were not only declining in the 1980s, but their educational opportunities were being limited as well. Without some kind of official position, whether inside or on the margins of the state, it would have been very difficult for women gain the same kind of attention, and leverage, as their male colleagues. Indeed, one of the most concerted forces keeping women at bay during the reforms has been a resurgence in sexism, as seen amongst the literary critics earlier in this chapter. If Zhao Ziyang disapproved of women in politics, why would he welcome them into one of his think tanks? Finally, I would argue that the reinforcement of *guanxi*, or personal relations, during the Cultural Revolution may have partially facilitated the exclusion of women in the formation of critical intellectual politics, establishment and dissident, during the 1980s.
Guanxi is a cultural phenomena that stretches back centuries in Chinese history. According to Mayfair Yang, guanxixue, or the practice of guanxi, involves “the exchange of gifts, favours, and banquets; the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness.” (Yang, 1994:6) Yang and other Western scholars have noted how guanxi practices were reinforced during the Cultural Revolution (Yang, 1994; Gold, 1985; Lewis, 1986). According to John Wilson Lewis, the word guanxihu (or guanxi network) was practically unheard of prior to the Cultural Revolution (Lewis, 1986:15). During the Cultural Revolution, however, the “sequences of purges and defensive reactions created a climate of distrust, and the elite (as well as the society as a whole) became a honeycomb of self-contained, defensive units that bypassed the official structure...” (Lewis, 1986:18). These informal, unofficial relationships were utilized to get things done, from simple tasks to major life choices (Gold, 1985:661). They were also used to form the basis of a political meeting ground.

Over the course of the late 1970s, some 200,000 educated youth returned from the countryside and attended university (Liu, 1993:105). Liu Binyan has argued that this group, known as the third generation, has been the most influential in recent years in China (Liu, 1993:104-105). Some, including Liu Binyan, have argued that red guards had a direct taste of democracy during the Cultural Revolution (Liu, 1993:105). Because of their ability to protest, stand-up to authority and assert independence, these youth were not willing to follow the status quo as the reforms took hold during the 1980s. But, it was their ability to forge powerful guanxihu during and in the last stages of the Cultural Revolution, I would argue, that provided them with the political leverage and confidence to become active critical intellectuals during the reform era. This was the case with the formation of the salons, the think tanks as well as organs such as the Economic Daily.

According to Michel Bonnin and Yves Chevrier, "the young educated (zhiquing), or elder
intellectuals sent to the countryside formed links of personal relation and political persuasion which later led to the establishment of the first salons in the 1980s." (Bonnin & Chevrier, 1996:153)

Similarly, the youth who formed the agricultural think tanks of the early 1980s established links with one another as well as important members of the leadership. It was during the Cultural Revolution that Chen Yizi first got to know Deng Yingtao, and then his father Deng Liqun, an important Party official who helped facilitate the foundation of the Rural Development Group (Fewsmith, 1994:34). Like Deng Yingtao, other members of the study group were the sons and daughters of high ranking cadres; Du Ying was Deng Liqun's son-in-law and Bai Ruobing was Central Committee member Bai Jiefu's son (Burns, 1989:504).

Like the salons and the think tanks, the Economic Weekly was also forged upon personal relations formed during the Cultural Revolution. Members of the third generation, Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao were both active during the Democracy Wall movement in late 1978. When Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang went to view posters at Peking University and Qinghua, Hu invited several of the Democracy Wall activists to his home, including Wang Juntao (Goldman, 1994:42).

Mayfair Yang has argued that guanxi relations discriminate against women workers and peasants. Because guanxixue involves mixing with a wide assortment of people in society, many believe it is not good for a woman’s social reputation (Yang, 1994:79). Chastity seems to play less of an important role among women intellectuals, although Yang notes that though intellectual women do participate in the public domain of guanxixue, they are disadvantaged in that they must play up to male expectations (of dress and deportment) since most guanxi targets in this domain are male cadres or office workers (Yang, 1994:84). Moreover, it is important to remember that at the same the third generation was flooding into the universities in the late 1970s, only 25% were women. It is my conclusion, therefore, that a combination of the practice of guanxixue among critical
intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, discrimination against women based on the goals of “modernization,” and a more blatant re-emergence of sexism all contributed to the exclusion of women in the new public of the 1980s.

Prior to examining the activities of the student movement, it is important to acknowledge the work of two prominent women intellectuals, Ge Yang and Dai Qing, who were often heard in the “new public” of the 1980s. Given the prominence, and uniqueness, of both Ge Yang and Dai Qing, it is critical to try and understand why these women have been able to forge a place for themselves in the new public when so many others have not.

Ge Yang was born in 1919. Aware of discrimination against women from a young age, she sought to educate herself, and later joined the Communist Party. While she was not aware of inequality in the Party while working as a reporter in the Red Army, she realized in later years how mistreated women were during the war. After 1949, Ge became editor of a journal called the New Observer. Due to her outspokenness, however, Ge Yang was branded a rightist in 1956 and sent to a labour camp. She similarly was sent to another labour camp during the Cultural Revolution.

When the Reform era began Ge Yang was re-appointed as editor of the New Observer. Ge describes her political activities in the 1980s in the following way:

I used my newly regained office to push for freedom and democracy. In Beijing we established a circle of liberal intellectuals. I published statements others would not. My magazine became the spearhead of the democracy movement. There was another magazine in Shanghai called the New Economic Herald. The two journals collaborated. When Hu Yaobang, the reformist leader of the Communist Party, died, the Herald and the Observer worked together for a memorial ceremony and a special issue. In my journal I talked of the death of communism. One million copies of that issue sold. The Observer was the first to be closed after the June Fourth crackdown. In the establishment papers I was named as the "mother of turmoil" and my long history of counterrevolution was described in detail (Afkhami, 1994:73).

In addition to her political activities and work as a reporter since the 1940s, Ge Yang married and raised five children. Although Ge Yang has openly criticized sexism in the Chinese Communist
Party (Afkhami, 1994:69), I am unaware of whether the Observer ever addressed such issues in the context of political reform and/or the 1989 democracy movement.

Like Ge Yang, Dai Qing was also involved in the world of newspapers. Unlike Ge Yang, however, Dai Qing hailed from different origins and carried a somewhat different political banner. In the 1980s, Dai Qing was best known for her investigative reporting. Raised in the family of Marshall Ye Jianying as a child, Dai Qing was privy to a number of important personages and events which she chose to disclose in her work. Dai’s purpose was to “shatter orthodox myths” about the Party and high politics (Link, 1992:147). Dai herself had been a Red Guard during the Cultural Revolution and afterward worked as a rocket scientist. While it was extremely difficult to transfer work placements in the late 1970s, Dai used her connections with old cadres and officials to move to the Guangming Ribao (Enlightenment Daily) (Dai, 1996:59). Dai Qing makes use of the tradition of zawen, or “piquant essays” in her work in order to criticize events ranging from the persecution of the intellectual Wang Shiwei in the 1940s to the more recent plans for the Three Gorges Dam.

Although extremely critical of abuses in the leadership, Dai has not been a proponent of rapid political change in China. Indeed, in late 1988 and 1989 she was very supportive of new authoritarianism. Dai Qing eventually abandoned new authoritarianism as a viable political route, but continued to criticize the impetuosity of the students in the 1989 movement. Dai writes:

I do not view the Tiananmen incident as a democratic movement but as an act of destruction-a destruction that hindered the transition from a traditional society to a modern one...The immediate impact of the “June 4” crackdown was the elimination of the dozen best journals, the purge of some very fine officials, and the slaughter of a multidimensional set of standards for individual consciousness and values that had been arduously crafted over the ten-year economic reform (Dai, 1995/96a:25).

Dai herself was imprisoned for a year after the June Fourth massacre.

Dai Qing’s stand on women’s issues is an ambiguous mix. From a review of critical essays that she has written (in the 1980s and 1990s) and an interview with her in 1988, it would seem that...
Dai is both aware of and yet not overly concerned with women's issues (Dai, 1995-96; Wang, 1993). On the one hand, Dai has had an association with women's studies scholar, Li Xiaojiang, and has written several texts by or about women. Indeed, one of her texts is a recounting of a young nurse's enormous appetite for sexual intercourse (Dai and Luo, 1994). Dai Qing also attended the Sixth Congress of the All China Women's Federation as her newspaper's representative. In her written version of the event, Dai is outraged about the abuses currently being levied against women; including child labour, teen prostitution and female employment (Dai, 1995-96b:53-54). Dai is similarly incensed by the apparent non-interest of Chen Muhua in the ACWF proceedings, just prior to her "election" to the position of chairperson. Dai not only questions Chen's decision to go play golf during the proceedings, but also publicly announces her questions regarding the candidates qualifications, "I have never read anything or heard any speeches by Madame Chen in which, as the nominee for chairperson of the Women's Federation, she has expressed her views on matters involving women." (Dai, 1995-96:57)

Indeed, on a close reading of the piece I would argue that Dai's primary concern is not women's issues per se, but rather an exposure of abuse of power and the undemocratic nature of politics in China. Dai's motivation for writing A Series of Chinese Women, for example, was based mainly on the desire to use women as a metaphor for the plight of the nation as a whole (Wang, 1993:191). Moreover Dai is emphatic about the physiological differences between women and men and argues that, if necessary, women should return to the home to support the efforts of "modernization." (Wang, 1993:194) Dai states:

I absolutely disagree with sexual equality. Men and women are different; they are born different and cannot be equal (Wang, 1993:201).

Dai also views men as equipped with a superior intelligence than women and as a result, are much better writers than women (Wang, 1993:200-201). Ultimately, Dai Qing is adamant that intellectual
women do not suffer sexual oppression, and that there are many greater problems other than gender conflict facing China at the moment (Wang, 1993:205).

Of all of the elder critical intellectuals, Ge Yang appears to be the lone woman. Although I am unaware of her pre-1980 activities in any depth, her activism in the new public suggest her close involvement with Hu Yaobang’s network based upon politics and ties formed in the 1950s. Dai Qing, on the other hand, was able to gain some political leverage as a result of important family connections. While family connections were important for men as well as women, given the number of “wives” of critical intellectuals that I cited earlier, it would seem that this remains one of the avenues to politics for women. Both the vertical (between leaders and intellectuals) and horizontal (intellectual ties to one another) guanxi at play during the reform period, I would therefore argue, have been highly gendered, and for the most part contributed to the exclusion of women from active participation in the new public. Moreover, it is important to note the perception of women intellectuals like Dai who are supporting highly differentiated understandings of inner and outer worlds. The gender role perception of women may be equally influencing their political options, therefore, as the sexist attitudes of their male colleagues.

The 1989 Student Movement

Not all of the intellectual discussions of the 1980s took place in salons, the printed word or within the halls of power. In 1986 and again in 1989, Chinese students took to the streets to advocate for political change. A brief examination of their understanding of democracy and methods of organization reveals that the students were as unaware of the needs of women and other social groups as their more established, elder counterparts.

When Hu Yaobang died in the Spring of 1989 Beijing university students chose to mark his
passing by holding vigil in Tiananmen Square. In so doing, the students were following a tradition of using funery rites to express a commitment to political change. Indeed, students took to the streets in a similar manner in 1919, 1925 and 1945 (Wasserstrom, 1990:6-7). Among their demands was a call to end the corruption of officials and for political reform. The vigil quickly transformed into protests and soon hundreds of thousands of students were demonstrating in the streets of Beijing and in cities across the nation.

Over the six weeks of demonstrations the word democracy was repeated more than any other. Many Western scholars have argued, nevertheless, that the Chinese students had an "idealized, abstract attachment to democracy." (Moody, 1988:1142). According to Timothy Cheek, "many dissidents simply demanded the right to fulfill the kind of mandarin role that Chinese states (imperial, nationalist, and communist alike) have promised the intelligentsia: that of acting as advisors to those who govern" (Cheek, 1994:185). Elizabeth Perry similarly argues that Chinese students were acting out a kind of morality play that they saw as limited to the Confucian elite of scholars and officials (Perry, 1994:80). In addition to largely ignoring the workers' interest in involvement in the movement, the students did not make any connections between a nation-wide African student strike five months earlier or a Tibetan uprising that had taken place just two months earlier. Indeed, the African student strikes were the result of male Chinese students attacking African men for dating Chinese women. The needs and interests of women were also totally ignored.

In an article examining the gendered aspects of the student movement, Lee Feigon does not draw favourable conclusions. Despite the prominence of female Peking University Student, Chai Ling, spearheading the final days of the protests, Feigon observes that the upper levels of the movement were dominated by men in style and tone (Feigon, 1994:127). Indeed, women for the most
part played traditional kinds of supporting roles. Moreover, not only were women's issues not introduced into discussions of democracy but patterns of objectifying women were perpetuated as well. Wuer Kaixi, one of the foremost leaders, for example, kept girlie pin-ups on the wall of his office headquarters (Feigon, 1994:129).

After escaping to the West, Chai Ling asserted that there is a direct connection between sexual equality and realizing democracy:

There are some men who work for the democracy movement in the daytime but beat their wives at night. If democracy is just a concept and not a style of living, its useless (cited in Feigon, 1994:127).

Feigon notes, nonetheless, that Chai Ling may be one of the only demonstrators who was beginning to make connections between women and democracy. Indeed:

In the minds of these People's University student leaders, like those of the former revolutionaries they opposed, changes in gender relations would have to wait until they resolved what they considered the more important and immediate problems affecting the Chinese people as a whole (Feigon, 1994:128).

Elizabeth Perry has argued that the students reliance on traditional patterns of intellectual behaviour, such as their style of remonstrance, their search for political patrons and their stress on moralism put a brake on political transformation (Perry, 1994:86). I would add that the absence of women from the upper ranks of the movement and the lack of recognition of sexual equality and other interests, hampered the possibility of meaningful political transformation as well.

**Conclusion**

The public of the critical intellectuals in the 1980s, I would argue, was not democracy-friendly on a number of fronts. First, the voice and presence of women was largely absent from the literary and theoretical debates of the decade. This is due to a combination of both structural and attitudinal obstacles including the re-emergence of *guanxi* practices, the privileging of men in higher
education, the discrimination against women in employment practices, and the sexist re-ordering of the individual along male biased lines. Moreover, the question of autonomy from the state doesn’t seem to make too much of a difference to the approach of critical intellectuals to gender considerations. This is the case whether individuals aligned themselves as establishment intellectuals in the incorporated sector, or as dissident intellectuals on the margins.

As a result of mounting frustration, Goldman argues that Chinese intellectuals have abandoned the idea of reforming the Chinese State from within and are now seeking a replacement of the system (Goldman, 1994). Increasingly, intellectuals are differentiating between state, nation and society and are seeking to widen their revolutionary banner to include people with different interests. Indeed, a 1995 petition signed by a coalition of high-level intellectuals and non-establishment political activists urged an end to persecution for holding differing viewpoints and the release of those imprisoned for their political and religious beliefs, including Tibetans and Christians (Goldman, 1995:261). The question remains, nonetheless, whether establishment and dissident intellectuals will be able to incorporate notions of gender equality within their new coalition in terms of ideas and practice.

Reflecting on the lack of attention paid to sexual equality during the 1989 student demonstrations Lee Feigon argues that both men and women intellectuals identify with the regime in power:

They have bought into a system in which it has been taken for granted that one should not raise issues like gender discrimination while supposedly more important issues are on the agenda. Talk of sexual discrimination, it has been alleged, would alienate workers and peasant allies. Because women intellectuals in China, like their male counterparts, have benefited from what seemed to be a special relationship between the government and the intelligentsia, they have willingly put off gains in their own position until "next time" accepting the governments or the Party's claim that "this time" more pressing problems exist (Feigon, 1994:128).

As can be seen with respect to the women writers in the 1980s, Dai Qing’s views on women’s issues
and the student demonstrators in 1989, this does seem to be the case. There is evidence, however, that an alternative to the critical intellectual discourse is emerging.
CHAPTER FOUR

A WOMEN'S PUBLIC

Many women are still weak after the reforms, even more than before. Strong individuals are rare and make up only a tiny group. Most of us find the reforms a new challenge. In the past, we made the mistake of thinking we had a high status in society. We thought we occupied a high status in the law and in politics, and that there was equality between men and women, but that was never the case. Now we say that the status of women has fallen. But it was never high to begin with. To get where we want, we have to struggle and consciously strive for it (Wang, 1995:11-17).

While the vast majority of critical intellectuals were ignoring women's issues and organizing in male-centred networks in the 1980s, a minority of women academics were noticing that their female graduate students were having difficulty locating work upon graduation. This observation, and many others on the effects of the economic reforms on women mentioned previously, soon led to the formation of salons focused on women's issues, the founding of women's studies programs, and later the establishment of women's organizations. With the Fourth World Conference on Women being held in Beijing in September of 1995, these initiatives garnered unprecedented international visibility and support.

This chapter examines the work of women scholar-activists in the 1980s and 1990s. The role of the All China Women's Federation and the birth and objectives of new women's studies programs and organizations over the last decade are examined in this first section. The second section analyses seven Beijing women's organizations vis-a-vis Gordon White et al's framework of social organizations. Finally, preparation activities for the 1995 NGO Forum on Women will be discussed with an eye to the working relationship between ACWF actors and women activists.

It is my argument that the work of Chinese women activists is mounting a real challenge to

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12This and the final section of the chapter are based upon six months of research in Beijing in the Spring and Summer of 1995.
the male centred intellectual publics of the past century. In addition, the nature of their work is offering a real challenge to both the Chinese and Western discourse about state-societal relations in a time of political transition.

The All China Women's Federation: Women's Work in the '90s

After a twelve year absence due to Cultural Revolution chaos, the All China Women's Federation re-opened its doors in 1978. With instructions to restore the organization to its pre-Cultural Revolution status, the ACWF leadership has since set about trying to meet this objective while simultaneously adapting the Federation to meet very new economic and social conditions. The result is an increasingly diversified organization that is beginning to incorporate elements of both state and society in its structure and vision.

An amalgamation of pre-existing women's associations working in the revolutionary period, the ACWF was founded on April 3, 1949, and until recently was the only legitimate women's organization in China. Like other mass organizations, such as the Youth League, the All China Women's Federation was designed in theory to serve as a two-way channel of communication between a specific group (or class) of people, in this case women, and the state. In reality, however, mass organizations have operated primarily as a vehicle for the mobilization of the population in service of party goals.

At present, the All China Women's Federation employs over ninety-eight thousand full-time cadres at the national, provincial, municipal, county and township level (Zhang and Wu, 1995:30). As a result of its capacity to reach millions of women, the All China Women's Federation was key in implementing many of the post-Liberation policies towards women, most particularly, the Marriage Law of 1950, and has been instrumental in the implementation of the One Child Policy in
the 1980s and 1990s. The All China Women's Federation has some leverage with the state in that it has the authority and resources to help interpret and implement state policy on women. The Federation, nevertheless, remains an organization designed and maintained by the state in service of state and Party goals. The All China Women's Federation has no administrative or legislative power.

Since 1978, the All China Women's Federation has specifically sought to become a stronger advocate for women as the effects of the reforms have begun to set in. As early as 1980, the Federation rejected a proposal by economists to "send women home" in order to reduce men's unemployment (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:319). At the local level, Women's Federations have also sought to counteract employment discrimination. In 1984 in Tianjin, for example, the local Federation protested a factory policy that stipulated 97% of the total new workers recruited would be men and succeeded in having the percentage of women workers raised to 20% (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:244-45).

The All China Women's Federation has also undertaken campaigns and been involved in the development and publicization of laws to provide further support to women. In 1982, in response to increasing wife abuse and infanticide resulting from the one child policy, the Women's Federation promoted a campaign to protect the rights of women and children (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:319). Local chapters also set up counseling offices and some cities adopted local regulations which made it easier for the Federation to protect women and punish the guilty (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:319). The ACWF was also very active in the formulation of the 1992 "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Rights and Interests of Women." This law has helped to cover past gaps in legislation concerning women as well as to provide more support to women "paying a higher price" in the transition from a planned economy to a market economy (Zhang and Wu, 1995:33). To this end
various provincial and autonomous regional governments have adopted measures to help redundant
women workers find jobs (Beijing Review, 1995:11).

In order to carry out its work more effectively, the All China Women's Federation has expanded remarkably since 1978. One of the most dramatic changes between the early period of the People's Republic of China and the present is that the Federation is establishing numerous research centres and sponsoring associations (such as the China Association for Research on Marriage and the Family) at both national and provincial levels. As a result the ACWF has been able to conduct both large national surveys and smaller local studies on topics such as marriage and the family, female self-image, urban career women, and rural women's suffering due to the economic polarization of the countryside (Tan, 1993:1-21). As of today, fifty magazines are in circulation under the Federation's auspices.

The All China Women's Federation's dramatic expansion is reflected in the size of the ACWF's national headquarters. Ten years ago the All China Women's Federation was housed in a small four story building. Today the Federation operates out of a massive nine story complex that sits on the widest street in Beijing. Ironically, however, this expansion has come at a time when both the national All China Women's Federation, and branches at the local levels are being required to become more economically self-sufficient (Rosen, 1995:334).

Indeed, the All China Women's Federation is facing many obstacles to becoming a greater advocate for women. According to White, Howell and Shang, “In trying to change, the ACWF has been hampered by serious financial constraints, by divisions within its leadership concerning the overall direction of the organization and its relationship to the party and its constituency, and by opposition from Party/Government officials, trade-union and enterprise managers.”(White, Howell and Shang, 1996:81). In rural areas, where the Federation has traditionally most active, there are
reports in many parts of women cadres virtually disappearing (White, Howell and Shang, 1996:79). Moreover, in urban areas a recent survey suggests that the All China Women’s Federation is not perceived as totally relevant to women’s lives either. According to a survey carried out in Shenyang and Nanton, 46% expressed the need for a new women’s organization (White, Howell and Shang, 1996:92).

One of the organization’s limitations is its inability to challenge state policy. As Elizabeth Croll notes, the Federation "implements general Party policies first and only then studies, analyses and draws out the practical implications which recent policies might have for women." (Croll, 1983:124) The ACWF was thus one of the key Party tools for the implementation of the Family Planning Policy, a controversial program particularly for women in the countryside.

The ACWF must support the economic reforms and has not been able to challenge the gender biases operating in the construction of policies (Rai, 1995:190). When the Federation has acted as an advocate, such as in the case of the Tianjin factory, it has done so for the most part on a reactive basis. Li Xiaojiang describes the efforts of the All China Women’s Federation to stop the impact of the reforms upon women as like a "praying mantis trying to stop a chariot." (Li, 1994:370) White, Howell and Shang also note the tendency of the All China Women’s Federation to consolidate, rather than revolutionize, patterns of subordination and domination in ACWF periodicals. According to White, Howell and Shang, the ACWF, “reinforces the idea of women as the bearers of morality, as reproducers, and as the nurturers of China’s next generation.” (White, Howell and Shang, 1996:91)

Some women scholar-activists have also leveled criticisms against the All China Women’s Federation. Li Xiaojiang and Zhang Xiaodan note the “closed-system” of the Women’s Federation and its original reluctance to work closely with women intellectuals at the outset of the reforms (Li
A number of activists I interviewed also leveled criticism against the All China Women's Federation. One activist commented that the Federation "has to a large degree not realized the full extent of what women's issues are and so focuses on illiteracy, family planning and March 8th (festivities)." Several activists expressed their frustration with the Federation's lack of ability to protect and support women whom they had referred to the ACWF. The two Federation cadres I interviewed both bemoaned the excessive bureaucracy of the ACWF, and one in particular criticized the lack of sisterhood. As another activist critiqued:

The women's movement is a woman's job in an organization like the All China Women's Federation. Indeed, many people working in the Federation see it as their position (zhiye) as opposed to their career (shiye). The women's movement should be seen as a responsibility.

Finally, both ACWF cadres were critical of the limitations of working with the Federation. One of them commented:

The activities and research of the All China Women's Federation workers cannot be in conflict with the All China Women's Federation policy. Other women's NGOs have more freedom to criticize the All China Women's Federation and hold other opinions.

Despite its limitations, both as employer and as advocate for women, none of the activists I interviewed reject it outright. According to the activists, the Federation is extremely useful in its ability to reach women and implement programs on a national scale. One woman commented:

I oppose people who oppose the All China Women's Federation. There is too much work to do, the work too spread out. (An organization like the Federation) is a necessity in a developing country.

Many women also commented on a major benefit of working for the All China Women's Federation; that is, a salary. Li Xiaojiang, one of the leading theorists of the women's studies movement, points out the valuable role that the Federation has played on behalf of women in recent years. Li feels that the new research bodies attached to the ACWF have:

shattered the closed structure of the Federation and have actively introduced forces from
the learned and other social circles. Aiming at different problems (such as the abduction of women, women's conversion to religion, women's empowerment, funds for the bearing and caring of children) the research bodies have held a series of seminars and lectures. By organizing investigations, by collecting information about women in different fields and by making this publicly known, these research bodies have played a good role in awakening social alert, in strengthening women's forces and in encouraging women to be self-respecting (Li, 1993:7-8).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the All China Women's Federation has expanded both in terms of its size and vision. No longer the "closed structure" that it once was, the ACWF is searching for ways to meet new problems with less money. From the vantage point of the activists in this study, the All China Women's Federation possesses advantages and disadvantages as an advocate for women as well as an employer. For financial reasons, two of the activists I interviewed have chosen to continue to work for the ACWF while starting their own women's organizations in their spare time. Two others have continued to work for their unit (both affiliated with the Federation), using it to found their own magazines for women. The rest of the activists either volunteer for, or have founded, their own organizations outside of the All China Women's Federation. As shall be shown shortly, almost all of the activists, while locating a significant amount of their activism outside of the Federation, nonetheless maintain close contacts with the ACWF.

New Women's Organizations and the Women Studies Movement

Women's organizations, independent of the All China Women's Federation, first began to appear in China in the mid-1980s (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:321). Known as friendly societies, lianyihui, these new organizations were formed by women not advancing as rapidly as their male colleagues. The lianyihui operate primarily as a place of mutual aid, providing professional women with an opportunity to connect with one another and share vital information. Examples include the Women Engineers Society, the All-China Women Entrepreneurs' Association, and the Women
Journalists' Friendly Society (Honig and Hershatter, 1988:321). Professional women's organizations have continued to proliferate in the 1990s and many now have nation-wide networks.

Shortly after professional women began to gather in groups, women academics around the country began to look for ways to explore women's issues in their communities. In 1987, Li Xiaojiang initiated and developed the first Chinese women's studies program at Zheng Zhou University. As the forerunner of the Chinese women's studies movement, Li Xiaojiang has published prodigiously on women's issues throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s. Her theoretical work is also the first to challenge Marxist and modernization approaches to women. In her essay "Economic Reform and the Awakening of Chinese Women," Li questions both approaches because of their inability to recognize and incorporate women in the development process and calls for new forms of theory creation (Li, 1994:360-382). Li's prolific writing, outspokenness, and successful organizational skills have not gone unnoticed by the state, however. Li Xiaojiang was chastised for her political activity during the post-June 4, 1989 crackdown and in 1994, her Zheng Zhou Women's Museum was also shut down for a brief period because her opinions conflicted with the All China Women's Federation, Zheng Zhou University, and the education board.

Following on the heels of Li Xiaojiang, a number of other women academics have founded women's studies programmes at universities across China. At the present time, there are women studies programmes at Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, the People's University, Tianjin University, Nankai University, Fudan University, Hangzhou University, Wuhan University, and Jilin University. These women's studies programmes mark an important shift in the way women's issues are being addressed, because for the first time since the People's Republic was established, women are able to theorize about the status of women outside of the All China Women's Federation. This is apparent both in the location of women studies programmes, at universities
instead of within the Federation, as well as in the language women studies scholars are adopting to identify their subject area. Tani E. Barlow argues that women studies scholars rejection of the word *funu*, female subject in Maoist state discourse, and use of *nuxing* and *nuren* for women instead, signifies a clear rejection of the state-defined *funu* to act as a hegemonic signifier (Barlow, 1994:339-359).

The women studies programmes have also provided a new means for academic and professional women to network and for Chinese and foreign women to come together at conferences to discuss practical and theoretical issues concerning women. Examples include a conference on Marriage and the Family in the Spring of 1995, three annual international conferences at Peking University in the early 1990s, and an International Symposium on Chinese Women and Feminist Thought in June of 1995. Equally significant is the manner in which a number of women's studies programmes have translated their work into activism outside of the academic realm. The women studies centre I will be describing shortly offers an excellent example of this.

Women activist scholars like Li Xiaojiang are questioning both state and male intellectual discourses on development processes. They are also creating new avenues for women centred social action that have no precedence in Chinese history. Nonetheless, the work of a number of these activists is constrained on several fronts. First, to a certain degree, their work does not challenge the modernizing paradigm. According to Tao Jie, a Chinese women's studies scholar:

> the main task of women's studies should be closely linked with issues confronting Chinese women today. Women's studies should be able to find ways to solve problems and to help women raise their own awareness and improve their self-image so as to enable them to make greater contributions to the transformation of society (Tao, 1996:359).

While consciousness raising provides important psychological support to women, however, it does little to address the systemic societal obstacles that women are confronting. Second, a number of women's studies scholars have also emphasized the differences between women and men, at times
to the point of recognizing different spheres for the sexes (Li, 1994:141). To this end, scholar-activists have rejected both the lables *fumu* and feminist. Indeed, I have specifically called the women in this study, “scholar-activists,” as so many of these women do not identify what they believe Western feminism to be (advocacy of sameness with men). Finally, the work of several scholar-activists is limited by the continuation of a belief in the role of intellectuals as leaders. According to Li Xiaojiang:

> China’s women intellectuals are among the most advanced in society and ought, with perfect self-assurance and courage, to call upon the whole of the country’s womanhood to rally together. Such intellectuals can now act as the core force in the movement for women’s liberation (Li, 1995:108).

As of the mid-1990s, in addition to women’s professional organizations and women’s studies programmes, several different types of women’s organizations exist in Beijing. I will be examining a range of groups presently active: two research and counseling organizations; a women’s studies centre, two women’s magazines; a young women’s group; and a women activist’s network. In this section I will be attempting to assess where the organizations fit in terms of White, Howell and Shang’s framework of social, interstitial and suppressed organizations. In particular, I will analyze how the issues of autonomy, *guanxi*, and class impacts upon the work of the women’s organizations in comparison with the work of the critical intellectuals of the 1980s.

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13 It is important to note that while Chinese women intellectuals emphasize difference as a part of their women-centred politics, feminists in the West are divided on the issue. Indeed, the question of whether women are the same as, or different from men, and the political ramifications of advocating one approach or the other, is one of the most contentious issues in Western feminism.

14 I am the Canadian co-founder of this organization. Although my work with the organization was primarily based out of Vancouver, I did participate in a number of the Beijing chapter’s activities over the six months prior to the 1995 NGO Forum on Women.
Origins and Objectives

All seven organizations comprising this study were founded by individuals hoping to create change for themselves and other Chinese women. Regardless of the sector of women the organization is trying to assist or the means by which the organization has adopted to achieve its goal, each organization was inspired by the vision of women attempting to offer increased support to others in times of drastic transition. Also consistent across the organizations is the form their primary objectives have taken. With the exception of one organization, which makes informal recommendations to the All China Women’s Federation, the organizations all offer service and support to their female constituents without attempting any kind of political advocacy.

In order to differentiate between the types of support the organizations are providing to women I have divided them into three categories: research and service, service, and publications.

Three of the organizations in this study include a strong research component as a part of their work. Investigating the work and home conditions of women provides insight into and information about the kinds of services the activists may offer. Furthermore, the activists often publish their research results in order to bring women’s issues before the wider academic community. Studies undertaken by these three organizations range from small local studies to national surveys. All three of these organizations, nonetheless, are committed to ensuring their practical work assumes a place of equal importance in relation to their academic research. One organization, for example, has linked with a small rural community in order to provide the women residents with new skills and increased literacy. The two other organizations place a strong emphasis on counseling, either by phone or in-person. Women can thus obtain information and support on issues ranging from family difficulties and sexual harassment to health and legal matters. In addition, these two organizations hold both
short-term and ongoing outreach projects. One, for example, offers sex education courses to teenagers; the other conducted training courses for female cadres in the early 90s, is presently holding social events for singles, and is planning on offering support services to single mothers in the future.

The remaining four organizations in this study do not undertake research, but rather focus on either providing a service or publishing a magazine. One group works with young women, providing information about women's issues and, in 1995, provided information about the Fourth World Conference on Women to university students. The other was originally established as a network for activists working around women's issues that has set the improvement of women's health as its top priority. The last two organizations publish women's magazines with a particular goal in mind. One magazine targets rural women with the hope of alleviating female illiteracy and contributing to women's skill building in the countryside; the other seeks to bring women's issues, national and foreign, to Chinese women's attention.

Like the critical intellectuals of the 1980s, the Beijing scholar-activists focus on research as an important part of their efforts. Unlike the critical intellectuals, nonetheless, the women do not hold important ties with prominent leaders. Moreover, their activist efforts focus on service rather than political advocacy. Finally, the work of the scholar-activists reaches a wider range of people, including teenagers and rural women, than the work of the critical intellectuals in the 1980s.

**Internal Structure**

Like the critical intellectuals, all of the founders of the seven organizations are highly educated, urban dwelling women. They are journalists and editors, university professors and students, and even All China Women's Federation cadres. The membership of the organizations
similarly reflects the founder's status. In the largest organization of the seven, a research-service, all of the members are professional women: doctors, lawyers, sociologists, professors, students.

With the exception of the two magazines, where membership is composed of paid staff only, volunteerism plays a significant role in all of the organizations. The largest research-service organization is entirely volunteer based as are the two service-only organizations. In the remaining two organizations the line between volunteer and staff is less distinct. One of the research-service organizations is a women's studies centre located at a university. The women active in the centre all have separate full-time academic posts which supply them with a salary, housing, and benefits. As one member pointed out to me, this security provides the means to research women's issues and teach women's studies, for which they are not paid or recognized. The other research-service organization was founded by a woman employed by a research institute. Though most of her energy and time is devoted to her women's organization, she continues to receive housing, benefits, and pay from her unit. In addition, several former volunteers now work as paid staff, though without benefits and housing. Funding for staff comes from fund-raising efforts, and not the founder's unit.

Organizational size and structure is remarkably similar across the groups. With the exception of one of the research-service organizations, which holds a membership above 100, all of the other organizations have memberships between 10 and 15 women. Almost all are also organized hierarchically with the founders serving as the head of the organization. The two exceptions are the service-only based organizations, which are less formally structured than the others. In the case of the activist network, the group originally met informally and gradually evolved to sponsor a health project which one woman has spearheaded. In the case of the youth group, the activists have chosen to organize along collective principles.

For most of the organizations of this study, there is a fairly clear separation between the
organizational membership and the organization's constituents. The two exceptions are the magazine that focuses on rural women, and the young women's organization. In the case of the magazine, one of the reporters on staff is a rural woman. In addition, readers are encouraged to contribute their own stories about their lives and write letters to which the staff can then respond. Likewise, the young women's organization also encourages their newsletter readership to submit stories and articles. The majority of the young women's group membership were also past participants in the organization's workshops. The exchange between roles of constituent and member is thus quite high.

I would argue that while conceptions surrounding the role of intellectuals are being challenged in several of the Beijing organizations, certainly to a far greater extent than among the critical intellectuals in the 1980s, not all are questioning the class-limitations of their work.

**Funding**

Fund-raising and registration have proved two of the greatest challenges facing new women's organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For the seven organizations in this study, these challenges have been met in varying ways. Regardless of the organization, however, each founder and numerous members have had to struggle against great odds to ensure their organizations' survival.

Funding for the seven organizations has come from three main sources: personal donations, international contributions, and support from the founder's unit. In five out of the seven organizations, large personal donations from the founder and members themselves proved one of the primary sources of funding during the earliest period of the organizations. One founder, for example, raised 20,000 renminbi by soliciting support from friends and contributing her own money in an effort to meet the start-up costs of her organization. Often, however, personal donations were
not sufficient to create a normalized working environment. In the organization just mentioned, for example, the first office was a six metre square room without heat or air conditioning that flooded every Spring. Other founders also made great sacrifices as they tried to launch their organizations and special projects. One activist installed two phone lines in her home so she could more effectively offer counseling to callers. Another moved her daughter with her into her tiny office during her magazine's initial production period in order to avoid a long commute, and thus save time.

During the early 1990s, international support also became available. The Ford Foundation and the Global Fund for Women, among other international associations, have been very active for the past three years in supporting the work of a number of Beijing women's organizations, including the ones discussed in this study. For two of these organizations, these international bodies have provided their primary sources of funding. For the rest, the international contributors have provided an important complement to personal donations and/or support from the founder's unit.

Unlike some of the dissident organizations, none of the seven organizations have received financial contributions from businesses or entrepreneurs. Several, however, have received key support from their danweis, or units, which are a part of the state bureaucracy. The women's studies centre was established within a university, for example. In this case the university supplies an office as well as serves as the group's site of registration, but it provides no funding. One of the founders of another research and service organization was able to establish her organization's offices on the bottom floor of her apartment building which is owned by her unit. This organization is not, however, registered with the founder's unit. The two magazines have received limited financial contributions from their units to establish their periodicals, in addition to office-space and registration. Interestingly, the sponsor of the two founder's units (both of which are also national women's periodicals) is none other than the All China Women's Federation. It is important to note
that while the establishment intellectuals were working within state bureaucracies in the 1980s, they did not develop any links with any of the mass organizations in this way.

**Registration**

With respect to the organizations in this study, three groups registered with the founder's unit, three with separate organizations, and one not at all. The last group did not register their organization out of fear of rejection. These organizations thus cross the spectrum of incorporated, interstitial and the suppressed sector. However, amongst the registered organizations there exists consensus that their "mother-in-laws" in no way interfere with the workings of their groups. The magazines thus retain editorial control of the content, and the founders and membership alone make all decisions regarding their organizations. But how much freedom do the activists really have? A number of activists are careful to limit their own work within acceptable state boundaries and many activists, as shall be demonstrated, have sought to create ties with state bodies both for legitimacy and protection.

**Guanxixue: Official Connections and Personal Ties**

In order to meet their objectives the organizations in this study have developed an intricate network of relationships with both other women's activists and organizations as well as with state bodies and actors. To begin with, strong ties exist between all seven of the organizations of this study, as well as with other new Beijing women's organizations. A formalized example of these ties exist in the activist network in which four out of the six founders have been active members. Much of the cooperation between groups, however, is not formalized, but rather is based on existing friendships and mutual assistance. Two organization's founders have worked closely for a number
of years sharing strategies and ideas. In 1996, one of the organizations took over some of the other's counseling responsibilities in order to free the other to expand its work with teenagers. During its first year the young women's group volunteered two of its members to work with one of the counseling organizations in order to build more skills to bring back to their group. Similarly, when the young women's group wanted to start publishing a newsletter for young women they approached one of the magazines. The founder subsequently agreed to mentor the young women's group and help facilitate the publication and distribution process. In another example of cooperation, one of the magazine's founders linked one of the research and service organizations with the village in which they have ended up carrying out their literacy and skill-building training.

In addition to ties between the women's organizations, multiple official and non-official connections exist between the women's organizations and state bodies. A number of the organization's founders have purposefully sought to develop these connections with state bodies. To this end, one activist makes sure that she participates in a number of committees related to the work her organization is carrying out. By sitting on a woman's committee of the Labour Union, for example, she is better able to develop connections and gain legitimacy for her work.

Other groups sought to build ties with the All China Women's Federation early in their work. After registering with an outside unit, one organization applied to, and was approved for, membership in the Secretariat of the All China Women's Federation. On the day of this same organization's inauguration, All China Women's Federation officials attended the opening as well as expressed congratulations through letter. One of the officials expressed her hopes that the organization would not only become an active theoretical resource, but also a source of knowledge and information for the ACWF. The organization's founder also has the ear of Huang Qizao, vice-chairperson of the China Organizing Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women.
Another organization, the only organization of the study that is not registered, also ensured an All China Women's Federation presence at its first public event. The cadre who came and spoke to the group was so impressed with the event that she suggested it should be televised on the Central China Television Station. The fact that the cadre was so enthusiastic suggested to the organization's founder that her organization could continue to operate safe from political repercussion despite its unregistered status. The same cadre also put the group in touch with an official body preparing for the 1995 Forum on Women. This connection enabled the group to present a workshop at the Forum and thus attend the international gathering, an opportunity they would not have had otherwise.

The Federation at local levels has also proved a useful resource to two other organizations. One uses local Women's Federations as a distribution point for its publications to rural women and thus avoids hefty postal costs. The other relies on a local women's federation cadre to serve as its go-between with the village in which it is presently working. As there are no phone lines the ACWF cadre finds someone to send messages to the village. She has also proved helpful when the organization is working in the village. As one member commented, "She (the Women's Federation cadre) is a bridge between us and the village."

Relationships, formal and informal, between women's organizations and state actors is not simply an "us-them" dichotomy, but often an "us-us" scenario as well. The two founders of the publications, for example, are both still employed by the All China Women's Federation and thus remain a part of the system. Likewise, one of primary founders of one of the seven organizations is also a cadre in the All China Women's Federation. An excellent illustration of the multiple ties that currently shape the women's community in Beijing can be seen in the preparations for a conference that took place in the Spring of 1995. One of the organization's founders initiated the event, but when she recognized that her organization did not have the resources to carry out the
conference alone, she asked another of the organizations in this study as well as the Marriage and Family Academy of the All China Women's Federation to help organize the event. According to one activist, the involvement of the All China Women's Federation brought a number of benefits. The ACWF, for example, was able to introduce good *guanxi* (connections) and, because it has researched women's issues for such a long time, it helped to make the organizational process more *shunli* (smooth). Moreover, having ACWF's name and reputation behind the Conference was helpful as well. The main connection at the Marriage and Family Academy of the All China Women's Federation is a former school mate and close friend of both founders of the two women's organizations involved.

An analysis of the seven Beijing women's organizations reveals that *guanxi* practices are just as important to the work of scholar-activists as they were to the critical intellectuals in the 1980s. Although incorporating the All China Women's Federation, the scholar-activist's *guanxi* ties have not extended beyond the women's activities to influence the party leadership, nor brought about new funding resources from the business community. The organizations, nonetheless, are more pluralist than the activities of the critical intellectuals in terms of their constituency. Finally, the women's organizations experience in matters of autonomy/assistance point to different conclusions as well.

There is no doubt that the ability to act autonomously is extremely important to the activists in this study. Many take extreme pride in the fact that their work has sprung into being from personal vision and initiative. They are also clear that no outside body or person interferes with the content and implementation of their work. When the state has kept a firm grip on the realm of women's issues for so long, it is extremely empowering, particularly for the elder generation, to assume a new responsibility for one's own well-being and to contribute to the well-being of other women. In this sense, autonomy is a critical measure of the health of the dynamic between the state
and women's organizations. Nevertheless, the vibrancy of impulses for autonomy at present remain critically vulnerable to the influence of the state. The fact that strict registration regulations sit on the books, that women's organizations do not have formal channels to provide input to the state, and that the threat of being shut down by the state always remains a possibility, prompts the activists to strategically self-regulate their work and thus limits their autonomy. Almost all of the activists I interviewed agreed that without government 'help' it is nearly impossible to run an organization. As one woman said, "There are no NGOs in China because if the government tells you not to do something, you can't." Another woman reflected that:

The primary difference between Chinese NGOs and foreign NGOs is that there are so many restrictions placed upon Chinese NGOs. There is very little self-sufficiency in China and much more freedom in the West.

Perhaps most revealing on the subject of organizational autonomy in China is the commentary of one All China Women's Federation cadre-activist:

All of the Chinese women's NGOs have a good relationship with the government - no one dares criticize it. Not even Li Xiaojiang. This is not a "check and balance" system. The reality is, women's organizations can be shut down any time and academic research and opinions may be made political. When the government does not pay attention to academic opinion then there is no problem. If, however, the government sees academic opinion as significant then the government may do something. Society and government must have the same voice. Although NGOs want their own voice, the government will not permit this.

The same activist also summed up the potential for women's organizations to influence government policy. Although there is more state openness to the recommendations of the All China Women's Federation and other women's organizations, this openness is contingent upon "the rate of social development." If problems had occurred at the NGO Forum on Women, therefore, the government could have easily refused future input from women's organizations or simply shut them down.

However, autonomy is not the only lens through which to analyze the state and women's organizations: equally important is examining the strength of the connections creatively forged
between the two. Whereas some connections have been forged out of fear and a desire for protection, others have arisen on the basis of friendship and trust, common goals, and a pooling of resources and ideas. More often than not, connections emerge as a complicated mixture of both.

First, the state is providing many of the women's organizations with key support. For some organizations, support comes in the form of funding and staff, for others office space, free postal service, and a salary. The activists benefitting from these state contributions are clear they want this support to continue. Second, an alternative women's community has resulted from the numerous cross-connections forged between the state and women's organizations. This community, instead of separating women and men into realms of private and public, encourages a linking of women in both realms. Through national hotlines and magazine distribution in remote rural areas, through informal workshops and literacy training, women are reaching across realms of public and private to assist one another. Some women are active in both realms, that is, employed by the All China Women's Federation and volunteering in their own women's organization. In other words, this new community breaks down the gendered dichotomy that traditional understandings of civil society set up.

When thinking about women, the state, and civil society it is necessary to abandon a framework of analysis that only takes the criteria of autonomy into account. While autonomy is critical, and indeed many activists desire greater freedom to direct their work, it does not necessarily entail a complete separation of women's organizations from the state. Indeed, mutual cooperation can be very beneficial. Just as many activists have welcomed support from the All China Women's Federation, so has the Federation sought assistance from activists. In the following I will examine state and activist preparations for the 1995 NGO Forum on Women in order to show ways in which the Federation has benefitted from the skills and knowledge of activists as well as to further illustrate
both the potential for empowerment and the potential for danger in the Beijing women-focused activist and state community.

**The 1995 NGO Forum on Women**

The 1995 Conference and NGO Forum on Women was significant for Beijing women activists for several reasons. Over the three years preceding the Forum, a number of women involved in women's organizations received funding (through the Ford Foundation, CIDA, etc.) to attend international preparatory conferences. The experiences these women had overseas, as well as in China, preparing for the Forum with foreign women provided an atmosphere of exchange for Chinese women that was unprecedented. In addition, a number of Chinese women founded women's organizations, including two organizations described in this study, as well as organized conferences and workshops (such as the *Symposium on Chinese Women and Feminism*) in anticipation of the event. This helped to focus a great deal more attention on women's issues and to further the discussion in both academia and the media. Finally, preparing for this international event, especially the NGO Forum on Women, pushed women's organizations, the All China Women's Federation, and the state to try to come to terms with the concept, "NGO." Comments by the women activists have revealed the manner in which they are re–thinking their relationship to the state. I would argue that if the NGO Forum on Women had not taken place in China, this re–thinking might not have occurred as rapidly as it has. Neither might the state have re–thought its relationship to women's organizations.

China was accepted to host the 1995 Conference and NGO Forum on Women in 1992. One All China Women's Federation Cadre told me that prior to this time she had never heard of the word, "NGO." Although a few people in the late 1980's had initiated activities in China and had contact
with groups abroad (such as Li Xiaojiang), no one identified themselves as a member of a NGO. There was no NGO consciousness. In the past, if one was to describe a social group, one would call it a *minjian zuzhi* (people's organization), a *shehui tuanti* (social organization) or a *qunzhong tuanti* (mass organization) according to state regulations that I have described previously. Similarly, when China had sent delegations abroad to participate in previous Conferences on Women, for the most part there was no Chinese involvement in the NGO Forum on Women. This was the case at the 1975 meeting in Mexico and the 1980 meeting at Copenhagen. According to one woman professor who had researched past Chinese involvement at U.N. Conferences on Women, the first time there was any awareness of a NGO Forum was in Nairobi in 1985. Upon discovering there were two meetings when they arrived, the official delegates scrambled to organize two workshops at the last minute.

According to several Chinese women activists, when the All China Women's Federation first began preparing as the official host for the 1995 NGO Forum on Women, ACWF leaders did not fully understand international NGO protocol. For example, at the first preparatory conference of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Wang Shuxian, head of the governmental delegation, came over to the NGO meeting to give a speech to welcome foreign women's NGO's to Beijing in 1995. Wang Shuxian then promptly left, not staying for discussion afterwards. Although the All China Women's Federation was hosting the NGO Forum on Women, ACWF representatives were only attending governmental meetings.

At the Asia Pacific Regional preparatory conference, however, held several months later in Manila, foreign NGO representatives did not let the All China Women's Federation off so easily. At the opening plenary session of the NGO meeting Huang Qizao began to give a speech extolling the progress of Chinese women. She was catcalled off the stage within three minutes. Another Chinese governmental delegate, a man, was also shouted off the stage during the same meeting.
Although All China Women's Federation representatives were just beginning to understand that greater participation was required in the NGO Forum meetings, Chinese women's activists were already present and involved. A small group of women activists had been in attendance at the Vienna meetings, and twenty were present in Manila. In fact, because there were only twenty All China Women's Federation representatives at the Manila NGO meeting, the ACWF and non-ACWF numbers were equal in number. According to one woman present in Manila, this was a sensitive period for both the All China Women's Federation and the women activists. The All China Women's Federation felt challenged by non-ACWF people who were able to get resources to work on women's issues, and the women's activists were not sure how to approach the ACWF representatives. "Neither side was sophisticated in cooperating with the other." In the end, however, Huang Qizao welcomed activist participation in the meetings. It had become quickly clear to the Forum organizers that the meaning of NGO was quite different from what they had originally conceived. They also realized that they were regarded by foreign women as a GO (governmental organization), and that they could not organize effectively without the assistance of women activists. Indeed, from then on ACWF representatives were not only highly visible at the NGO preparatory conferences but also made sure that Chinese women's activists were with them. This could be seen one year later at the African preparatory conference when the ACWF gave an update on preparations for the Forum. During the ACWF speech, the Chinese women's activists stood with the ACWF representatives on stage – hand-in-hand.

Whereas a number of women activists' and ACWF cadres' understanding of the concept "NGO" had evolved over the two years of preparation, the state's had not. At the end of April, 1995 the Chinese government suddenly made the decision to move the NGO Forum on Women to Huairou, a county 50 km outside of Beijing. It is widely believed that the decision was made shortly
after Li Peng's trip to Copenhagen where he not only witnessed thousands of women demonstrating but also saw his own face splashed on the front pages of the NGO newsletter with a nasty epitaph. Many Chinese women's activists and ACWF representatives were stunned by the announcement. As one activist commented:

Everything was going very well until the site was changed. After the site was changed it was a big shock and many women had to stop, pause, and rethink their vision of the Chinese women's movement. Because before the site was changed, everything was going very smoothly and things were developing optimistically. But then suddenly, there was the break... I think (actually) it's not all that bad, it makes people more mature and it made the women activists more strategic and more careful in planning their own activities. I think it's a good caution... before things become too offensive in the government's perspective. It's the yellow light...not the red light.

In addition to attending preparatory conferences, many of the activists I interviewed were either organizing a workshop for the NGO Forum or were participating in one. In order to attend the Forum all applications had to go through the China Organizing Committee (C.O.C.) at the All China Women's Federation. Five thousand Chinese delegates participated in the Forum and there were a total of 44 Chinese workshops. Although several women I knew were able to apply directly to the C.O.C. or to apply indirectly through a "mother-in-law" organization, many applications were dependent upon the individual's relationship with the provincial All China Women's Federation. I was also told that a number of governmental organizations formed "NGOs" in order to meet the criteria of the C.O.C. to host a workshop.

It is difficult to determine what kind of control was placed on the organization and content of the workshops. Two of the women I interviewed who were putting together their own workshops told me that they had complete say over these matters. The only requirement was to submit a list of the people presenting in the workshop. But in fact, freedom to organize the workshop was significantly related to the status of the workshop organizer and the sensitivity of the material
One women's organization, for example, petitioned Huang Qizao directly to hold a workshop. The organization received approval without problem and although a number of very sensitive issues were broached, such as prostitution and domestic violence, and quite a heated discussion ensued during the trial run of the workshop, the ACWF representative present was very pleased with what she saw. Most workshops, however, were far more strictly controlled. The majority were initiated by government-organized NGOs who oversaw much of the development of workshop content. Several women told me of the long lectures they were given on how they should and should not interact with foreigners, and had to re-write their speeches several times to fit the organizer's criteria.

That the state was once again in charge of organizational activity is revealed through an examination of preparations for the 1995 NGO Forum. However, restricted autonomy proved only one layer of the dynamic at play. The fact that the All China Women's Federation made use of several of the activists' expertise in coping with foreigners and international events demonstrates further evidence of interdependence and mutual benefit. Ironically, one of the consultants called in by the All China Women's Federation to help prepare Tibetan women for the NGO Forum was a woman activist.

Conclusion

The work of women scholar activists over the past decade has been unprecedented in China. Women theorists are not only questioning state and male intellectual frameworks of debate, but researching, debating and offering solutions to numerous problems afflicting women under reform. Moreover, the activists are using guanxixue amongst themselves and with state actors to achieve
their goals. There are several points worth mentioning here. First, while the work of scholar activists is fueled partially by a desire to assert autonomy vis-a-vis the state, a number also recognize the importance of close connections with state actors. The importance is located not just in the value of the guanxi relationships, as in the case of the critical intellectuals, but in the importance of state support for women’s issues. Here, it is interesting to note that unlike the critical intellectuals, the work of the scholar-activists ranges all four types of social organization, including involvement in a mass organization. While, the ACWF is flawed and badly in need of further reform, the activists in the study confirm its importance to their work and women’s issues in general. The issue of autonomy for many of these activists, then, involves a much more complicated and nuanced debate. On the other hand, because women’s issues are not considered, “political” by the state, they have been accorded somewhat more freedom than other issue oriented organizations in the post-Tiananmen era. It is this “freedom”, however, that keeps them from addressing a wider range of issues.

Indeed, I would argue that the revolutionary work of these activists is compromised on four fronts. First, women theorists have challenged state and critical intellectual discourse primarily through asserting women’s difference. While this has allowed them to subvert pre-Reform conceptions of sexual equality based on a male model, it still leaves them in a vulnerable position which essentializes the natures of both women and men. Second, the practice of guanxixue has been confined largely to circles of women. Although this has been empowering in terms of forging a sense of identity, it also still leaves them primarily on the periphery of the male centred networks. The All China Women’s Federation is not as powerful a political leverage, for example, as the think tanks in the 1980s. Third, and related, the activists operate primarily on a reactive, rather than on an advocacy basis. With the exception of one of the research and service organizations which passes
on recommendations through the All China Women’s Federation, none are involved in any kind of advocacy work. Therefore, while I would argue that their work is political and politicizing, it has not questioned the overall reform agenda of the present leadership. Finally, some of the women activists assert that it is intellectual women who must lead the way to an era of women’s “self-consciousness.” Like the critical intellectuals of the 1980s, not all women scholar-activists have entirely abandoned certain assumptions around the role of intellectual leadership in social and political transition.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The Chinese intellectual publics that have emerged in the earlier part of this century, and in particular during the 1980s and 1990s, provide us with a greater understanding of the interplay between gender and political transition. On the one hand, the state is not gender neutral in initiating change. To this end, growing economic hardship, the one-child policy and changes in the institutionalization of politics have had a deleterious impact upon many women. These gendered changes mirror earlier initiatives, whereby women were either used as signs of social superiority (as in the case of the late Qing) or to meet male-privileged economic goals (as in reversals in work policies toward women in the 1950s). On the other hand, structural and attitudinal obstacles have prevented women from fully participating in the new public of the critical intellectuals. These include the economic impact of reform as well as the resurgence of clientalistic, or guanxi, ties. In addition, there has also been a re-emergence of misogynistic attitudes on the part of some critical male intellectuals and the advocacy of “women’s difference” by some women intellectuals as well. These findings correspond with some of the experiences of countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as they have abandoned socialism and embraced the economics and politics of a liberal democracy to varying degrees.

At the same time, economic and political transition have taken a much longer route in China than in most places in Eastern Europe or Latin America. In fact, it was just about ten years after the economic reforms were initiated that the Chinese women’s studies movement began to get off the ground. The greater length of the economic transition has provided women with more time to respond to the changes and organize. Moreover, because this movement has largely been viewed
as non-political by the Chinese leadership, it also has been able to grow during the late 1980s and early 1990s, at the same time that much of the work of the critical intellectuals has been suppressed. Both of these developments confirm Georgina Waylen’s findings on Eastern Europe and Latin America.

If we know how women are dis-empowered in the process of political transition, how is that they can become empowered to become partners in the process? I believe we must return to our conceptual basis to answer this question. If we are to posit that civil society is predicated upon societal autonomy from the state during a time of political transition, it is fairly sure that most women will not benefit from that autonomy in the same way as men. In the case of the critical intellectual’s public, women’s voices and concerns were almost totally absent from the debate. Furthermore, in the case of the work of the scholar-activists, although they sought a measure of autonomy from the state, they still endorsed the value of state involvement in women’s issues. Autonomy, I would therefore argue, cannot be the defining criterion of what constitutes civil society. In the words of Lu Tonglin, “women’s fate indicates that a straightforward oppositional politics is inherently contradictory to democracy because it virtually reduces diversified interest groups to a single position by means of a simplified representation.”(Lu, 1995:187)

It is my belief that when thinking about the political implications of civil society, we must emphasize its “civic” aspects, whether these activities are fully autonomous from or somewhat supported by the state. If, for instance, a state institution is perceived as a flawed but valuable asset in the goal to uphold women’s interests, and activists are working with that institution, their work should be regarded as contributing to the formation of civil society. On the other hand, secret organizations like the Triads, should be viewed as in contradiction to, rather than supporting, the foundation of civil society. This is not to say that autonomy doesn’t count, but that we just can’t let
Given this re-working of the term, it becomes apparent that the new publics of the critical intellectuals and the women scholar-activists are simultaneously contributing to and potentially obstructing the development of a political civil society in China. First, their contribution is apparent in terms of the pluralization of ideas that both publics have generated. Second, both publics have sought to establish autonomous institutional structures as well as have cooperated effectively with state actors, in order to create better socio-economic and/or political conditions. These efforts, nonetheless, have been compromised in their ability to contribute to civil society. In the case of the critical intellectuals, the view of intellectuals as mediators of the societal agenda effectively blocks the participation of other groups, including workers and peasants, and women of all classes from adding alternative views to the discourse. Moreover, their political theories, like many Western observers, do not place much (if any) emphasis on social and economic rights. Indeed, with the advocacy of increased state-society separation, women may be increasingly expected to take on welfare activities formerly attended to by the state. This, combined with a resurgence in Confucian morality, as suggested by Su Xiaokang, may also work against the political empowerment of women.

In contrast, it is interesting to note that when the Beijing Workers Autonomous Movement early in the Spring of 1989 made a number of demands on the Chinese government, they included an end to discrimination against women in hiring and firing (Walder, 1996:67).

Many of the women I spoke to believe China is heading towards some form of political liberalization and feel that their work is contributing to that end. As one woman said; "A NGO is a people's activity and in the long run will transform China into a democracy." Another in her commentary on rights and law is looking beyond the present to a time when "freedom, democracy, and mass participation" are guaranteed. Indeed, I would argue, the work of the women scholar-
activists has been both political and politicising. While the women scholar-activists are working with workers and peasants, however, some still uphold the view that women intellectuals should lead the women’s movement in China. Given these characteristics, therefore, I would argue that the new publics are emulating patterns of authoritarianism rather than offering a new vision of state-societal relations. An interesting coincidence, I believe, sums the picture up. Two women, one of the critical elite and one young scholar-activist, reflect on the nature of politics in China. On the one hand, Ge Yang notes, “I am old myself but I am against the politics of old men.” (Afkhami, 1994:73) The young activist, on the other hand sees continuity in the pattern of oppression. Of the male student leaders jockeying for power in 1989 she says, “They were just the same as the old leaders sitting in the Great Hall of the People.”

Gordon White, Jude Howell and Shang Xiaoyuan have suggested that peaceful political transition in China - involving liberalization or democratization - can most effectively be achieved through a process of political bargaining and accommodation between key elites in the state and civil society (White, et al, 1996:217). These elites would include state actors in the Party, state bureaucracy and military, the critical intellectuals, the emergent business sector, the professional strata and trade unions (White, et al, 1996:218). Given the elitist constraints of the critical intellectuals, however, it is difficult to see a substantive democratization effort following from their lead, should the opportunity arise. While their perspective of democracy may shift to incorporate other social actors, critical intellectuals will more than likely not seek ways to support women’s issues in the context of democratization. Unless, of course, the women scholar-activists are able to shift aspects of their work to include active political advocacy and networking. To this end, the All China Women’s Federation would have to become a stronger political body within the state structure; more of an advocate than a transmission belt. Secondly, the women’s studies programs and organizations would
have to expand their *guanxixue* into the networks of the critical intellectuals and other social groups; including further expansion into the world of business, workers, and rural dwellers as well. Third, and related, they would have to develop an agenda that would address the difficulties women face in the context of political transition and relate it to both civil society and state sectors. Whether these efforts would be welcomed, however, is another matter altogether. More critically, a move in the direction of political advocacy could threaten the existence of the women’s movement itself. In April of 1996 a Shanghai refuge for battered women was forced to close after only one month of operation due to, “bureaucratic red tape.” Officials said that because the refuge was the first of its kind and no precedent existed they could not allow it to open (Reuters, 1996).

It has been two years since the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing and eight years since the June Fourth massacre and subsequent crack-down. While White, Howell and Shang speculate that political change in China will more than likely occur as a slow-moving bargaining process among key elite actors, they also note that future remains very uncertain (White et al., 1996:217-218). What I wish to emphasize, nonetheless, is that whether political change now moves quickly or slowly, if women are not at the table (both from the rural and urban, educated and illiterate and from the civil society and state sectors) their voices will not be heard. And if women’s voices are not heard, there will be little real democracy in China’s immediate future.
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