

© 2015

Bo Jia

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

GENDER, WOMEN'S LIBERATION, AND THE NATION-STATE:

A STUDY OF THE CHINESE OPERA *THE WHITE-HAIRED GIRL*

By

BO JIA

A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts

Graduate Program in Women's and Gender Studies

Written under the direction of

Julie Rajan

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Gender, Women's Liberation, and the Nation-State:

A Study of the Chinese Opera *The White-Haired Girl*

by BO JIA

Thesis Director: Julie Rajan

"Every time during the show, all seats were filled, both old and young people were much interested in watching it. On the roof and wall, there were people everywhere. The tragic story and stirring music excited everyone there: some cried, other moaned. Audiences were aflame with fury." This is the scene describing to what extent the White-haired Girl was made popular in China by a famous Chinese writer, Ding Ling.¹ *The White-haired Girl* is one of the Chinese operas that touched the most people with the greatest influence in the latter half of 20th century. First produced in the 1940s, it was based on a folktale and achieved great success in Yan'an in 1940s. Because of its popularity and its particular political and cultural meaning, this story was further adapted to an opera in the 1940s and in

¹ Dingling, "Yan'an Literature", Hunan Literature & Art Press, 1987.7.Print

the 1950s, to a ballet in the 1960s and it was also adapted to the model ballet *The White-haired Girl* in 1972 during the Cultural Revolution. By the late 1970s, tens of millions of people in China had memorized every word of the opera. It is one of the most significant cultural texts in 20th century history. This paper considers the development history and various versions of *The White-Haired Girl* as study objects, analyzing the gender construction and the development of women's liberation movement in the revising process of the story. Also this paper focuses on understanding women's policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and their functions during the transformation of *The White-haired Girl*, especially from the late 19th century to the mid-1970s when the Cultural Revolution ended.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|---------------|
| <i>Abstract</i> | ii |
| Introduction | 01 |
| 1. Research Objects and Research Significance | |
| 2. Literature Review | |
| 3. The Emancipation of Chinese Women as Rooted in National Fate | |
| 4. The Emergence and Development of the Chinese Women's Liberation Movement | |
| 5. The Symbolic Female Body | |
| 6. Overview of Each Chapter | |
| Chapter 1: The Historical Evolution of the Folklore of <i>The White-Haired Girl</i> and Its Gender and Cultural Connotations | 20 |
| 1. A Brief History of the Evolution of <i>The White-Haired Girl</i> | |
| 2. From Haired-Maiden to White-Haired Girl | |
| 3. Confucianism and the Construction of Gender | |
| Chapter 2: The Opera <i>The White-Haired Girl</i> and the May Fourth Movement | 33 |
| 1. The Yangko Movement and the New Opera | |
| 2. The Confirmation of the Genre | |
| 3. The Determination of the New Opera of <i>The White-Haired Girl</i> and the Passing of the Spirit of the May Fourth Movement | |

4. The Women's Liberation Movement from Late Qing Dynasty to the 1920s
5. The Appropriation of the Yan'an Version and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Version of the Opera *The White-Haired Girl*

Chapter 3: The Opera *The White-Haired Girl* in the Late 1940s and 1950s **57**

1. The Appropriation of the Opera *The White-Haired Girl* and Communism
2. The Women's Liberation Movement before 1949 Under the Impetus of Class Revolution
3. Conflicts and Concessions of War, Women, Gender Liberation, and Class Liberation
4. Gender Construction and Gender Roles of Women in Times of War

Chapter 4: The Ballet *The White-haired Girl* in the 1960s and 1970s **83**

1. The Rise of Ballet and *The White-Haired Girl*
2. Women's Gender Construction and the Liberation Movement from the Establishment of New China (1949) to the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)
3. The Ballet *The White-Haired Girl* and the Great Cultural Revolution

Conclusion **102**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **107**

Introduction

1. Research Objects and Research Significance

Expounding the gender-construction history of Chinese women and the history of the Chinese women's liberation movement is undoubtedly a huge project, so I cannot and will not elaborate the gender-construction history of Chinese women in detail. Instead, This paper discusses the history of Chinese women's gender construction and liberation movement through the evolution of the opera *The White-Haired Girl* and different versions of *White-Haired Girl*, which are the objects of study in this paper, and I will especially focus on the period of history from the end of the 19th century to the mid-1970s, when the Cultural Revolution ended.

The development history of opera *The White Haired Girl* is chosen as research object for the following reasons. First, as to story origin, the story about the haired-maiden has a long history of more than two thousand years in China. From the *Lieh hsien chuan* (*Biographies of Immortals*), written by Liu Xiang in Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) which was first recorded the story about the haired-maiden to the news about the wild woman heard from time to time from all parts of China, it can be seen that people sincerely believe in the story of haired maiden with yellow, green, purple or white hairs. The story of the haired maiden has gone through the whole history of Chinese nation. The stories imply people's thinking about gender conception of female and the considerations of life value. The implied meaning is exactly the internal motivation for people to spread

the stories in different spaces and times. To some extent, the story can be considered as a window to understand the fate of Chinese women.

Second, the development of the story shows the frictions and integration of western culture, the culture in May Fourth Movement period (1919-1927), traditional culture and folk culture. In the period of Republic of China (1919-1949), the story was affected greatly by the western culture. In 1945, the story was adapted into an opera. The scholars deeply affected by western cultural values created the “new opera”, and combined the traditional story of white haired girl with the western opera, changing the traditional version’s characteristic of focusing on secularity, interestingness and novelty but ignoring women's fate. The new opera of *The White Haired Girl* began to really focus on women's fate and assumed the sense of historical responsibility to make enlightenment.

Last, the story reflects gender construction situation, the needs of nation and state on women’ liberation movement, and the position and role of women’s liberation movement in different periods, so it is a vivid text describing the gender construction history and women’ movement development in China.

2. Literature Review

Most studies on *The White-Haired Girl* before the 1980s explored the political attributes and class nature of characters in the story from the perspective of political ideology. The studies aimed to enrich and complement the “correct discourse” and construct “revolutionary classics” to serve the national state. In the 1990s, these studies made significant progress. In 1991, Meng Yue published an article, “Female Image and

National Myth.”, which was published in *Twenty-First Century* of Hong Kong, which interpreted *The White-Haired Girl* from the perspectives of gender and class. She discussed the role of gender in the story and the relations between gender and class for the first time. Her analysis shows that the heroine Xi'er, who is the main character in *The White-haired Girl*, got people's sympathy because of the status of oppressed class represented rather than the gender status. Meng believed that the whole story was included in the scope of “class struggle”.²

In 1993, Yang Li wrote a doctoral paper, *The Fateful Road of Struggle—An Study on Socialist Realism (1942-1976)*, in which she studied the opera *The White-Haired Girl* as a part of Chinese contemporary literature history instead of an independent analysis target. The writer divided the development of socialist realism in 1942—1976 into three periods: narration, emotion expression and symbolism. She then explored the following questions: When was the opera popular in narration period? Why did the ballet become a model in China's Cultural Revolution? “In what historical and cultural context did they become possible? What relations did they have with the power”? Yang Li believed that history could arouse people's attention only when it was narrated into a big story with a beginning, an end and a consistent story line and developing towards the future. *The White-Haired Girl* appeared in the 1940s as an opera because it told a tough story for the time, revealing the theme that “the old society made a person become a ghost while the

² Meng, Yue. “Female Image and National Myth.” In *Gender Politics in Modern China, Writing and Feminism* edited by Tani E. Barlow, 118-136. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

new society makes a ghost become a person,” in order to seek for the historical justification for the establishment of a modern national state. Therefore, the character in the opera may grow into mature class images with changing willpower. They may have visionary expectations from the landlord class or cowardly commit suicide rather than struggle against violent repression. In Yang Li’s view, *The White-Haired Girl* had great practical and political significance because it expressed people’s thirst for the national state.

Other papers and books about *The White-haired Girl* include Bai Di’s “*Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets The White-Haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women.*”, the goal of her paper is “to reach a fresh understanding of model theater’s position in the PRC’s cultural history as well as to recognize its significance in subverting the hegemonic Party ideology.”³

In her book “*Maoist Model Theatre, The Semiotics of Gender and Sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*”, Rosemary A. Roberts focuses on the model opera “*The White-haired Girl*”, the model opera flourished during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 in China. She questioned the erasure of gender and sexuality and asexualized images of women despite the model opera promoted women’s liberation and gender equalitarianism.⁴

³ Bai, Di. “Feminism in the Revolutionary Model Ballets The White-Haired Girl and The Red Detachment of Women.” In *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*. Ed. Richard King. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press. 2010.188-202.

⁴ Roberts, Rosemary A. *Maoist model theatre: The semiotics of gender and sexuality in the Chinese Cultural*

Since 1990s, studies on opera *The White-Haired Girl* got significant progress, providing suggestive idea for the further study on the classical work. In my paper, I will study the origin and development of the story of *The White-Haired Girl* based on existing studies to clarify the destiny of Chinese women and the development of the Chinese women's movement as reflected by the story.

3. The Emancipation of Chinese Women as Rooted in National Fate

One of the ways in which the women's movement in China differed from the Western feminist movement is that it was not independent; that is, it was not a movement simply fighting for women's rights. The emancipation of Chinese women rose along with the movements for national salvation and self-reliance. Therefore, it had always been both closely linked with national liberation and involved in the mainstream discourse of the nation. The whole of modern Chinese history shows that the movements to emancipate women, which were always a part of a social revolution, had as their ultimate goal to save the nation from peril rather than to purely represent the interests of women. When the revolution reached its climax, the women's movement rose with it, but when the revolution was frustrated, the women's movement also receded to a low ebb.

Before the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1911), Chinese women's gender construction was deeply affected by Confucian thought, which has survived for thousands of years. Traditional views like the three obediences and the four virtues were the main factors

affecting Chinese women's gender construction. However, since the late 19th century, i.e., since the late Qing Dynasty, the history of modern women's gender construction was always connected to the establishment of national state, and women's gender construction had a deep mark of national state. The social changes in late Qing Dynasty made it possible to realize female liberation. The reformers of the late Qing Dynasty connected the advocacy of female liberation to the demands of strengthening the new nation. In 1902, Liang Qichao published the *Biography of Madame Roland*, clearly showing modernization reformers' idea of discussing female liberation within the scope of the state. The article praised Madame Roland highly as the mother of citizens, culture and revolution for people to study and follow.⁵ When the traditional gender norms isolated women from the state and nation, modernizing reformers connected women with strengthening the new nation, creating conditions for women to walk out of their homes and into the society and offering reasonable grounds and legitimacy for female liberation.

After the Hundred Days of Reform (1898), whether the advocacy of female independence or the appeal for female self-examination, the focus on the female problem was connected with the construction of modern nation and state more closely. In *Women's Bell*, Jin Tianhe firmly asserted that patriotism and salvation were "women's duties."⁶ Chen Xiefen, the editor in chief of *Female Journal*, also emphasized that women should seek education and rights by themselves in order to "educate the nation in the

⁵ Liang, Qichao. "Biography of Madame Roland", *Xin Min Series Newspaper* 28 (1902)

⁶ Jin, Tianhe. "Nüjiezong [The women's bell]." Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House, 2003.

future.”⁷After *Independence* and *Women’s Bell*, a lot of articles advocating equality between men and women and female independence appeared. Although with different focuses, the articles shared a common view of connecting female liberation with the rise and decline of the nation-state. At the same time, women began to examine their own problems, which, apparently, also aimed at the rise and decline of state.

The feminism advocates in the period of the Hundred Days of Reform denounced the social unfairness to women and vigorously advocated women’s liberation from the standpoint of women, but no one ever exposed or criticized the ideological and cultural roots of the unfairness. The “overthrow of Confucius and his sons” in the New Culture Movement, which began in 1919, started with the female problem. The Movement criticized Confucianism for the inferior position of women in family, marriage, chastity and ethics & morals that attempted to establish the “individual.”

However, the “individual” didn’t point to a specific gender. In this sense, men liberated themselves from feudal ethical codes and gained the recognition of their gender through the nation and state; females also liberated themselves from feudal ethical codes, but as the “people,” just the same as men, in which case they also needed to connect their independence with the state and nation, just like men, to establish recognition of their gender. It indicated that the women’s liberation movement in the May Fourth Period was the same as that in the late Qing Dynasty: just an accessory of the ideological emancipation of the whole society.

⁷ Chen, Xiefen. “The Independence”, *Female Journal* 1.1903 (1903).

“National salvation to prevail over cultural enlightenment” is a description of China after the 1930s from the perspective of ideology and culture. The May Fourth ideological trend of individual emancipation and gender construction ended and was replaced by a desire for the establishment of a national state. At that time, attention to the gender problem had differences in historical context from the “strengthening the new nation” proposed in the late Qing Dynasty and the “individual liberation” advocated in the May Fourth period, and revolution, political party, class and nation became the most important influencing factors in gender construction.

From 1949, the new China with a socialist state system seemed to end its past, but gender construction was still serving the emerging national state. Compared with any other time in the past, the new China paid unprecedented attention to the status of women, and the shaping and limitation of political, economic and cultural factors with the characteristics of socialist state to women were also unprecedented. Zhen made the “times have changed, men and women are the same. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can achieve as well.”⁸, and “Women hold half of the sky”⁹ made women as a group vanish in the revolutionary goals of “equality of men and

⁸ From Jin Yihong, “times have changed, men and women are the same. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can achieve as well” was first pronounced by Mao Zedong in June 1964. Mao made this remark after a swim with Liu Shaoqi during which Mao noticed that several young women were capable of catching up with the two men from behind. This saying was published for the first time by *Renmin Daily* on 27 May, 1965, but only as an anecdote in the report entitled ‘Chairman Mao Swims Freely at the Thirteen Tombs Reservoir’. The first formal citation of the slogan by an authoritative publication came on 8 March 1970, in a *Renmin Daily* headline that preceded a report on working women’s achievements. Afterwards, from 1970 to 1973, this quotation was used so frequently that people sometimes felt that it appeared everywhere. See Jin, Yihong. “Rethinking the ‘Iron Girls’: Gender and labor in China during the Cultural Revolution.” *Sociological Studies* 1 (2006): 008.

⁹ These are very popular slogans during 1950s to 1970s, from Jin Yihong, “Whereas the origin of ‘women can hold up half the sky’ is not clear – *Renmin Daily* and other authoritative publications have never officially quoted

women” and “women’s liberation;” if in the May Fourth period there was individual liberation without a specific gender orientation, then in this time, the gender was oriented to a clear target, but the “individual” disappeared.

4. The Emergence and Development of the Chinese Women’s Liberation

Movement

Since the late Qing dynasty, the fate of Chinese women and the movement to achieve their emancipation had been linked with the nation itself. Many Chinese and foreign scholars have studied the nature of the Chinese women’s emancipation movement. Both Christina Gilmartin’s concern about the fate of women in the Nationalist Revolution (1924-1927) ¹⁰ and Flora Botton’s criticism of the traditional family have left a vast space for reflection.¹¹ These articles profoundly demonstrate the particular nature of the Chinese women’s emancipation movement: It is still a male-centered movement. This raises several questions. Can the Chinese women’s emancipation movement be considered a feminist movement? Can it be included in the broader feminist movement? Does the Chinese women’s emancipation movement have a connotation essentially different from that of the Western feminist movement? Other sources have not drawn conclusions on these sensitive issues, and I will not do so here, either.

In modern Chinese history, various groups have explored a path to salvage the

this slogan” See Jin, Yihong. “Rethinking the ‘Iron Girls’: Gender and labor in China during the Cultural Revolution.” *Sociological Studies* 1 (2006): 008.

¹⁰ Gilmartin, Christina. “Gender, Political Culture, and Women’s Mobilization in the Chinese Nationalist Revolution, 1924-1927”, in Gilmartin, Christina K., ed. *Engendering China: women, culture, and the state*. Vol. 10. Harvard University Press, 1994. 195-225.

¹¹ Li, Xiaojiang, Zhu, Hong and Dong, Xiuyu. *Gender and China*. Shanghai, Joint Publishing Press, 1994. 38-62.

country and the nation. A strong majority of women, together with millions of other Chinese people, joined the ranks seeking national salvation. Women took part in a series of social movements from the late Qing dynasty, and these movements became the main content of women's political lives. During the Reform Movement in the late 19th century, some women were influenced by thoughts of reform, and though they were not directly involved in the Hundred Days Reform and other political activities, women participated in establishing societies, newspapers, and schools. The Chinese Female Society, which was founded in the summer and autumn of 1897, made many efforts to promote political reform. *The Journal of Women*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Female Society, published quite a few articles exposing the conspiracy of capitalist powers to carve up China. "Patriotic Women" and other articles inspiring women to be patriotic were also published.¹² A resounding slogan was solemnly put forward by the society: "Every woman is also responsible for the rise and fall of the world."¹³ This slogan, a mark of the awakening of Chinese women's national and political consciousness, had a profound impact.

The 1911 Revolution, which ended thousands of years of autocratic monarchy in China, is a landmark event. Chinese women fought side-by-side with men during this struggle, which had a dramatic impact on the country. Women gained an influence that was hardly ignorable in the political arena. The May Fourth Movement that broke out in

¹² Lv, Meiyi and Zheng, Yongfu. *The Chinese Women's Movement, 1840-1921*. Henan, Henan People's Press, 1990.18.

¹³ Liu, Renlan. "Quan Xing Nv Xue Qi (Appeal for women education)," *Nv Xue Newspaper*, April, 1898.

1919 was not only the most influential enlightenment movement in modern history but an unprecedented anti-imperialist movement. The women who first responded to the May Fourth Movement were female students in Beijing. As part of the May Fourth Movement, Chinese women were able to mobilize all strata of society using the strength of their organization. In addition to the Federation of Female Students, women established a variety of other influential groups.¹⁴

The War of Resistance against Japan, which broke out in 1937, was a serious disaster for the Chinese people, although China eventually prevailed. Chinese women, despite suffering unprecedented atrocities, contributed greatly to the victory. Many Chinese women established anti-Japanese groups, and a few personally fought in the war. There were many female soldiers in both the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, and a group of outstanding female commanders, such as Kang Keqing and Li Zhen, came forth. Women were also a major force in rescuing soldiers on the battlefield. In 1939, there were more than a thousand female condolatory delegations in action across the country. The women's groups successfully launched several nationwide activities to make clothes for soldiers at the front. Women across the country launched activities to encourage donations. During the Anti-Japanese War, most women contributed in some form to the defeat of the Japanese. In some sectors, women took the place of men. Women participated in industrial and agricultural labor and even assumed the work of

¹⁴ Lv, Meiyi and Zheng, Yongfu. *The Chinese Women's Movement, 1840-1921*. Henan, Henan People's Press, 1990. 29.

road construction and transportation, which few women had done in the past.¹⁵ China's victory in the Anti-Japanese War fully shows the strength, wisdom, and great patriotism of Chinese women.

With the power of the state regime, the Chinese Communist Party comprehensively implemented the concepts and principles of the women's emancipation movement after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The freedom of marriage, monogamy, gender equality, economic independence, equal pay, prohibition of discrimination, opposition to feudalism, and the abolishment of corrupt customs were all implemented with the powerful impetus of the state apparatus.¹⁶ However, as some scholars have pointed out, these improvements were mainly achieved by legislative means through the state's socialist system. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, all measures for Chinese women's emancipation came from the government rather than the people. This contributes a certain falsity to the emancipation.¹⁷

5. The Symbolic Female Body

What would happen if nationalism, the dominant force of various trends of thought since the late Qing Dynasty, encountered feminism, which was introduced in the late Qing Dynasty? From the standpoint of feminism, nationalism, especially its "ethnocentrism," is undoubtedly the central embodiment of patriarchy. At the same time,

¹⁵ All China Women's Federation: *History of Chinese Women's Liberation Movement*. Chinese Women Press, 1991.399.

¹⁶ Gu, Xiulian. *Chinese Women's Liberation in 20th Century*. Chinese Women Press. 2008.319.

¹⁷ Li, Xiaojiang. "China's Reform and Chinese Women's awakening in Self-consciousness, A Discussion on Women's Issues in the Primary Stage of Socialism". *Social Science Front*, 1998, 4.

summoned by the theme of modern China, “strengthening the new nation,” all the modernized movements are not possible without the escort of nationalism. The Chinese women’s liberation movement is no exception. Due to the needs of the nation-state discourse construction, since the late Qing Reform Movement (1898), male intellectual elites—because the focus of their concerns about the nation-state was transferred onto females—attributed China’s weakness to the physical weakness of females and initiated the Anti-Foot-Binding Movement. On the other hand, male intellectual elites, as represented by Liang Qichao, by fully negating the historical contribution of females, emphasized the importance of developing female education. As Wang Zheng said, “Women at the time were seen as a symbol: they can be regarded as the cause of national weakness, as well as the mark of national backwardness; males, proposed women problems (women are ‘problems’), in order to find a way to save the country. Therefore, women were carriers/tools, and a powerful nation was the goal”.¹⁸ In addition, in the early twentieth century, as a result of aggression by Western powers, the Chinese mentality of “being colonized” began to spread, making the elite males have anxiety over their own identities and national identity. Thereby, they expressed feminism as an important symbol of modern males and the modern country. Kang Youwei, in *Fu Nv Ku Zong Lun (A Discussion on Women’s Suffering)*, listed eight kinds of gender oppressions that women suffered and advocated “natural rights,” believing that violation of the rights

¹⁸ Wang, Zheng. *Gender and China’s Modernity*. Tianjin, Tianjin Renmin Press, 2004, 178.

of women was a violation of human rights.¹⁹ But the purpose of his ideas for women's "liberation" was to liberate the nation-state; what he was consciously aware of was the need to make women themselves aware of the importance of women's liberation. Thus, his concept of women's liberation was out of the need for male subject identity building. Jin Tianhe, in *The Women's Bell*, showed undisguised longing for equality and freedom in the West: "I dream of a young, white European man. On this day, at this hour, with a rolled cigarette in his mouth, walking stick in hand, his wife and children by him, he strolled with his head held high and arms swinging by his sides through the promenades of London, Paris, Washington. Such happiness and ease! I wish I could go there myself; [although I cannot,] I do know of that world indirectly."²⁰ In this book, he advertised gender equality and the need to keep up with European white people, to show his identity as a modern man.

It should be no wonder that He Zhen made the stinging criticism, "It's interesting that in the past, men took it upon themselves to confine women within the boudoir and regarded the oppressive treatment of women as their given duty. They now turn around and call for women's liberation and for a system of equality between man and woman". From her, there are three reasons, first is that "Chinese men worship power and authority...By transplanting this system into the lives of their wives and daughters, by prohibiting the practice of foot binding, and by enrolling them in schools to receive basic

¹⁹ Kang, Youwei. "Fu Nv Ku Zong Lun (A Discussion on Women's Suffering)." Zhu Ronggui, *Women and Human Rights*. Taiwan, Furen University Press. 2001, 33-40.

²⁰ Jin, Tianhe. *The Women's Bell*. Trans. Liu, Lydia He, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds. *The birth of Chinese feminism: Essential texts in transnational theory*. Columbia University Press, 2013. 207.

education, these men think they will be applauded by the whole world for having joined the ranks of civilized nations” The second reason is that men can reduce their stress by emancipating their women, “Since men are responsible for supporting their families, they are beginning to feel pressure...Men are now promoting women’s autonomy and argue that women should not depend on men for their livelihood.”; the third reason is that “ Chinese men view the family as their personal property and threat having progeny as a top priority, but the task of running the household and raising the children is not something they can bear. They then turn it instead into the responsibility of women.”²¹

In short, to liberate women was to cultivate outstanding descendants for paternal families. To the male elites of the time, advocating female rights could express the pursuit for equal rights for men of Han nationality, who were situated at a disadvantageous position in the national hierarchical structure, and also comes out of the need for mobilizing females to join in nation-state construction; furthermore, it is an element of constructing the modern male subject, a symbol that distinguishes them from the past males as well as a groundwork for their identity as liberators.

During the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s and 1940s, the female body symbolized a ravaged nation state. The sexual violence on Chinese women committed by male Japanese offenders was not just an act of the strong over the weak, or of a male soldier over a civilian woman, but involved power relations between the invaders and the

²¹ He Zhen, “On the Question of Women’s Liberation.” Trans. Liu, Lydia He, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds. *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*. Columbia University Press, 2013. 60.

invaded. As a result, gender issues were involved in nationalism and national discourse, showing a coexistence of gender and nationalism. As a propaganda tool, the folk tale of the White-haired Girl was chosen by CCP to revised into the new opera.

During the following civil war and class revolution, the female body was distributed as property. Similar to Xi'er, the protagonist in *The White-Haired Girl*, the insulted and violated poor women became the symbol of the oppressed classes, arousing their enthusiasm for resistance. We must be aware that the violated body of The White-Haired Girl hid the attitude of misogynistic men towards women behind its superficial reflection of class hatred. Taking effective control of the masses, this violating-violated gaze pattern successfully got the violator (landlord Huang Shiren) into an immoral situation and allowed the proletariat to show that it had superior morality. With female bleeding wounds and a violated body as the medium, the ideological concept required by mainstream society was constructed, and the double suppression, both in gender and in politics, was ultimately acquired.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the female body was regarded equal to individual desire, which was not an existence encouraged. Women who superficially enjoyed equal rights with men were integrated into the socialist "labor resources" and had to join the labor construction like men. The "Iron Girl" was the special product of the era, and the female gender was neglected and obscure. In the Cultural Revolution, the gender difference was completely obliterated. The female body in model operas, including the ballet of *The White-Haired Girl*, served as a political

symbol, leading the whole society toward a non-gender status. From apparel to everyday life, the female body was completely shrouded. Meanwhile, in the ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, one of Eight Model Operas, the woman was involved only as “the other.” In the end, a man would appear to solve the problem and rescue her. The story turned out to be patriarchal.

5. Overview of Each Chapter

In this paper, the first chapter reviews and analyzes the motif and prototype of the story and the evolution of the haired-maiden legend. It mainly analyzes the gender and cultural connotations of the haired-maiden motif and the story of the white-haired girl, and simply presents the gender-construction history profoundly affected by Confucian culture before the late Qing Dynasty.

In Chapter Two, after investigating the Yan'an version of April 1945 and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version from the end of 1945, I elaborate on the disappearance of the spirit of the May Fourth Movement in both versions. I will analyze the effects of the women's movement from the late Qing Dynasty to the May Fourth period on the development of the opera *The White-Haired Girl*. This chapter analyzes the fact that the scholars deeply affected by western enlightenment thought and May Fourth enlightenment culture kept their insights into humanity focused on female fate and individual fate when creating and adapting the opera *The White-Haired Girl*. The period from the late Qing Dynasty to the May Fourth Movement was full of huge historic changes in Chinese society. The process of constructing a modern national state was

accompanied by a feminist movement, and Chinese women's liberation was thus connected with historic social changes, and women changed their position in traditional social order. However, it should be noticed that the awakening of Chinese women was always under the influence of "the others." The construction of a national state is a huge "other," and female liberation was always attached to the establishment of the modern national state.

In Chapter Three, I will investigate both the July 1947 and the 1950 versions of the opera *The White-Haired Girl* to illustrate the impact of the Chinese Communist Party and the class revolution on the evolution of the opera. In this process, I will review women's emancipation movements from the 1920s to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. I mainly focus on the development of the opera *The White-Haired Girl* before 1949. From the 1930s to 1949 and the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, China sought for "national salvation to prevail over cultural enlightenment." The May Fourth ideological trend related to individual emancipation and gender construction faded away and was replaced by the need to establish a national state and the ideology of a political party, which put gender issues in a different context than "strengthening the new nation" as proposed in the late Qing Dynasty and the individual liberation advocated in the May Fourth era. As the dominant position of revolutionary discourse grew more entrenched within the state, revolution, political party, class, and nation became the most important influencing factors in gender construction. During this period, under several adaptations, the white-haired girl, Xi'er, changed from a female individual to a class subject.

In Chapter Four, I will investigate the ballet version of *The White-Haired Girl*, which was produced in the 1960s. With the foundation of the New China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution from 1960s to 1970s, the “paradigm” of opera was weakened, while ballet was valued. During the Cultural Revolution, “following the outline of class struggle,” family, individuality and gender disappeared gradually.

Chapter 1: The Historical Evolution of the Folklore of The White-Haired Girl and Its Gender and Cultural Connotations

1. A Brief History of the Evolution of The White-Haired Girl

The folklore of the White-Haired Girl was believed to have been widely circulated in the Communist-occupied areas of northern China from the late 1930s.²² With the expansion of the spreading scope of this folklore, “while retaining a fixed central core, folklores are constantly changing as they are transmitted, so as to create countless ‘variants’ differing in length, detail, style, and performance technique” because “the telling of one story inspires other people to share what they have read or heard, and in a short time a lively exchange of details occurs and perhaps new variants are created.”²³ It is hard to see the original pattern of the folk legend of the white-haired maiden, and various differences and variants of the legend can only be obtained from the records made by the literati and recollections of local mountain people. From the sources, we can see the legend has many versions, of which some are fairy tales.²⁴ This folk story could also be described as a love triangle,²⁵ and some tell of a social tragedy caused by son

²² Meng Yue, *‘The White-Haired Girl’ and the Historical Complexity of Yan’an Literature*. Diss. 2003. Print.

²³ Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The vanishing hitchhiker: American urban legends and their meanings*. WW Norton & Company, 2003. 3-5. Print.

²⁴ According to local mountain aborigines, a girl in the village bullied by a bad rich man escaped to the mountain. She drank the raw water, ate wild fruit and lived in a cave. After living in the dark for years without taking in salt, her hair gradually became white. Then, she met an immortal who taught her how to cultivate vital energies, so she finally became a goddess. Therefore, people began to believe in her as the White Haired Goddess, and came into the mountain to offer up a sacrifice to beg for her blessings on their families in the first and fifteenth days of every month. According to Zhou Weizhi, the commander of Western Battle Group, he ever heard the white haired fairy story in Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei region, which was about the white haired goddess scrambled up the hill and walked on clouds like an immortal. (Zhang ,Tuo, Qu, Wei and Zhang Lu. "The Born of the Opera, The White-haired Girl " *Opera Art Study* 3 (1995).)

²⁵ Zhou Erfu, who was the minister of the Literature and Arts Department in 1940s in Yan’an had already explained the origin of this story. This explanation is one of possible origins of the white-haired girl: “As told by many individuals, the story of the white-hair girl happened in Buping County, Hebei Province. A father and his

preference²⁶ or class oppression. As for this version, He Jingzhi made a detailed description in *The Creation and Performance of the White Haired Girl*.²⁷ Whatever the original story is, it is important to notice that these women's sufferings were ended by the arrival of the Eighth Route Army, the Communist Party.

son all wanted to marry Xi'er, and competed with each other. In a quarrel, the son killed his father accidentally. After consulting with his mother, the son shifted the responsibility onto Xi'er." (Zhou Erfu, "Some ideas about the opera 'The White-haired Girl'", *A New Starting Point*, Masses Publishing House, 1949. 113.)

²⁶ In 1942, Ren Ping, who worked at the art troupe of the military of the Communists Party in the central of Hebei province, brought his initial story about the white-haired girl from local peasants. He spoke of a rich man still having no son after marrying two wives. So he married for the third time but still ended up having a daughter. The rich man was irritated and expelled the third wife and her daughter from the family. They were forced to stay in a cave, living on sacrifices. Since then, this woman was living in the cave with her daughter and surviving on fruits; without proper diet, her hair gradually turned white. She hid in the deep of the mountain and dared not to go out, in order to feed herself and her daughter, she began to steal tribute food from the temple during ceremonies and new-year celebrations. One day, she was seen by a prayer and mistakenly regarded as the "White-haired Goddess". (He, Huoren. "The White-haired Girl and He Jingzhi." *Theory Criticism of Literature and Art* (1998.02): 21-26. Print.)

Wang Bin, the director of the opera *The White-haired Girl* also narrated a story similar to that of Ren Ping's but with slight differences on the details. According to him, "The landlord, by the excuse that his wife cannot be child-rearing, raped a young servant girl, and promised that she could be his wife as long as she gave birth to a boy. Yet unfortunately, she has a girl and therefore was expelled. She had to hide in the mountain with her child and survive on mountain dates. Due to the lack of salt intake, her hair gradually turned white." (Wang, Bin. "A Short Introduction to the Creation of The White-haired Girl." *Film Literature* (1959.01): 18-22.)

²⁷ From He Jingzhi in his "How 'The White-haired Girl' was Written and Produced", this folk story is about class oppression. In a small village by the mountain appeared a female immortal who had white hair and frequently acted at night. She resided temporarily in a temple village, and ordered villagers to make an offering to her the first day and 15th in of each month in lunar calendar. And all of the villagers continuously obeyed this female immortal. However, when the villagers forgot to make an offering, they could hear a sharp shriek coming from the altar gloomy: "If you do not make an offering to the female immortal, there will be a catastrophic disaster!" Therefore, the villagers had to go to in the temple to burn incense and offer the tribute. People in the village were panic and flustered, having no mood to engage in production.

Once, cadres from different districts went to the village to hold a plenary session, but no villager participated. The cadre inquired the reason, and the village cadre responded: "Today is 15th in lunar calendar; everybody went to make an offering to the female immortal" After hearing this story, the district cadre thought it was very incredible, and he believed certainly that someone was being up to mischief. Therefore, in that very evening he, together with some people, went to seize the ghost. In that evening, they carried weapons, hiding in the gloomy corner of the temple. It was not until the midnight that they saw "the ghost" with white hair came. They put out the gun and shout and rushed out, the female immortal was astonished and ran fast to a cave. They followed close her to the cave, and saw the white-haired female immortal was hiding in the corner clinging tightly to a child. Under the district cadre's inquiry, the female immortal cried and narrated her own story:

Before the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, there was a despotic landlord in the village, who had a liking for a tenant farmer's daughter in the village. Therefore the landlord forced the old farmer to death and robbed his daughter in the name taking rents. After this girl arrived at the landlord's family, she was seduced and harbored the pregnancy. But the landlord detested and rejected her, preparing to get married. When organizing the wedding, the landlord plotted to kill her. Fortunately, a kind old female servant let go of the girl quietly. After she ran away, she did not know where to go and had to find a cave to settle down. Later, she gave birth to a baby. Because she had lived for several years in the cave, and there was no sunlight in the cave, no salt to eat, the whole body blanched. The reason why villagers named her "white-haired female immortal" was that she always stole worships in the temple and they all made an offering to her. She depended on the worship to get by. But she knew nothing about the Sino-Japanese War, the Eighth Route Army having liberated the village and so on. After listening to the story of this white-haired female immortal, the district cadre was very moved. So he and those villagers rescued her out of the plight.. (He, Jingzhi. How "The White-Haired Girl" Was Written and Produced", He, Jingzhi, Yi Ding, and Ke Ma. *The white-haired girl: an opera in five acts*. Foreign Languages Press, 1954.)

The story of the mysterious white-haired girl got the attention of people from various fields. The enigma prompted reporter Li Mantian from *Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Daily* to collect and compile the various versions of these legends during the early 1940s. These stories eventually completed the novel named *The White-haired Girl* by Li Mantian.²⁸

The novel talked about a tenant farmer named Yang Bailao, who was forced to sell his daughter Xi'er to the landlord Huang Shiren to repay his debt. Yang Bailao then committed suicide, and after suffering all kinds of humiliation at the landlord's home, Xi'er eventually escaped from the landlord's house and hid in a mountain temple while surviving on offerings. Her whole body gradually became white due to lack of salt intake and sunlight. Because she often appeared in the Nainai temple, local villagers mistakenly recognized her as the powerful white-haired goddess. In the Chinese mythology, people believed that if they prayed to the goddess in Nainai Temple, they could obtain male descendants. At the end of the story, Xi'er was rescued from the mountain and started her normal life.²⁹

The correspondent traveling between Yan'an, the Holy Revolutionary Land of CCP, and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei CCP base during that period helped Li Mantian introduce

²⁸ According to the available sources, this novel was not published and later the manuscript was lost. The roughly content of this novel was recorded in the letter which was sent to Yao Baoxuan from Li Mantian, this letter was published on Opera Studies titled "How I wrote the novel 'The White-haired Girl'" From Li Mantian, "When worked at the government office of Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei border area, I was much attracted by this legend and thus investigated every single details through a variety of means. During May and April 1942, I was transferred in my job. While I was idle to wait for the transferring results, I collected all information about this story and wrote it into a novel. Later when I was acting as an editor for *The Jin - Cha - Ji Daily*, I kept improving the story and eventually developed it into a novel with over 10000 words. After the novel finished, at the end of 1943 I gave this novel to a correspondent to bring it to Yan'an. In 1947, I was transferred to another place and the manuscript had been missing ever since I left the draft of *The White-hair Girl* to the president of Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Newspaper Agency."

²⁹ Li, Mantian. "How I Wrote out the Fiction 'The White-Haired Girl.'" *The Footprints of Sino-Japanese Literature*. Ed. Yao, Naiwen. ShanDong: BeiYue Culture& Arts Press, 1988. 213-216. Print.

this story to the Communist headquarters in Yan'an. In 1944, Zhou Yang, who was the head of Yan'an Lu Xun Art Theatre, and He Jingzhi organized a group of writers to adapt this story into an opera named *The White-haired Girl*. As a tribute to the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party, this opera was first shown in 1945 in Yan'an, and it turned out to be a smashing success as it got high praise from the Communist leaders. Then it was widely performed in liberated areas. In 1950, the opera was further adapted into a new version. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, with further adaption based on the opera, the model ballet *The White-haired Girl* was born. It became one of the very few operas shown repeatedly during the Cultural Revolution.

2. From Haired-Maiden to White-Haired Girl

There are different versions of the legend of the white-haired girl before it was adapted into an opera in 1945. The white-haired girl or, more precisely, the haired maiden, has a long history and a deep origin in China.

The first historical mention of the haired girl in China is recorded in *Haired Maiden*, the second volume of *Lieh hsien chuan (Biographies of Immortals)*, written by Liu Xiang in the Han Dynasty. It records that there was a girl in the Huayin Mountain with hair covering her entire body. She claimed herself to be a maid from Qin Shi Huang's imperial palace and that she is one hundred and seventy years old. When the Qin Dynasty ended, she fled into the mountains. Taoists taught her to eat pine needles, and as a result, she felt

neither hungry nor cold, and her body was then as lithe as a swallow.³⁰ The ending seemed bright, but it implied the tragic fate of imperial maids after the destruction of the Qin Dynasty. All victims were captured, raped, killed, or sold, and those escaped to deep mountains and forests became haired girls. They were the first prototypes of the White-Haired Girl.

In *The BaoPuZi (Master Embracing Simplicity)*, written by Ge Hong in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317 AD to 420 AD), this story develops further. In this story, the woman “with hair covering her entire body” turns into a woman “with black hair covering her entire body.”³¹

In the Tang Dynasty (618 AD to 901AD), this story has new contents based on the original one. *The Legend of Tao and Yin* is a legend of the Tang Dynasty and tells that Tao and Yin come across a haired woman when they came to Huashan Mountain to gather herbs. The haired woman used to be a maid buried with the dead in the Qin dynasty. She narrowly escapes and hides in the mountain. All the hair on her body turns green because of the pine and cypress she eats.³² Another story about the haired maiden in the Tang Dynasty was written by Xue Yongruo in *Record of collected wonders* (集異記).

According to *Record of Collected Wonders*, there was a maid in the Yuntai Taoist Temple of Huashan Mountain called Yunv. She had been suffering from a serious disease for

³⁰ Liu Xiang (77 BC-6 BC), " *The Liexianzhuan (Biographies of Immortals)*", Volume 2. Shanghai, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, June, 1990.

³¹ Ge Hong, " *The Baopuzi(Master embracing simplicity)* ", Volume 11. Shanghai, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House. 1990.

³² Pei Xing, "Tao and Yin", *The Legend of Tang*, Shanghai, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House. 1995.

years with skin festered and decayed, so she was carried by people to the mountain to die. However, she recovered after taking the herbs offered by a Taoist priest and then picked and ate lucid ganoderma every morning under the directions of the Taoist priest. Later, she became lighter and lighter and could fly. Yunv had lived for more than a hundred years and finally became a beautiful fairy. However, one day, she was captured and raped by a man. The next morning, the man found that she had become an old hag. The story shows that although the maid had become a fairy, she still couldn't escape the fate of being imprisoned and raped. The plot makes people think of Xier in the White-haired Girl, who was also raped by the landlord. To some extent, the story can also be regarded as a chief source of the story of White Haired Girl.

In the Song Dynasty (960 to 1279), the legend of the haired woman continues to be popular. Cai Tao records in his *The Tieweishan Congtan (Dense Talks of Mt. Tiewei)* (volume 5) that Cai Jing comes across a haired woman in Zhongnan Mountain and calls her a "fairy."³³

The *Records of the Taiping Era* vol. 65 has a story that a girl born in troubled times was abandoned by her parents in the South Mountain. Refugees who passed thought she was poor, so they fed her with spring water and leaves of pin and cypress. The girl grew up day by day and fed on pine leaves. She could fly at the age of four or five and had green hair on hr body. When growing older, the haired girl could fly to the sky to enjoy

³³ Cai Tao, *The Tieweishan congten (Dense Talks of Mt. Tiewei)*, Volume 5. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1983. 84.

music with immortals and eat immortal food. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there were still stories in historical records that the Sichuan people who escaped into the deep mountain when Zhang Xianzhong surrounded and suppressed Sichuan Province had green hair covering their bodies.³⁴

In *The TouXiaLu*, Wang Mingqing records that Cai Jing sees a haired woman with green hair covering her entire body with his own eyes when he passed Huashan Mountain.³⁵ By the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there were still such stories in historical records that the Sichuan people who escaped into the deep mountain when Zhang Xianzhong surrounded and suppressed Sichuan Province had green hairs covering their bodies.³⁶

The motif of the haired maiden has continued for as long as 2,000 years, which is a huge length of time. It has surprising vitalities, and the series of stories about the haired maiden show relatively stable contents. A German scholar, Wolfram Eberhard (March 17, 1909–August 15, 1989), studied Chinese folktales and also noted the legend of the haired girl and summarized the story type into the following mode: 1. A girl escapes to avoid maltreatment; 2. She feeds on pine needles in the mountain or forest, and thus has black, white, or green hairs; 3. She can fly as a result of this.³⁷ All the stories above about the white-haired girl reflect the unfortunate fate of Chinese women in the feudal system. As

³⁴ Li, Fang. *The Records of the Taiping Era* vol. 65, *Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature*, Tai Wan Commercial Press, 1043—349.

³⁵ Wang Mingqing, " *The Touxialu Records (Causing the Audience to Stay Without Throwing Away Their Lynch-Pins)*". Shanghai, Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House. 1991.18.

³⁶ Wu, Weiye. *Sui Kou Ji Lue*. Shanghai: Shanghai ancient books publishing house, 1992.

³⁷ Eberhard, Wolfram. *Folktales of China*. Vol. 2. Routledge & K. Paul, 1965.

victims of feudalism, they were imprisoned in the imperial harem or became burial objects when the federal rulers were on the throne; when the rule was destroyed, they were killed, sold, or forced to escape deep into the mountains. They were also the victims of patriarchy and were abandoned randomly under the traditional son preference culture. Even becoming magic goddesses in folktales, they still could not escape the fate of being raped.

In other words, the stories were all affected by the traditional gender culture greatly. In the folk stories with the motif of the haired girl, every female character involved was attached to their fathers or husbands in their mundane lives. They were accessories in patriarchal families and could only get independence and freedom as individuals with self-awareness, a sense of independence, and emotions after becoming immortals. Besides, the spread of these stories always reveals the male-centered patriarchic society's curiosity of the female. Men wrote and spread the stories. They were curious about the adventures of the female, the second gender attached to the male, and they only read and spread the stories about women rather than really caring about women's fate. The stories may contain some descriptions about the woman's fate, but do not, ultimately, really care about women. But it is worth mentioning that there is a big difference between the haired maiden in the 1930's to the one in ancient times: the existence of the savior.

If we abstract the characters according to their functions in the story, we can create a hidden story mode for them. Propp studied Russian folktales and proposed an important concept of function. He believed that folktales generally assigned the same action to

different characters who might have different identities or roles while having similar activities and effects in the stories, i.e., the same function.³⁸ Propp's narrative theory definitely enlightens us on the analysis of the White-Haired Girl's narrative mode. The story told by Zhou Erfu has characters like Huang Shiren, his father, and his mother, and their joint action is persecuting the innocent girl Xi'er. The version told by Ren Ping also has the character of the landlord who persecutes an innocent girl (his third concubine). In the story told by Wang Bin, the bad guy is a landlord persecuting an innocent girl (a young maid). In Mantian Li's novel *White Haired Goddess*, the bad guy is also a landlord persecuting an innocent girl. Understanding the function of character, we can summarize various versions of stories about the white-haired girl into one mode. Under the persecution of an evil person, an innocent girl escaped to a remote mountain by herself for survival. During years of life in the wild, her hair became longer and longer, which eventually turned completely white. Because of her appearance, she was considered a "female immortal." Many years later, she came across a savior and returned to the society and then lived happily. In fact, the narrative mode is the most common in folktales. A very common story mode in traditional narrative works of folktales or fairy tales is that "the leading character is in a normal environment, and then encounters unexpected incidents or misfortunes, but finally becomes happy after twists and turns. Most stories are ended by 'he (she/they) lives (live) happily ever after.'"³⁹ In this mode, two

³⁸ Propp, Vladimir Iakovlevich. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Vol. 9. University of Texas Press, 1968.

³⁹ Tong, Qingbing. *Literature Studies*, Higher Education Press, 2004.245.

characters—the evil person and the savior—contribute to the twist of fate of the innocent girl. The former makes her life deteriorate, while the latter propels her life to a safe direction. Through various versions of the folk story of the White-Haired Girl, the savior is the Communist Party, which implies that it is inevitable that this folklore would be chosen as a political weapon.

As for the haired-maiden motif, in the folk stories before the twentieth century from those ancient literati, the traditional gender culture reflected by these stories was closely connected with Confucian thoughts, which affected the gender construction in feudal societies greatly. Many works have mentioned the effects of Confucian thoughts on gender construction, so this paper introduces and analyzes it briefly.

3. Confucianism and the Construction of Gender

Traditional Chinese Confucian culture has a series of ideas and attitudes of the two genders' positions in the social division of labor, which has infiltrated into daily life in the form of culture. Its construction of gender roles connected to the sense of hierarchy in the ruling order and became an important tool to maintain social order. "Only women and flunkies are hard to live in peace with." Confucius' words announced the inferior personality and status of women. The behavioral standards constraining the physical and mental development of women not only repressed women but also shaped the obedience of them.

From Ban Zhao in Han China in *Lessons for a Woman* (*nv jie zhong*), "As Yin and Yang are not of the same nature, so man and woman have different characteristics. The

distinctive quality of the Yang is rigidity; the function of the Yin is yielding. Man is honored for strength; a woman is beautiful on account of her gentleness.” She also said:

A woman (ought to) have four qualifications: (1) womanly virtue; (2) womanly words; (3) womanly bearing; and (4) womanly work. Now what is called womanly virtue need not be brilliant ability, exceptionally different from others. Womanly words need be neither clever in debate nor keen in conversation. Womanly appearance requires neither a pretty nor a perfect face and form. Womanly work need not be work done more skillfully than that of others.⁴⁰

Dong Zhongshu (179 B.C. to 104 B.C.), who lived in the Han dynasty, promoted Confucianism as the dominant position in the country. He extended Ban Zhao’s thought and developed it into the theory of the “three cardinal guides” (sangang); the three guides are ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife.⁴¹ Meanwhile, women who participate in politics are abnormal and unnatural. There is an old Chinese idiom: “hen crow like a rooster at daybreak”; this idiom is used to describe the phenomenon of having a woman rule. According to Confucian beliefs, women’s political participation is unnatural and might bring disasters.

Liu Xiang’s (79 B.C. to 8 B.C.) *The Biographies of Virtuous Women* (Lie nv zhuan) records one hundred famous women before the Han dynasty; they were all famous for various virtues. These women were called “Virtuous Women” by Liu Xiang. Liu Xiang divided women’s virtues into six categories: matronly deportment, sagacious clarity, benevolent wisdom, chaste obedience, pure righteousness, and rhetorical competence.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ban Zhao, *Lessons for a Woman*. from Nancy Lee Swann, trans, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China*, New York: Century Co., 1932. 85-86.

⁴¹ Dong Zhongshu, *Chun Qiu Fan Lu (Exuberant Dews of the Spring and Autumn)*, annotated by Ling Shu. Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1937.241.

⁴² Bates, Roy. "10,000 Chinese Numbers." (2007). 165. Print.

In the Song Dynasty, the Confucian Cheng Yi (1033 to 1107) maintained that “starving to death is a small matter, losing one’s chastity is a great matter”⁴³ (*e si shi xiao, shi jie shi da*). Chastity has become the only qualification of female virtue, proposing more concrete, stricter, and more compulsory requirements on female chastity.

Emperor Ming Taizu enacted laws that if a woman lost her husband before thirty, and does not marry until fifty, she and her husband’s family will receive rewards and honor. Society encouraged women to preserve chastity by offering royal praise and economic reward, in which case, whether a widow preserved chastity became an issue about the family’s honor and economic interests of her and her dead husband’s families, rather than an individual choice.⁴⁴ In fact, the construction of obedient nature was realized by depriving women of marriage rights.

After the evolution of dynasties, Confucian culture finally formed its core content of code requirement for women: “San-ts’ung ssu-te” (*san cong si de*). “San-ts’ung” refers to the obedience of a woman to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her son after her husband’s death.⁴⁵ It limits the role of women to one of dependency on men. “Ssu-te” signifies the four feminine virtues of moral conduct, proper speech, modest appearance, and diligent work.⁴⁶ The three forms of obedience and the four feminine virtues have become the most basic moral principles to be followed by

⁴³ Rohsenow, John S. “ABC Dictionary of Chinese Proverbs (Yanyu).” *The Contemporary Pacific* 26.1 (2014).

⁴⁴ Xia, Yuanji, Yang, Rong. “Mingtaizu Shilu.” (1962).

⁴⁵ Jameson, Elizabeth, and Susan Hodge Armitage, eds. *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women’s West*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. 260.

⁴⁶ Taylor, Rodney Leon, and Howard Yuen Fung Choy. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism: AM*. Vol. 1. The Rosen Publishing Group, 2005. 496.

women in Confucian teachings.⁴⁷

From Jack Belden:

the practical Confucianism committed several deadly sins against women: Chinese women are provided with no education and their minds are left in a state of nature and millions of them are supposed to have no minds at all; Wives and daughters are sold as readily as cattle and horses; Compulsory marriage of all girls; The family system has resulted in the suicide of wives and daughters, and the death rolls are convincing enough proof of the woes endured by Chinese women.⁴⁸

From the analysis above, we can understand the female fate in feudal patriarchal societies before the late Qing Dynasty and the gender construction in patriarchal societies under the influence of Confucian thoughts. When the thunder of guns in the First Opium War in 1840 woke up the rulers of the Qing Dynasty, the last feudal dynasty in China, in 1840, women's female fate also began to change unstoppably.

⁴⁷ Taylor, Rodney Leon, and Howard Yuen Fung Choy. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Confucianism: AM*. Vol. 1. The Rosen Publishing Group, 2005. 496.

⁴⁸ Belden, Jack, and Owen Lattimore. *China Shakes the World*. Penguin Books, 1973. 311.

Chapter 2: The Opera *The White-Haired Girl* and the May Fourth Movement

1. The Yangko Movement and the new opera

As I previously mentioned, the story of *The White-Haired Girl*, which has a very long history and deep origins, has been widely circulated in the Communist-occupied areas of northern China since the late 1930s. This folk story reached Yan'an in 1944 and was adapted into a five-act opera by He Jingzhi, Ding Yi, and some other intellectuals from Yan'an Lu Xun Academy of Art (Yan'an Lu Xun yishu xueyuan, commonly known as Luyi). Why has the folk story of the White-Haired Girl aroused great interest among the intellectuals and writers in Yan'an? How could the folk story be adapted into an opera? To answer these questions, we must understand the cultural context in which this story was born, especially the Yangko Movement and even tracing it back to the May Fourth Movement (1919).

In 1934, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was temporarily defeated by the Nationalist Party due to its poor strategies and was forced to retreat the main force of the Red Army from Ruijin and march to Yan'an of Shaanxi province. This is well known as the "Long March." Yan'an, as the end point of the Long March and the base of CCP from 1935 to 1948, was treated as the Holy Revolution Land of the CCP.

Yan'an was keen to confirm its cultural status and strive for cultural dominance. Therefore, it showed a strong creative intention in terms of culture, attempting to build a new cultural order. Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" in May

1942 indicated that the establishment of the new cultural order in Yan'an had begun; folk culture had become the starting point of the new cultural order in Yan'an. From Mao, art should be created for the people and that artists should not neglect the workers, peasants, and soldiers in the army as audiences. From Mao: "The audience for literature and art consists of workers, peasants, soldiers," and the purpose of this talk was

to obtain the correct development of revolutionary literature and art and better assistance from them in our other revolutionary work, so that we may overthrow our national enemy and accomplish our task of national liberation... Victory over the enemy depends primarily on armies with gun in their hands, but this kind of army alone is not enough. We still need a cultural army, since this kind of army is indispensable in achieving unity among ourselves and winning victory over the enemy.⁴⁹

Apparently, Mao Zedong hoped the circle of literature and art in Yan'an and other liberated districts would bear the heavy responsibility of the ideological construction of the modern national state.

The Yangko Dance Movement from 1943 to 1944 was a preliminary attempt to reconstruct the cultural order. The modified Yangko opera integrated the folk form with the revolutionary narration and connected tradition with the modern mindset; it therefore became the focus of the new cultural practice.⁵⁰

Why did Yan'an pay special attention to folk culture? Why was the folk Yangko chosen to make an alliance with the revolution? The answers are closely related to the social conditions and cultural foundation in Yan'an at that time. In October 1935, when the troops arrived in the north of Shaanxi after the Long March, they were facing an area

⁴⁹ McDougall, Bonnie S., and Zedong Mao. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an conference on literature and art": a translation of the 1943 text with commentary*. Center for Chinese Studies; University of Michigan, 1980. 57-60.

⁵⁰ Zhang, Geng, "Yangko Dance and the New Opera", *Zhang Geng Collection*, Beijing: China Drama Press, 1996.

with barren culture. The remote place had poor resources and rampant bandits and was full of local armed conflicts since the mid-nineteenth century. Therefore, the modernization of Chinese culture had very limited effects here. In the remote place, it was hard to find a literate among four or five hundred people, and even in the whole county, only one or two people achieved a secondary education level.⁵¹ It was very difficult to construct the new democratic culture in such a place. The planners of the new culture had to find a place to gain psychological and cultural identification from the local people. Finally, they found Yangko, a native-born folk culture. The folk yangko had an irreplaceable position in local people's spiritual life and social order. The original folk yangko included the song, the dance, and the plot. It was generally in the form of man-woman antiphonal singing with the man dressed like a woman. Yangko was very dramatic and lively, so it was an indispensable way of entertainment in people's lives.

From Anna Louise Strong:

there were six hundred Yang-ko troupes, amateur and professional, in Yan'an Border Region. One person in every twelve knew how to 'do a Yangko.' It may be performed in the open air or indoors. It spread rapidly through all the areas of the new China...In Yan'an I often saw Yangko dramas on the streets or in fields. On every holiday the various amateur and professional troupes would put on performances and crowds would gather at once. Most villages had their own troupes which often wrote their own plays.⁵²

2. The Confirmation of the Genre

When Yan'an tried to construct the new cultural order, folk culture, especially the folk yangko, was highlighted and became one of the important foundations of new culture

⁵¹ Hu, Sheng. *Seventy Years of Chinese Communist Party*. Chinese Communist Party History Publishing House, 1991.

⁵² Strong, Anna Louise. *The Chinese Conquer China*. Doubleday, 1949. 165.

order in Yan'an. The Yangko Movement started in 1943, reached its peak in 1944, and came to a close in 1945.⁵³ However, Yangko opera was not the end; driven by the innovative desire, the "national new opera" was vividly portrayed. In the early 20th century, when nationalism gradually spread and took root in China, and especially after China suffered aggressions by foreign powers, the desire to build a modern nation-state became more urgent. In the 1930s and 1940s, the founding of a new country and the fight against the Japanese invasion were the central goals. For Yan'an, establishing a nation-state and eventually taking its leadership was the necessary choice in its historical context. Therefore, as in the political, economic, military, and other fields, Yan'an made no secret of its desire for cultural leadership. With the "Yangko Movement" as the first act, Yan'an desired to consolidate its cultural leadership through a newer art form of its own. As Mao Zedong said, "Chinese culture should have its own form."⁵⁴ What kind of art could become China's own cultural art form, though? Yangko opera certainly had an irreplaceable role, but Yan'an needed a newer and more modern art form to break through and seize the cultural leadership. The process to select the art form was part of Yan'an's pursuit of modernity. After the selection, the target cleared up gradually: "An entire introduction from the West would not work, because their art forms failed to reflect Chinese farmers' life. Similarly, the old Chinese art forms cannot reflect the new life of farmers in the liberated areas."⁵⁵ Only when the Yangko opera further evolved, and a

⁵³Chen, Chen. "Yangko Movement during the Yan'an Era" *Wen Shi Jing Hua* 1 (2003): 56-60.

⁵⁴ Mao, Zedong. "Forum about the National Form of Art," *Literature Monthly*, May. 15.1940.

⁵⁵ Zhang, Geng. "About the Creation of the Opera The White-Haired Girl." *The White-Haired Girl (Five Acts)*, Jia

“new Chinese Opera” different from both Western opera and the old-style Yangko opera was created, could it be possible to take the cultural leadership. After a long period of modification, the creators drew on the creative experience of the Western opera and they also absorbed the tunes of folk music, the creation of a large new opera had begun.⁵⁶

The folk story of the white-haired goddess was spread into Yan'an at this time. The significance implied in the folk story was captured by cultural workers who sensed the special value to Yan'an from the story's social meaning. The story was recommended by different creators to Zhou Yang, the vice-director of the Department of Propaganda. Reading the story, Zhou Yang, with his keen insights for the trend of the times, understood the profound meaning of the legend. He believed the romantic story could be adapted into an opera. Then, what are the themes and significance of the story of the white-haired girl?

3. The Determination of the new opera of the White-Haired Girl and the Passing of the Spirit of the May Fourth Movement

With romantic and deep folk religious tradition, the legend of the white-haired goddess attracted many intellectuals who retold it in various literary forms. The phenomenon itself is enough to prove the huge energy contained in the legend, which can be told as different versions. First, the legend can continue the old faith tradition, developing into a variant of the haired girl legend and becoming a new legend. It would

Musi, The northeast Jia Musi Press. 1947.

⁵⁶ Liu, Zhen, Meng, Yuan and Chen, Pingyuan. *The Birth of the Opera The White-Haired Girl in Yan'an*. Diss. 2005.

become popular in folk society. However, in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border region with a basic task to banish all faiths, it was impossible to cater to this cultural psychology. Some people immediately censured the material, as it was like trying to attract the audience with a ghost story, and it was the wrong way. Second, the legend can be retold as a story against superstition and son preference. The adaption can adhere to standards of propaganda but has less dramatic effects. Third, the legend can be revised into a story containing the conflicts about sex or gender, a story about a love triangle to show the heroine's choice between two men, or a story of hate and love, expressing the gratitude or resentment between two men. Fourth, the legend can be retold as a story about Xi'er's position and experience as a woman. In other words, it is about how to revise the folk tale and restate the story; people with different cultural backgrounds may make different choices. Therefore, theme determination has become the toughest thing in adaptation and also the most controversial issue. "It took some time to understand and portray the main theme. To begin with it was considered by some as a ghost story devoid of any social significance. Others felt it could be written up as a story to over-come superstition."⁵⁷

With keen artistic intuition, Zhou Yang captured the dramatic and romantic features of the legend. He was far less involved in the narration as an intellectual, than as a guide of the adaption work as a performer and spokesman of Yan'an's cultural construction. Therefore, when Zhou Yang was attracted by the romantic nature of the legend, the theme

⁵⁷ He, Jingzhi. How "The White-Haired Girl" Was Written and Produced", He, Jingzhi, Yi Ding, and Ke Ma. *The white-haired girl: an opera in five acts*. Foreign Languages Press, 1954.

of the opera—to “present the desperate scene of rural anti-feudal fights and describe the happy scene of the new life of rural men and women after liberation”⁵⁸, that is, to present two different worlds, the old one and the new one—became more and more clear in the collision of different views. At last, the theme was settled upon: “the Old Society forces people to become ghosts, and the New Society restores ghosts back to life.”⁵⁹

After the theme of the opera was determined, the creation group reached a consensus soon without any resistance, because the theme of “the Old Society forces people to become ghosts, and the New Society restores ghosts back to life” was extremely attractive and aroused the desire for a new national state and the longing for a modern democratic society in the depth of every person, especially the intellectual. It also aroused common people’s experience in suffering life and yearning for a happy and stable life. Meanwhile, when the theme was settled upon, the image of the white-haired girl was gradually changed from a woman who struggled in the patriarchal society to a general proletariat representative who struggled in the class society. That is to say, the white-haired girl was no longer just a woman, but became a common symbol in the class context.

Although the opera’s creative direction was limited to “the contrast between two ages and two social systems,” many literary and art workers of Luxun Art Academy of Yan’an, i.e., the writers and adapters of the opera, began to show their May Fourth spirit of

⁵⁸Zhou, Yang. *New Art for people China’s Liberation Areas, Literature Movement(1)* Chongqing :Chongqing Press, 1992.

⁵⁹ He, Jingzhi. How “The White-Haired Girl” Was Written and Produced”, He, Jingzhi, Yi Ding, and Ke Ma. *The White-Haired Girl: An Opera in Five Acts*. Foreign Languages Press, 1954.

enlightenment unconsciously. Many literary and art workers of Luxun Art Academy of Yan'an experienced the May Fourth New Culture Movement and were nurtured by the Western Renaissance enlightenment spirit in the Movement and learned how to use enlightenment discourses. What were the effects of their spirit of enlightenment on the adaptation of the opera and the plot development of *New Haired Girl*? What were the effects of the May Fourth Enlightenment Movement in the early twentieth century on Chinese women's liberation and gender construction? How did political discourse gradually replace the enlightenment thought that manifested humanity and the caring for women? To answer these questions, we must return to the history of the late Qing Dynasty of rapid change and China in the early twentieth century.

From the late Qing Dynasty to the May Fourth era, China experienced dramatic changes. During the modern national state construction process, the feminist movement was rising. Therefore, the Chinese women's liberation was connected to social and historical changes, and women changed position in the traditional social order. In the late Qing Dynasty, reformers' advocacy of women's liberation was connected to the advocacy of strengthening the new nation. In 1902, Liang Qichao published *Biography of Madame Roland* in *Xinmin Series Newspaper*, clearly showing modernization reformers' idea of discussing women's liberation within the scope of the state. The article regarded Madame Roland as the mother of citizens, culture, and revolution. When the traditional gender norm claimed that women should stay at home and be isolated from the state and nation, modernization reformers connected women with strengthening the new nation, creating

conditions for women to walk out of their homes and into society, and offering a theoretical basis for the Chinese feminist movement.

In the *Biography of Madame Roland* in 1902, Liang Qichao said Madame Roland was born and also died for freedom and regarded her as a heroine in the European continent in the nineteenth century, the mother of European civilization, and the mother of the Great French Revolution.⁶⁰ Liang Qichao's evaluation of Madame Roland showed that his proposition was changing from revolution to improvement. Apparently, he didn't create the image trying to lift women to the symbol of nation, state, revolution, and freedom because of his insights on the long-term discrimination and repression suffered by women in social life. However, because of his social status and influence at that time, his argument would definitely have positive effects on women's liberation.

Considering the social situation with domestic strife and foreign aggression and intellectuals' thirst for Western modernization in the late Qing Dynasty, it is easy to understand modernization reformers' advocating to and promoting of the feminist movement.

To liberate women, modernization reformers vigorously promoted two measures: forbidding foot binding and initiating women's schools for the fundamental purpose of strengthening the new nation. From their point of view, foot-binding women were weak, so they could not assist their husbands or educate children or resist the aggressors as

⁶⁰Liang, Qichao. *Biography of Madame Roland Xin Min Series Newspaper* 28 (1902).

could men; instead, they would become the burden to men and cause men to lose ambitions to want only to stay with women. The measure of initiating women's schools actually aimed to make women useful for the state by promoting women's education. For this point, Liang Qichao has said:

It has been said that there are two fundamental principles of governance: the first is to instill an upright heart, and the second is to recruit talented people from far and wide. Children's education establishes the foundation of both principles. Children's education begins with the mother's teaching, which is itself rooted in women's education. Therefore women's education fundamentally determines whether a nation will survive or be destroyed and whether it will prosper or languish in weakness.⁶¹

The advocacy of women's liberation was a part of constitutional reform and modernization in the late Qing Dynasty, and participants were men reformers and their wives, sisters, and daughters, so the way and steps of the women's liberation movement kept pace with the constitutional reform and modernization. Specifically, the women's liberation movement was also a revolution from the top down, just the same as constitutional reform and modernization, and its main approaches for implementation included organizing societies, creating newspapers, and building schools. In 1895, the first Chinese women's society—the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge among Chinese women (Nv xue hui)—was founded by reformers and their women relatives. The foundation of this women's society promoted the development of the women's liberation movement. A series of women's schools, women's newspapers, and women journalists were established, from which we can see women's liberation consciousness and

⁶¹ Liang, Qichao, *On Women's Education*, translated by Liu, Lydia He, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds. *The birth of Chinese feminism: essential texts in transnational theory*. Columbia University Press, 2013.194. Print.

independence both aiming at the ultimate goal of a national state.

In February 1903, Chen Xiefen published *Independence in Female Journal*, a monthly journal issued under her general editorship, and pointed out that the ultimate aim of women's schools and women's rights was to "educate the offspring, to see the citizens educated well contribute to the state and nation."⁶² In 1903, *Women's Bell*, which is considered the earliest brochure stating feminist revolution theories systematically and comprehensively in Chinese women's history, was issued in Shanghai. The author, Jin Tianhe, believed that patriotism and saving the nation were "women's obligations" and paid much attention to women's rights to participate in public affairs.⁶³ After *Independence* and *Women's Bell*, many articles were published. Although with different focuses, the articles all believed that the goal of women's liberation was to serve the national state. For instance, Mo Xiongfei claimed that when women's schools and women's rights were flourishing, "everyone will lay down their lives for the country like Joan of Arc," from which we can see that she believed the purpose of women's liberation was to "contribute one's life for the country."⁶⁴

Referring to the current theoretical system of feminism, it is easy to draw the conclusion that the equality between men and women advocated at that time did not involve women's individual independence or individual consciousness awakening, but only considered women's liberation as a tool serving the national state to some extent, so

⁶² Chen, Xiefen. "The Independence", *Female Journal* 1.1903 (1903).

⁶³ Jin, Tianhe. "Nüjiezong [The women's bell]." Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House (2003).

⁶⁴ Mo, Xiongfei. "Female China." *Women's World* 5 (1904).

it could not realize women's own liberation. However, considering the specific cultural context at that time, we can see that combining female liberation with the national state was the only way to realize women's liberation, because for a long time, the gender norm assigned by traditional Confucian culture was assisting the husband and educating the child in the only activities of the home. In the late Qing Dynasty, women required equal rights, and they could feel the equality directly by getting the right to participate in public affairs like men. For women, obtaining independence and liberation also means obtaining the equal right to give their lives to the country. From another point of view, the requirement of individual independence awareness for women clearly has gone beyond the specific historical stage.

The women's liberation movement that began in the late Qing Dynasty laid a foundation for the women's liberation movement in the May Fourth New Culture Movement. In 1921, the Republic of China (1912 to 1949) was established, and the regime change bred the dramatic changes of society, thought, and culture. At the same time, the failure of the Revolution of 1911 and the rule of the Northern Warlords made people seek the truth from Western countries to save the country. Some intellectuals accepted advanced Western education, such as Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun, and launched the New Culture Movement, spearheading their critical attacks at traditional moral principles and the social system in China. Their new ideas and concepts brought quite a shock to the society. As John Dewey once commented, "It was the manifestation of a new consciousness, an intellectual awakening in the young men and

young women who through their schooling had been aroused to the necessity of a new order of belief, a new method of thinking.”⁶⁵

The term *individual* or *I* entered into people’s lives irresistibly and became the keywords of discourse of the age in 1915. In 1915, from Chen Duxiu in *Call to Youth*:

Be independent, not servile. All men are equal. Each has his right to be independent, but absolutely no right to enslave others and nor any obligation to make himself servile...I have hands and feet, and I can earn my own living. I have a mouth and a tongue, and I can voice my own likes and dislikes. I have a mind, and I can determine my own beliefs. I will absolutely not let others do these things in my behalf, nor should I assume an overlordship and enslave others.⁶⁶

The initiators of the New Culture Movement, such as Chen Duxiu, advocated human liberation and for young people to have their independent personalities; in such a case, women’s liberation was naturally included in the disclosure system. The May Fourth Ideological Enlightenment Movement forced the generation of individual consciousness and advocated individual subjectivity. Before the May Fourth New Culture Movement, advocates of women’s rights denounced the unfair treatment of women, and vigorously advocated women’s emancipation, but few people mentioned the ideological and cultural roots of the unfairness. Until the May Fourth New Culture Movement that advocated *individual*, *personality*, and *independent personality*, the initiators and participants associated women’s problem with Confucianism. In a sense, the measures of going against Confucianism and advocating neo-Confucianism in the New Culture Movement began with women’s problem. The Women’s Liberation Campaign during the May 4th

⁶⁵ Dewey, John. “The Sequel of the Student Revolt,” in *Middle Works*, 12:23.

⁶⁶ Teng, Ssu-yü, and John King Fairbank, eds. *China’s response to the West: a documentary survey, 1839-1923*. Harvard University Press, 1979. 241.

period took direct aim at patriarchy of feudal ethics, and feminine consciousness began to sprout with their independent value being acknowledged by few elitists. The New Culture Movement paid attention to women as human beings, and stimulated women's awakening as a human awakening. Zhou Zuoren has pointed out in the article, "Women's Issues and Oriental Civilization," that women's liberation should be built on the consciousness of women's individual concepts, which is the first step to be free from men. What's more, to emphasize human awakening is not equal to women's awakening. Women have to be acknowledged as human beings and as women so as to achieve real liberation.⁶⁷ Chen Duxiu started from women's problem to demonstrate that Confucian moral values did not fit in with modern life, like women's political participation, which would be an absurd argument according to Confucianism. Confucianism also forced women to preserve chastity and pin their destinies to families and lose independence. But the modern life is economic, and the fundamental principle of economic production is individual independence. Its effect has penetrated ethic. Consequently, the independence of the individual in the ethical field and the independence of property in the economic field bear witness to each other, thus reaffirming the theory [of such interaction]. Because of this [interaction], social mores and material culture have taken a great step forward.⁶⁸

Hu Shi discussed the feudal ethical codes' oppression of women from the issue of chastity and highlighted the individual in his argument. He pointed out that whether a widow remarried after her husband's death or a paragon of chastity committed suicide for her dead husband was just a "personal problem" and "should be decided by the free will

⁶⁷ Zhou, Zuoren. *Yongri ji*, Yuelu Press, 1988.

⁶⁸ Chen, Duxiu. "The way of Confucius and Modern Life". Wm. Theodore de de Bary. *Sources of East Asian Tradition, Vol. 2: The Modern Period*. Columbia University Press; Introduction to Asian Civilizations edition (July 15, 2008). 704.

of individual.”⁶⁹ Ye Shaojun believed women also had personalities and should be respected. In his article, “Nv ren’ge ren wenti” (*The problem of women’s personality/character*), “Renge” is “a type of spirit that an individual within a group should have...In other words, it is the kind of spirit that will let one be an independent and complete part of a group.”⁷⁰

The publicity of independent personality and individual in the May Fourth period promoted the development of the women’s liberation movement. However, the women’s liberation movement in that period had a dependency like those in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, and only existed by attaching to the mainstream discourse of the era, such as national state liberation or individual independence. However, the May Fourth enlightenment thought still had great effects on women’s liberation and gender construction. The enlightenment thought called on women to get rid of the subordinate and slave status to become self-reliant and independent. The “new woman” with the independent personality was considered the need of new era, and women began to walk out of their homes and into the society.

4. The Women’s Liberation Movement from Late Qing Dynasty to the 1920s

Women played an important role in the Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898. Though the number of women participating was small, they had great passion and wholehearted dedication. Kang Youwei, the leader of Hundred Days’ Reform, had a daughter called

⁶⁹ Hu, Shi. *The Problem of Chastity*, *New Youth*, Vol.5 1918.

⁷⁰ Ye Shojun, “Nvren ren’ge wenti”(The problem of women’s personality/character), *Xinchao*, 1,no.2 (Febery 1919). Reprinted in *Zhonghua quanguo funv lianhehui* 1981:124. Trans. Dale, Corinne H., ed. *Chinese aesthetics and literature: A reader*. SUNY Press, 2004. 64.

Kang Tongwei who wrote articles to advocate for modernization and revolution. Some of these works, such as “Records of Japanese Reform,” were written when she was less than 20 years old. Some women made sacrifices during the Hundred Days’ Reform.⁷¹ From 1901 to 1905, many women participated in the movement, opposing tsarist Russia’s embezzlement in Northeast China. In addition, women’s societies were established in Shanghai, Zhejiang, Guangzhou, Jiangsu, and in many other places to hold parades and donation activities.⁷²

Many other massive, spontaneous struggles were based on the efforts of women. At that time, the most influential event was the creation of the Women’s Revolutionary Army during the Revolution of 1911. The revolution overthrew the rule of Qing dynasty and ended a thousand years of autocratic monarchy. As the revolution began, Wu Shuqing, a 19-year-old young woman, asked for approval to join the army again and again. After she was rejected, she organized a “women’s revolutionary army,” which consisted of hundreds of young women. They received great fame due to their brave battle against the Qing army near Hankou. At the same time, there were also several women’s armies in Shanghai and Guangzhou, with membership ranging from dozens to hundreds.⁷³ These groups received positive recognition for their contribution to the Revolution of 1911, and

⁷¹ He, Liping. “A Discussion on the Formation of Modern Chinese Feminism.” *Journal of Renmin University of China*, March, 1997. 84-90.

⁷² Lv, Meiyi and Zheng, Yongfu. *The Chinese Women’s Movement, 1840-1921*. Henan, Henan People’s Press, 1990. 29.

⁷² Gu, Xiulian. *Chinese women’s Liberation in 20 Century*. Chinese Women Press. 2008.101.

⁷³ Gu, Xiulian. *Chinese women’s Liberation in 20 Century*. Chinese Women Press. 2008.101.

Sun Yat-sen praised them, saying they were just as excellent as men.⁷⁴ After the beginning of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, Chinese women established many influential women's societies, including the girl students union, within which there was a group of leading figures, including Deng Yingchao and Xiang Jingyu. Meanwhile, these groups achieved a high popularity among the people. As a newly rising power, they took active part in strike struggles even though they had no independent organizations and activities. Moreover, many old, closed families had also been impacted by the fervor of the patriotic wave. Many housewives began to boycott Japanese goods.⁷⁵ Women, as a whole, began to become one of the major forces in the political movement, instead of serving a secondary role. They proved themselves with patriotism and their remarkable organizations and movements.

5. The Appropriation of the Yan'an Version and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei Version of the Opera *The White-Haired Girl*

The above shows that the story of *White-Haired Girl* was adapted into an opera and performed in April of 1945. This version was written by He Jingzhi with the assistance of Ding Yi, and composed by Ma Ke and Zhang Lu. It was considered the Yan'an version, for which there is no written record now, only an oral one. In 1945, the opera was revised for the second time by Ding Yi and He Jingzhi jointly, and the new version was called the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version. Next, I will explore the May Fourth cultural workers' care

⁷⁴ Sun, Zhongshan. *Sun zhongshan Collections*, Zhonghua Book Company, 1982. 52-53.

⁷⁵ Gu, Xiulian. *Chinese women's Liberation in 20 Century*. Chinese Women Press. 2008.270.

for women's stories and focus on humanity based on the two versions of *The White-Haired Girl*.

There were many adaption directions for the opera, but Zhou Yang, the leading person of Luxun Art Academy of Yan'an, decided to focus on the theme of the contrast between two eras and two social systems, and fundamentally determined its creative direction of the opera. However, many literary and artistic workers of Lu'xun Art Academy of Yan'an experienced the May Fourth New Culture Movement and had been nurtured by the western Renaissance 'spirit of enlightenment. Therefore, many of them subscribed to the political theme of contrast between two ages and two systems: "the Old Society forces people to become ghosts, and the New Society restores ghosts back to life." The adapted opera is very similar to the folk story, except that there is a new character, Xi'er's lover, Wang Dachun. At the end of story, Wang Dachun saves Xi'er from the cave, replacing the character of distraction cadre in the folk story. Wang Dachun not only represents the image of Eighth Route Army and the new government, but also was Xi'er's lover before she comes into landlord Huang Shiren's home. Writers designed the last scene as the happy life of married Xi'er and Dachun, but Zhou Yang rejected that idea in the rehearsal. Why?

Actually, it's easy to understand if we consider Zhou Yang's view of love in yangko. He said, "Love is the most common theme in the old style of yangko ... in the feudal society where the need for love couldn't be satisfied, the theme of love could bring fierce protests against and destroy the feudal order and morality...the love theme in old folk

drama was always full of colors of feudalism and reflected the simple rural life. However, the foundation of feudalism has been destroyed and people's life is full of fighting now, and love has retreated to a very trifling position. The new yangko needs a theme more important and meaningful than love.”⁷⁶ Keenly feeling that love was not enough to give the social theme with political significance, Zhou Yang changed the ending into a public meeting criticizing and denouncing Huang, using the highest-minded political theories possible. In this version, Xi'er doesn't have a happy ending with her lover, Dachun, but complains about her tragic life to the masses as a representative of the oppressed class. In other word, Xi'er's fate was determined by class conflict.

The image of Xi'er reflected the May Fourth spirit as well. In the first overall rehearsal, the Yan'an version, Xi'er is abused by Huang's mother after entering Huang's home. She missed her home, her father and Dachun very much, and then had a dream. The dance in the dream shows some romantic colors, but was rejected in rehearsal. In Act Three, Xi'er has been raped by Huang and pregnant for seven months. Knowing Huang's family was arranging a wedding, Xi'er believes his lie and thinks he is going to marry her, so she dons the red cotton wadded jacket Aunt Zhang made for the bride and sings and dances onstage to express her joy.⁷⁷

Zhang Geng said, “Many people didn't agree with the scene and thought it distorted the image of Xi'er because she shouldn't forget the class hatred for her father's death or

⁷⁶Zhou, Yang. A New Time—After Seeing the New Yang-ko,, *Jiefang Daily*, March, 1944.

⁷⁷ Zhang, Geng. Recalling the life in Yan'an Luxun Art Institute. Liu Zengjie. *Literature movement materials in Yan'an and other Anti-Japanese base*. Shanxi, Sahnxi People Publishing House, 1983.

yield to her enemy, but a few people thought that women in that specific environment would get the idea.”⁷⁸ The “few people” were the writers who liked the plot and believed it could show high artistic techniques. However, the masses greatly objected to the design, and Zhou Yang also criticized the writers for focusing on theatricality and failing to realize the opera needed to build a vivid political image.⁷⁹ The writers thus removed this scenario and some other content in 1945, and added something new. This revision is the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version. He Jingzhi once talked about this amendment. “I made these changes according to audience suggestions. First, I reinforced the character of Xi’er after three acts. Second, I highlighted farmers’ opposition in the old society, and added a scene of Xi’er lover’s turning back home after participating in the Eighth Route Army. Third, I add a scene of common people talking about stories of the Red Army to show hopes hidden in farmers’ heart.”⁸⁰

Some ideas from the writers were not preserved in rehearsals, but the writers, affected by the May Fourth spirit of enlightenment, never changed their idea of building Xi’er into an image growing up gradually, reflecting their insights into humanity and caring for women’s stories. In the text of opera, Xi’er presents more characteristics of an innocent, weak and naïve rural girl. In Act Three of Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version, as soon as Xi’er appears on the stage, she sings,

⁷⁸ Zhang, Geng. Recalling the life in Yan’an Luxun Art Institute. Liu Zengjie. *Literature movement materials in Yan’an and other Anti-Japanese base*. Shanxi, Sahnxi People Publishing House, 1983. 468.

⁷⁹ Zhang, Tong. A Brief Introduction to the Production of the White Hired-Girl, Film Studies. 1959.01.

⁸⁰ He, Jingzhi. How ‘The White-Haired Girl’ was Written and Produced,” *The White-Haired Girl*. Peking: People's Literature Press, 1952. 249-261.

“During the seven months after that, I have been living under the crushed branch, enduring contempt and abuses, and suffering pains without speaking out. Under the circumstances, I have absolutely no choice but to count on [Huang] ...bowing my neck to live.”⁸¹

When Xi'er is raped and pregnant, she can only place her hope on Huang and be prepared to live in humiliation. Therefore, in the official performance, the scene about Xi'er donning a red cotton wadded jacket, dancing and singing in the deception was cut, but in keeping with her character development, the plot that she still harbored a fantasy and was prepared to yield to her destiny was preserved. In Act Three, Xi'er stops the indifferent and impatient landlord in the yard, and entreats him to say something. She cries, “My pregnancy is becoming more and more obvious. Now what can I do? People are laughing at me and scolding me. I'm living death now. What can I do?” After hearing from Aunt Zhang that Huang has never considered marrying her, Xi'er says sadly, “I have been pregnant for seven months, what should I do?”⁸²

In Act Four, Xi'er has fled into the mountains and given birth to a baby, in hopelessness, got the idea of climbing down to Dachun's mother, Aunt Wang, but, at the thought of having just bore the “evil seed,” she felt ashamed to see her loved ones. Hesitating, she finds herself at the gate of Aunt Wang, and is surprised to see that Aunt Wang and Uncle Zhao have just visited and come back from Yang Bailao's grave. Hiding

⁸¹ He, Jingzhi, Ding Yi, *The White-Haired Girl*, 1949 3rd edition, Xinhua Bookstore, 54.

⁸²He, Jingzhi, Ding Yi, *The White-Haired Girl*, 1949 3rd edition, Xinhua Bookstore, 52-60.

behind the door, she hears the two elders sighing, “Xi’er died a woman of character.” She now has more of a sense of being a “sinner” herself because of the deeply-rooted concept of feudal chastity in her mind and she feels shame. Pouring all her resentment into the newborn “evil seed,” she then scrambles back to the cave to strangle the child; however, the cry of the child sobers her. She lies upon the baby, crying, “My child, There is nothing wrong with you, I should not blame you so much.”⁸³ This innocent baby has awakened Xi’er’s innate motherly love and humanity. So she gathers her courage and determination to struggle with her fate and live in desperate times, waiting for revenge.

However, the content was cut out in the revisions in 1950 and 1953, and won’t be seen at the stage nowadays. The scene is delicate, profound and impressive. The writers tried to express Xi’er’s inner conflicts and pains in her plight in depth. Therefore, in Acts Three and Four, Xi’er is suffering not only from Huang’s maltreatment and the harsh living environment, but also the psychic trauma caused by her ingrained views on chastity. The stress to her after losing her virginity is no less a problem than her agony from the landlord’s bullying or the danger of natural environment. Xi’er’s feminine and humanistic traits shine through as she struggles.

This version systematically reveals her inner contradictions and pains: she is strong yet fragile, naïve yet mature, credulous yet independent. At the same time, this play also tells us about her growth process under terrible suffering. Her image in Acts Three and Four shows intellectual insight into human nature, female characteristics, and women’s

⁸³He, Jingzhi, Ding Yi, *The White-Haired Girl*, 1949 3rd edition, Xinhua Bookstore, 64.

stories, and conveys political ideology with humanistic tradition. All this reflects the spirit of May Fourth.

However, processing the image of Xi'er in this way didn't completely meet the requirements of liberal mainstream politics for opera, nor did it meet the expectations of the lower class about Xi'er's image. Therefore, in performances, many audiences railed against Xi'er for her spinelessness during Acts Three and Four, to express their strong dissatisfaction. From the view of politicians, Xi'er's illusion of marrying Huang after his deception diminished the purity of her class nature, weakened her class opposability as a daughter of poor peasant, disturbed the theme of class antagonism and class resistance, and dispelled the hatred in the opera. The plots—Xi'er believes her enemy Huang's lies and wants to marry him and even gives birth to the “evil baby” and raises him; when saving Xi'er from the cave, Wang Dachun supports Xi'er in one hand and carries the baby in the other—were unacceptable to the peasant audience who considered chastity the highest value for women and thought the blood tie between the baby and Huang made the love of Xi'er and Dachun much less pure, and Xi'er much less loyal and steadfast.⁸⁴

Since the end of the 19th century, Western theories of freedom, equality and human rights had been introduced into China, China entered a turning point, affecting traditional absolute monarchy, Confucian moral values, production modes, political forces, and new ideas, particularly about the living conditions of women, all of which created a women's movement and awakened of advanced women. *The White-Haired Girl*, as adapted and

⁸⁴ An, Rongyin. New Yangko, New Peasants' Art. *Journal of Hainan University*, 2005(04).

performed in the 1940s, was deeply affected by the enlightening spirits of May Fourth and women's liberation, which paid close attention to humanity and women's feelings as "human," "woman," and "mother." However, the dominant discourse of mainstream ideology strengthened over time, which made another revision imperative.

Chapter 3: The Opera *The White-Haired Girl* in the Late 1940s and 1950s

1. The Appropriation of the Opera *The White-Haired Girl* and Communism

To some extent, the adaption of *The White-Haired Girl* went hand in hand with the development of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The opera is the propaganda instrument and carrier of the CCP. It was born within the flames of Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the gunpowder smoke of Liberation War (1945-1950), and also developed with the generation and development of the CCP's feminist policies. The adaption history of the opera can be considered as a textbook to understand the development of the women's movement under the CCP. Above, we learned it was adapted from an apolitical folk story but shows the May Fourth spirit of enlightenment and May Fourth intellectuals' caring for women. However, after the 1930s, China sought for "national salvation to prevail over cultural enlightenment." The May Fourth ideological trend related to individual emancipation and gender construction departed and was replaced by the need to establish a national state and the ideology of a political party, which put gender issues in a different context than "strengthening the new nation" as proposed in the late Qing Dynasty and the individual liberation advocated in the May Fourth. During the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP gradually weakened the enlightenment discourse of intellectuals, and the dominant position of revolutionary discourse grew more entrenched within the state. This affected the adaption of *Girl* greatly. The revolution, political party, class, and nation became the most important influencing factors in gender construction, and Xi'er changed from a female individual to

a class subject.

As the last chapter showed, *The White-Haired Girl* had its first revision and performance in April 1945, the Yan'an version. The end of 1945 saw the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version. The image of Xi'er in both showed intellectual insights and compassion about the humanity and destinies of and lower-class women. However, this was at a perceived cost to Xi'er's class antagonism. To meet the need for "national salvation to prevail over cultural enlightenment," the play was adapted into different versions continuously. The gender identity of Xi'er got more and more ambiguous, and she became more like an abstract symbol. Her suffering as a woman in a patriarchal society gradually became the suffering of a social class subjecting to exploitation and oppression. Sexual violence was converted to class violence. Her female identity was overwhelmed by class conflict. Why? What were the effects of the unique women's liberation policies of the CCP on the gender construction of women? What were the effects of the play's adaption? What did Xi'er represent in later versions?

In July 1947, Ding Yi, another cowriter of the opera, made a lot of changes and deletions to the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version, mainly cutting the hard life of pregnant Xi'er after her escape to the cave. Ding Yi explained, "The act mainly presents how Xi'er lives in the cave, for which we have no real life experience and can only fabricate it through imagination, so it is not so vivid or realistic. Besides, the act slows down the development of opera theme and thus seems burdensome. Therefore, we believe the act

should be cut out.”⁸⁵ This now seems an insufficient reason. The statement that “we have no real life experience” is very far-fetched, because artists can’t and needn’t have a real experience of living in a cave as a wild woman like Xi’er. Saying the act “slows down the development of theme and thus seems burdensome” indicates Xi’er’s experience as a woman and mother is no longer valued. Her maternal consciousness and shame of lost chastity showed in the cave hindered the development of the class subject, which adapters considered the play’s true theme. Class revolution discourse, no doubt, had consolidated its dominant position as state power was established, so the scene of “living in a cave” was cut out.

In October 1947, the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version revised largely by Ding Yi was spread. Two years later, in 1950, He Jingzhi entered Beijing and made another significant revision. This revision followed Yi Ding’s idea of deletion and also made great changes to original opera. The changes involved some important part of Xi’er’s characters. For instance, in Scene One of Act Three in the revised script, the pregnant Xi’er, after being insulted, doesn’t stop Huang to say, “My pregnancy is becoming more and more obvious. Now what can I do? People are laughing at me and scolding me. I’m living death now. What can I do?” or cry, “I have absolutely no choice but to count on [Huang];”⁸⁶ instead, she always holds bitter hatred and anger for Huang’s family and never has any fantasy. When Huang lies about the marriage to steady Xi’er, Xi’er “feels greatly insulted.”

⁸⁵Ding, Yi. *Forward for the Revised The White-Haired Girl*, Haerbin, Northeast Press, 1947:1.

⁸⁶ He, Jingzhi, Ding, Yi. *The White-Haired Girl*. Xinhua bookstore, 1949. 3rd Edition. 52.

Mu (housekeeper of Huang): Do you know why I am here?

Xi'er: No, I don't.

Mu (holding wedding invitations in hand): What is this?

Xi'er: What do you mean?

Mu: Wedding invitations. A wedding ceremony is coming. So you should be happy now! Soon you are going to be a Priceless Beauty!

Xi'er (humiliated and shouting down loudly): Bullshit. I will never marry him.⁸⁷

Aunt Zhang (housemaid of Huang) worries that unsophisticated Xi'er would be deceived by Huang's family and comes to tell Xi'er, "Do not be fooled by Huang Shiren, He will not marry you, but rather a girl from a rich and powerful family in the town!" Xi'er interrupts her immediately and replies wrathfully,

"Aunt Zhang, who do you think I am? Huang Shiren is my enemy. I won't forget what he owes me even if the heaven falls and the earth crumbles. He can hurt me or kill me, but he will be in vain if he ever tries to fool me again... Huang's family is so ruthless, and you will see, I won't be like my father even if I have no ability. Even a worm will turn if you tread on it. Even if one day he holds a knife to my neck again, I swear to bite him for a bloodstain."⁸⁸

In the revised script, Xi'er's character has changed greatly. Xi'er never believes she might marry into Huang's family; instead, she holds the faith of revenge all the time.

⁸⁷ He, Jingzhi, Ding, Yi. *The White-Haired Girl*. Beijing, Renmin Literature Press, 1954. 68.

⁸⁸ He, Jingzhi, Ding, Yi. *The White-Haired Girl*. Beijing, Renmin Literature Press, 1954. 69.

Therefore, Huang's family can't deceive Xi'er any longer and Xi'er won't be cheated by the landlord or his attendants again. Aunt Zhang's concern is misplaced. Xi'er's class nature is now very pure: she lacks the childishness of an unsophisticated farm girl or the psychic trauma of feudal chastity, feeling only a craving for revenge. In previous versions, Xi'er has conflicts, pains, and complicated emotions. She is daughter and woman, but also plays the role of mother, and her class-consciousness is not inherent. In the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version, she does vow vengeance: "The evil baby of Huang's family, I will strangle it and hang myself with it at the gate of Huang's family. I will give his family has no peace or quiet, and take my revenge even if I become a ghost."⁸⁹ When she is going to strangle her baby, her maternal instinct is aroused by the baby's cry, "Don't cry, baby. We'll keep living. Grow up fast, and take revenge for me then."⁹⁰ Her revenge is still individual, and she never thinks that the CCP or the Eighth Route Army can revenge for her. As an isolated individual and an isolated woman, she carries all of her fate. In the last scene of the opera, Xi'er is saved by the Eighth Route Army, but the salvation looks more like an accident. We can't help thinking of Xi'er's life after her salvation. Will she have class consciousness after she is saved? The dramatist Chun Ji pointed out Xi'er's individualistic idea and said, "Will she throw herself into the roaring wave of revolution simply just as the ending of the script does?"⁹¹ The rather incisive question showed his doubt about the growing prominence of the class subject.

⁸⁹He, Jingzhi, Ding, Yi. *The White-Haired Girl*. Xinhua bookstore, 1949. 3rd Edition. 70.

⁹⁰He, Jingzhi, Ding, Yi. *The White-Haired Girl*. Xinhua bookstore, 1949. 3rd Edition. 72.

⁹¹Ji, Chun. Characteristics of the Times of The White-Haired Girl. *Shumianzuotan*(1945): 7-21.

Relative to the Yan'an version and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version, after revision, Xi'er doesn't have complicated emotions any more. Her character is simplified to revenge and revolt alone. Her image changes greatly and her suffering also weakens. Finally, because the leitmotif of class struggle is further intensified, her class nature is greatly enhanced.

As the last chapter shows, when *The White-Haired Girl* was first adapted into opera, mainstream political discourse basically dominated its theme, character development and plot direction. However, the May Fourth spirit remained and affected the play somewhat. After many revisions, as the dominant position of revolutionary political discourse solidified, the May Fourth spirit weakened, the humanity disappeared and Xi'er's class nature grew, closely connected to the social atmosphere and needs of the time and unique women's liberation policies of the CCP.

Now, let's return to the questions in the beginning of the chapter: What were the effects of the unique women's liberation policies of the CCP on the gender construction of women? What were the relations between those policies and Xi'er's increasing class nature? What were the effects of this period's women's liberation movement on the gender construction of women? To answer these questions, we must go back again to the revolutionary war from 1921 to 1949, to explore the answers by combining the historical background and historical events.

2. Women's Liberation under the Impetus of Class Revolution

“In the women of China, the Communists possessed, almost ready-made, one of the greatest masses of disinherited human beings the world has ever seen. And because they found the key to the heart of Chinese women, they also found one of the key to the victory.”⁹² The CCP combined class revolution with women’s liberation, which affected the gender construction of Chinese women greatly.

The CCP paid high attention to the organization and leadership of women’s movement since its first day in the arena of history. In the period of revolutionary war from 1921 to 1949, it began to learn the Marxist concept of women’s liberation and apply it to the reality of China, especially the needs of revolutionary movement. In the late May Fourth period, with the introduction of Marxism, early CCP members made an in-depth study of the “woman problem” while vigorously promoting Marxist theories. Chen Duxiu claimed the party had to “use the approach of class struggle to reform the social system,” or else women’s liberation would lose all meaning.⁹³ Xiang Jingyu also pointed out in *Women’s Liberation and Improvement* that the efforts of women alone were not enough to realize their liberation, and had to be linked to the revolution of the whole country. “The woman problem won’t be solved if the political problem is not solved.”⁹⁴ Using the efforts of early Marxists, the CCP quickly established a relatively complete theoretical system of women’s liberation. At the same time, the CCP publicized the idea of women’s liberation by organizing women’s groups, establishing female schools, and publishing

⁹² Belden, Jack. *China shakes the world*. Penguin Books, 1973. 317.

⁹³ Chen, Duxiu. *Collections of Chen Duxiu*, SanLian book Store, 1984.17.

⁹⁴Xiang, Jingyu. *Women’s Liberation and Improvement*, *Collections of Xiang Jingyu*, Hunan, Hunan People’s Press, 1985.

women's magazines, guiding women to participate in class revolution. It not only made definite commitments to women's liberation and a series of feminist programs, but made the best of its resources to give women equal rights in politics, economy, society, and culture during the Agrarian Revolution, Anti-Japanese War and New Democratic Revolution. Before the establishment of New China in 1949, the CCP had realized the integration of gender revolution into class revolution, pushing women's liberation actively, exploring their resources, and encouraging their participation in class revolution.

The CCP's attention to women followed Marxist theories but also stemmed from women's urgent desire for participation in class revolution. Women were the most oppressed of social groups. The socialist revolution depended on channeling such burning desire for change.

It's not difficult to see the CCP's eagerness to mobilize women in Mao Zedong's high praises in different periods for women's power. In December, Mao wrote for the Ninth Party Congress of the Fourth Red Army in December of 1929: "Women comprise one-half of the population. Their poor economic position and extreme oppressed status are not only the evidence of their urgent need of revolution but also the indication of their being the determining force that will win the revolution."⁹⁵ In Yan'an 1939, at the opening ceremony of Yan'an Women's College, he gave the well-known conclusion that "The day the women throughout our nation stand up is the day the Chinese revolution

⁹⁵ Mao Zedong, *Collection of Mao, Zedong. Vol.01.* trans. Yuan, Lijun. *Reconceiving women's equality in China: a critical examination of models of sex equality.* Lexington Books, 2005. 58.

succeeds.” At the Memorial Meeting to Celebrate March Eighth Women’s Day at Yan’an, he emphasized, “Women’s liberation, obviously, is connected to social liberation, and should become a component of social liberation movement. Without the social liberation movement, women’s liberation wouldn’t succeed; similarly, without the women’s movement, the social liberation would be impossible.”⁹⁶ In the 1950s, he said, “Chinese women are great sources of manpower which should be exploited for the construction of a great socialist country.”⁹⁷ The remarks show clearly that Zedong believed women’s liberation was closely connected to the class revolution.

Whether during the Agrarian Revolution and Anti-Japanese War or in the Liberation War, the CCP always raised women mobilization to the height of political strategy, and put into great efforts. Since its date of establishment, the CCP has listed leading the women’s movement in its important agendas. It briefly discussed the movement in the first National Party Congress, when the movement was “decided to be handled by the Central Committee in the future”⁹⁸ due to limited time. Before the establishment of the CCP’s women’s organization, it helped the Chinese Women’s Federation of Shanghai with its reorganization in August 1921, and published the reorganization manifesto and articles of association of Chinese Women’s Federation of Shanghai in the CCP’s organ publishing *New Youth*. The reorganization manifesto affirmed that women’s liberation

⁹⁶ Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, *About Women*. Renmin Press, 1988. 46.

⁹⁷ Mao, Zedong. *Collection of Mao*, Vol.05. Renmin Press, 1977.253.

⁹⁸ Jiang, Shuchen. *Before and After The first National Congress of the CCP*. Renmin Press, 1980.181.

was “the most important part in modern history of liberation.”⁹⁹

The Resolution of the Women’s Movement made in the second National Party Congress of the CCP in 1922 was the first special resolution of the CCP about women’s movement, and the first resolution about women’s movement passed in the name of a political party in the history of feminism, giving it a special and important position in history. The Resolution clearly explained the basic theories and program of the CCP’s women’s liberation movement, including “fighting for the benefit of all oppressed women” and overthrowing private ownership. It also emphasized that workwomen had a great revolutionary character, determining the basic feminist direction for the CCP: mobilizing women to participate in class revolution.¹⁰⁰

In June 1923, the third National Party Congress of the CCP passed the Women’s Movement Resolution under the presidency of Xiang Jingyu. Its basic theme was to “guide women, accounting for half of the nation, to participate in the national revolution movement.” The Resolution summarized the successful experience of women’s movement, believed that “the strike has showed the importance and significance of workwomen in the class struggle,” and proposed the slogan of “uniting women of the whole country to overthrow imperialism and warlords.”¹⁰¹ As an early leader of the CCP’s women’s movement, Xiang Jingyu published *Recent Women’s Movement in China*

⁹⁹ The Manifesto for the Chinese Women’s Federation of Shanghai. *New Youth*. Vol.09.5.

¹⁰⁰ The central archives: Assembly Documents for The Second the CCP National Congress to The Sixth the CCP National Congress. Renmin Press, 1981, 25-26.

¹⁰¹ The central archives: Assembly Documents for The Second the CCP National Congress to The Sixth the CCP National Congress. Renmin Press, 1981, 66.

and pointed out, “Only the emerging workwomen in women’s circles have the most power and the most struggle and revolutionary spirit.” Later, in *The Basis of Women’s Movement*, she said, “Working women urge to get liberation most, and only working women have the most spirit and courage for liberation... it is the real basis for our women’s movement.”¹⁰²

In January 1925, the fourth National Party Congress of the CCP passed the Resolution of Women’s Movement under the presidency of Xiang Jingyu. The Resolution emphasized again that “women’s liberation is strongly associated with class liberation” and believed “the slavery position of modern women is completely caused by the evil private property system, so women can’t be liberated completely unless private ownership is annulled,”¹⁰³ further tying women’s liberation to class liberation.

The CCP employed many methods from the start to strengthen its organizational and thought leadership of the women’s liberation movement. One way was to establish women’s organizations and groups. Besides the special Women Working Department established by the Central Committee, women’s departments were established in many areas. The second way was to establish women’s journals and further publicize women’s liberation. In December of 1921, directly driven by the CCP, *Women’s Voices*, the journal of Women’s Federation of Shanghai, started publication to publicize Marxist-socialist theories of the women’s movement. Other journals, such as *Women Weekly Newspaper*,

¹⁰² Xiang, Jingyu. *Collections of Xiang Jingyu*. Hunan: Hunan Press, 1980.

¹⁰³ The Central Archives: Assembly Documents for The Second the CCP National Congress to The Sixth the CCP National Congress. Renmin Press, 1981.

Women of China, *Women's Voices*, *Light* and *Friends of Women*, were both controlled or affected by the CCP. The third way was to establish women's schools to cultivate the backbone of women's movement. In 1921, the CCP established Shanghai Common School of Women to cultivate talents for the women's movement and train workwomen.¹⁰⁴ The CCP also propagated its feminine liberation theories through night schools for workers and institutes for peasants, to cultivate activists.

In the period of Agrarian Revolution (1927-1937), the CCP promoted women's liberation radically, using its political authority in the Soviet base. It first struggled against the customary marriage system and gave women autonomy in marriage. The customary marriage system was a heavy yoke fettering women into feudal family relationships and thus in direct conflict with the CCP's need for their participation. Therefore, every meeting the CCP held proposed to abolish feudal marriage by manifesto or resolution. The Soviet Republic of China was established in 1931, and it issued and implemented *Marriage Regulations of the Chinese Soviet Republic of China* after less than one month. The Regulations expressed the basic principles of freedom of marriage, gender equality, monogamy, and the legal protection of women, children and the aged.

The first article says, "The Principle of freedom of the marriage between man and woman is established and the entire feudal system of marriage arranged by persons other than the parties themselves, forced upon the parties and contracted by purchased and sale

¹⁰⁴ All-China Women's Federation, Women's Movement's Histories Studies Department: *History Materials for Women's Movement. (1927-1949)*. Renmin Press, 1986.11.

is abolished. The practice of taking a ‘foster daughter-in-law’ is forbidden.” Article 4 requires that “For a man and a woman to contract marriage, the consent of both parties is necessary. Coercion exercised by either party or by a third person is not permitted.” Article 9 adds, “Whenever both the man and woman agree to divorce, the divorce shall have immediate effect. When one party, either the man or the woman, is determined to claim a divorce, it shall have immediate effect.”¹⁰⁵ Even today, these articles are radical, especially Article 9’s freedom of divorce with few or no strings attached.

Women’s rights were also clearly confirmed by the promulgation of *The Constitution of the Soviet Republic of China* of the same year. It guarantees the emancipation of women, recognizes the freedom of marriage, and puts into operation measures defending women, enabling them to attain the material basis required for their emancipation from the slavery of domestic work, and for participation in the social, economic, and political life of the country.¹⁰⁶

After three years of trial implementation of the Marriage Regulations issued in 1931, the Government issued the *Marriage Law of The Soviet Republic of China* officially on April 8th, 1934, further standardizing and improving the systems of marriage, divorce, and the protection of illegitimate children’s interests. The Marriage Laws issued by the government of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia border region in 1939, 1944, and 1946 all

¹⁰⁵ M. Meijer, *Marriage and Policy in the Chinese People’s Republic*, Appendix I. Marriage Regulation of the Chinese Soviet Republic of 1931 (1971). Meijer, Marinus Johan. *Marriage law and policy in the Chinese People’s Republic*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971.

¹⁰⁶ Fu, Shang Ling, “The New Marriage Law of People’s China,” *Contemporary China* (Vol. 1: 1955), ed. E. Stuart Kirby (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1956. 115. (Fundamental Laws of the Chinese Soviet Republic. New York: International Publishers, 1934. 21.

implemented the basic regulations.¹⁰⁷

Besides its radical marriage reform, the CCP also gave women economic rights, especially land rights. In December 1928, the first land law was promulgated by the Soviet government: the Jinggangshan Land Law. It states that “all men and women, old and young, shall be entitled to equal redistribution.”¹⁰⁸ In 1931, the Central Soviet Area issued the Agrarian Law of The Soviet Republic of China, of which the first article explicitly stipulated, “Working people, whether men or women, have the right to get the land allotted.” It was the first time women’s names had appeared in Soviet certificates of land, and women got the land right.¹⁰⁹

At the same time, the CCP clearly gave women equal political rights. The *Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic*, promulgated in 1931, stipulated that “All workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers, and all toilers and their families, without distinction of sex, religion, or nationality... shall be equal before the Soviet law, and shall be citizens of the Soviet Republic... All the above-mentioned Soviet citizens who shall have attained the age of sixteen shall be entitled to vote and to be voted for in the elections of the Soviets. [They] shall elect deputies to all congresses of workers, peasants, and soldiers (Soviets); they shall discuss and decide all national and local political

¹⁰⁷ Meijer, Marinus Johan. *Marriage law and policy in the Chinese People's Republic*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971.

¹⁰⁸ Hsiao, Tso-liang. *Power Relations Within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934: The Chinese Documents*. Vol. 2. University of Washington Press, 1961. 291.

¹⁰⁹ Meijer, Marinus Johan. *Marriage law and policy in the Chinese People's Republic*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971.

questions.”¹¹⁰ The Constitution also stipulated that women should account for 25% of Soviet representatives.

In April 1939, the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region¹¹¹ government promulgated *Marriage Regulations of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Area*, the Constitution continued the legislative principles of *Marriage Law of The Soviet Republic of China* of 1934, with goals to “realize the equality between men and women,” “implement voluntary marriage system,” “carry out the freedom of divorce,” and forbid selling or buying marriage or adopted daughters-in-law (tongyangxi)¹¹². The Constitution continued the principle of women’s protection, stipulating “If after divorce and before her remarriage, the woman has no occupation or property and lacks the capacity to perform work and to support herself, the man shall assist her until she marries again, but this period shall be limited to three years.”¹¹³

After the Mukden Incident in 1931, female anti-Japanese associations were established in Peiping and Shanghai; in addition, women in Nanjing, Tianjin, Jinan, Qingdao, and Changsha showed their patriotism via assemblies and parades. Female leaders like Song Ching-ling not only called upon women to support the war but also

¹¹⁰ *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, History of the communist party of China publishing house, 1999.

¹¹¹ Shaan-Gan-Ning was one of the two border region governments with the capital at Yan’an, named after the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia. Created by the CPC in agreement with the Kuomintang as a part of the Second United Front policy. From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaan-Gan-Ning_Border_Region

¹¹² “Tongyangxi, used to describe girls who were given or sold by their birth parents into another family before puberty. Tangyangxi is variously translated ‘child bride,’ ‘small daughter-in-law,’ or ‘affianced daughter-in-law.’” From Young, Helen Praeger. *Choosing revolution: Chinese women soldiers on the Long March*. University of Illinois Press, 2001.15.

¹¹³ Meijer, Marinus Johan. *Marriage law and policy in the Chinese People's Republic*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971.

persuaded Kuo Min Tang to join in the struggle against the Japanese. In 1937, the Anti-Japanese War broke out in full. On May 20, 1938, in a historic moment, Song Meiling held a meeting in Lushan for women from different parties, during which they established a united anti-Japanese national front. After this meeting, various female anti-Japanese societies were established in an unprecedented, large-scale mobilization. These women consisted of leaders, including Song Qing-ling and He Xiangning, as well as common female students and workers, including Chinese women living overseas and even prostitutes. In addition, women from ethnic minorities also participated in the anti-Japanese war, including women of Mongol, Hui, Manchu, Uygur, Li, and Miao ancestry. According to incomplete statistics from 1941, as many as 2.09 million women in Shanxi-Gansu-Ningxia and Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei areas participated in the war.¹¹⁴

The CCP attached much importance to and put a lot of effort into women's liberation before the state was founded in 1949. The fundamental objective was to integrate the women's movement into the political liberation movement and mobilize women to participate in class revolution led by the CCP, controlling the discourse power and leadership of women's movement. However, to some extent, the combination of women's liberation and class revolution retreated compared to the May Fourth New Culture Movement.

During the implementation of women's liberation policies, the propaganda instrument played an irreplaceable role. As mentioned in the first chapter, the CCP made

¹¹⁴ "Women in the War in Liberated Area", *Materials on Women's Liberation Movement*. March. 1985.

a Yangko Movement after establishing the revolutionary base area, and then a new propaganda instrument, New Opera, appeared. *The White-Haired Girl* appeared in Yan'an at the right time, arousing the interest of literary and art workers in Yan'an. The propaganda instrument must develop with the development of policies, and as the CCP carried policies forward, women's liberation was more and more closely combined with class revolution. Xi'er's class nature thus grew stronger and stronger. She transformed like the Chinese women who gradually became class subjects. What were the results of the CCP's women's liberation policies? Could the women's movement in the war really solve the woman problem in China? Could Xi'er and Chinese women get real liberation?

3. Conflicts and Concessions of War, Women, Gender Liberation, and Class

Liberation

We can see from the above that the women's liberation policies of the CCP brought benefits to women. At the least, it stimulated them to think about their statuses and the meaning of liberation and start to take action. However, women's liberation is not simple, and no single action will bring it success. Bourgeois revolutions asking women to do something and changes of policies and the environment are not sufficient.

For Louise Edwards, the war offered false hope for the Chinese women's political participation. Chinese female political figures only embodied "crisis femininity" in wartime. The "crisis femininity" produced woman warriors, but never proposed any

challenge to the base of male rights or privileges.¹¹⁵ When the revolution and war were considered above all else, and every good wish about social reform, including women's liberation, relied on the success of class revolution, women's liberation inevitably served class revolution. If restoring the important measures of women's liberation implemented by the CCP in the period of revolutionary war in the specific context, it's clear that nearly every important action in women's liberation practice served specific political needs. When the policy implemented conflicted with the goal of class revolution, women's liberation had to make way for the class revolution.

As mentioned, mobilizing women to participate in the CCP's revolutionary cause was the fundamental goal of its women's movement in the revolutionary war period. However, the revolution needed to not only mobilize women but also first mobilize men. Therefore, its mobilization practice met with resistance from the gender order, with often unexpected social effects on gender relationships.

Take the Soviet base area as an example. Generally speaking, land allotment was the most important approach to motivate peasants to participate in the revolution, but acquiring land profoundly changed gender relationships in rural areas. Meanwhile, since the abolition of buying and selling marriage (*mai mai hun yin*) and betrothal presents through the new Marriage Law, it was easier for many poor people to find wives. "One amusing result of the new marriage laws was that the price of brides grew cheaper. The

¹¹⁵ Louise Edwards, The impact of war on women's suffrage in China: The problem of "crisis femininity." Wang Zheng, *Chinese Feminist Thinking in Hundred Years*, Shanghai, Fudan University Press, 1995.

same Farm Champion Li who came to my cave to discuss the new society told me that he ‘got a wife from the revolution. She cost me only twenty dollars. I could never hope to get a wife before.’ How did the revolution make wives cheaper? When I asked this, Li seemed perplexed. ‘Her father knows that I have land now,’ was his first answer. After more thought he added: ‘A wife can leave a man now if she does not like him, so people will not pay so much.’”¹¹⁶ Zhu Xiaodong called this “the revolution’s redistribution of women’s bodies... women acted not so much as revolution subjects as the revolution goal or spoils at the beginning of Chinese revolution.”¹¹⁷ The statement is somewhat extreme, but does indicate that to mobilize peasants to participate in the revolution more effectively, the CCP’s policies did promote the idea that “wives are available when the revolution succeeds.” This idea did motivate peasants to participate in the revolution.

To mobilize women, the Soviet Government issued a rather radical Marriage Law, and stipulated “the Law should tend to protect women, and give more obligations and duties from divorce to men” at one time.¹¹⁸ It gave freedom of marriage to women and naturally met resistance from male peasants. The number of women requiring divorce and remarriage increased rapidly, which scared “common peasants.”¹¹⁹ Due to their traditional view, peasants couldn’t understand the divorce rights of women, and worried about losing wives and properties. Therefore, many people adopted a “completely

¹¹⁶ Strong, Anna Louise. *The Chinese Conquer China*. Doubleday, 1949.

¹¹⁷ Zhu, Xiaodong. The Control of the Marriage Registration, *Peking University Law Review*, 2001, 02.

¹¹⁸ He, Youliang. The History of Social Change in Chinese Soviet Area. Modern China Publishing House, 1996.199.

¹¹⁹ Mao Zedong, A Report For the Second Soviet Congress in Jiangxi. (January,1934.) All-China Women’s Federation, Women’s Movement’s Histories Studies Department: *History Materials for Women’s Movement. (1927-1949)*. Renmin Press. 1991

opposed attitude,” and in some places, men even rose up against the Law. Men avowed, “Everything about the Eighth Route Army is good, except for the divorce.”¹²⁰

The relatively radical women’s liberation policies, beyond the view of most rural people, led to profound understanding of women, but also many family conflicts due to their strong impact on conventional gender order, thus affecting the stabilization of social order in revolutionary base area. In “*China shakes the world*,” Jack Belden tells a representational story of a rural woman named Gold Flower, married to an ugly man by the old conventions, and abused by her husband and parents-in-law. When the CCP organized a women’s movement in the village, Gold Flower punished her husband with the help of the organization. Women took collective action to give her husband a sound thrashing and forced him to promise never to abuse his wife. All of this made the man full of resentment, “In the Liberated area women have become crazy.” At the end, the couple got divorced and the man escaped from the village.¹²¹

From the perspective of feminism, it was good that women had more subject consciousness and pursued their free personality, but for the CCP, the resulting family conflicts were not entirely positive. They could affect male peasants’ participation in the revolution, which was the priority of the CCP. Many women engaged to soldiers terminated the engagements, which caused discontent on the front and harmed the army’s morale. These conflicts between gender revolution and class revolution forced the CCP to

¹²⁰ Qin, Yan. *Transformation of the Marriage Law in Shan-Gan-Ning Border Region*. Women’s Studies, 1994.04.

¹²¹ Belden, Jack, and Owen Lattimore. *China shakes the world*. Penguin Books, 1973. 275-307

compromise in favor of the latter in the implementation of women's liberation policies.

In 1944, the border government abolished the *Marriage Regulation of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Government* of 1939, and issued the *Amendment of 1944* which had great changes of content, canceling the regulation of “prohibition of mercenary marriage and child bride” and reserving “the principle of voluntariness,” increasing the provisions limiting the divorce of soldiers' dependents—“wives of soldiers of the Red Army had to wait two to four years from the time their husbands' disappeared before they could request a divorce registration.”¹²²—and removing the clauses of women's protection like the one mentioned above about the man offering help to the woman after the divorce. The amendment showed the adjustment of revolutionary discourse in practice strategies, and also indicated that women's liberation in the class revolution had to make a concession to the patriarchy, at least temporarily.

A.L. Strong, who observed the life in the base area deeply, also said, “The stubborn resistance of the peasants to the new ideas finally forced the Communists to make a new approach. Miss Ts'ai Ch'ang, chairman of the women's movement, told me: ‘Our slogans in the rural districts are no longer ‘free marriage’ and ‘women's equality,’ but ‘save the babies’ and ‘for a prosperous family.’ We made a mistake when we emphasized women's rights to such an extent that we antagonized the peasants. The conflict between men and women weakened the united struggle against the Japanese enemy and against the landlord. Besides, equality of women and freedom of marriage cannot be secured in this

¹²² Wong, Linda. Family Reform through Divorce Law in the PRC, *Pacific Basin Law Journal*, 1(2)

manner.”¹²³ The acknowledgment of the “mistake” is significant. It shows a lot of conflict between class liberation and women’s liberation in practice, and the women’s liberation movement has to make a necessary concession to subject to the class revolution, i.e., compromising to the existed gender order.

4. Gender Construction and Gender Roles of Women in Time of War

In *Let Women Speak for Themselves: Personal Experiences of War*, the oral history of women compiled by Li Xiaojiang, a female soldier who was a university student said, “I’m only thinking about the revolution, ideal, human equality, defeating the Japanese imperialism...and never think of my life, love, family, or children. They never appear in my mind. Nothing but only the fighting exists.”¹²⁴

It’s not difficult to understand her. After sorting out the records of hundreds of women’s oral history, Li Xiaojiang also drew the conclusion, “The awakening of Chinese women was mostly aroused out of the national revolution rather than women’s liberation, and the national consciousness was much higher than the female consciousness and individual consciousness, which deepened the clear-cut characteristics of Chinese women’s liberation—not only left deep class consciousness in the female consciousness, but also became intertwined with the nation and state.” Then she analyzed the special relationship between Chinese women and the war. “Women, either at the bottom or upper middle level of society, either the illiterate or the intellectual, could walk out of home and

¹²³ Strong, Anna Louise. *The Chinese Conquer China*. Doubleday, 1949. 170-171

¹²⁴ Li, Xiaojiang. *Let Women Speak for Themselves: Personal Experiences of War*. San lian Bookstore, 2003. 479-480.

into the society and liberation through ‘the participation in war,’ so it’s easy to understand why there were fewer self-examinations on the close connection between women’s liberation and revolutionary war in China, relatively to women’s attitudes to war in other countries.”¹²⁵ The women throwing themselves into the revolution considered it a path to self-realization, a way to subjectivity. However, the gender problem always existed, whether revolutionists paid attention to it or not, and not only for rural women of lower middle class, but also in progressive women in Yan’an, and in the opera.

When women’s liberation compromised its strategy for the needs of class revolution, revolutionary women’s image was shaped closer to traditional gender roles. For instance, the *Organization and Work Outline of Congress of Workwomen Representatives in Central Bureau of the CCP Soviet Area* in 1932 specially emphasized that women should participate in productive labor, organized into laundry-doing groups, nurse groups, singing groups, and cooking groups. In 1934, the *Decision of the CCP Central Committee on the Present Direction of Women’s Work in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas* stated, “The main role of the women’s movement during the war was to organize women for productive activity... women should know how to spin and weave, breed silkworms, cook, farm, feed pigs and take care of their families....they must combine their productive activities with the domestic chores.”¹²⁶ Obviously, these duties continue the traditional gender-based division of labor that “men are responsible for outside work,

¹²⁵ Li, Xiaojiang. *Let Women Speak for Themselves: Personal Experiences of War*. San lian Bookstore, 2003.

¹²⁶ Luo Qing, ed., *Documents on the Women’s Movement*, Harbin, 1948, 1-3

whereas women are responsible for domestic work” (*nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei*). “Women’s work and service was not expected for a single family under patriarchal control, but for a large family consisting of the Party’s soldiers and led by the Party.”¹²⁷

If one wants to understand the effect on female gender construction caused by the Women’s Liberation Movement under the leadership of Chinese Communist Party, Yan’an, a sacred place of the revolution, is a good place to study. “Women in Yan’an are happier than women elsewhere in China.”¹²⁸ The liberated area achieved good results in terms of carrying out Women’s Liberation Campaign, and it has also realized equality between men and women in system, established regulations to protect women’s legitimate rights and interests. At the same time, the external environment of women’s survival in Yan’an also changed, with their work widely acknowledged and their status promoted. Women’s movement in Yan’an dramatically proceeded with the slogan that “women and men are the same.” However, the slogan undoubtedly simplified the women’s liberation issue, and the criteria of ‘all the same’ actually referred to male standards, ignoring the differences in women’s physiological and psychological problems. Women were not special political groups in Yan’an. They were fully involved in the male society of revolution and harmonization, and inextricably tied their action and fate to class revolution. What was more, their female characteristics and special requirements gradually faded away.

¹²⁷ Yan Xu, *We are One Family: Women Work in the Chinese Anti-Japanese Communist Bases (1937-1945)*. Yuelu Publishing House, 2005. 67.

¹²⁸ Ding Ling, *Thought on March Eighth*, trans. Tani E Barlow; Gary J Bjorge. *I Myself Am A Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*. Beacon Press, 1990.

These changes firstly reflected in their physical characteristics. Chen Xuezhao once described, “There were no high-heeled leather shoes, or colorful clothes shown in the street, but only blue uniforms. You can rarely see women in uniforms, yet you can see pregnant women in uniforms there... Little differences show in women and men’s dressing style. To exaggerate, there is no ‘sexy’ here.”¹²⁹ Chen Xuezhao also experienced this. She was in French coat with perm, beret, and elegant scarf in a picture which was taken in 1940. However, she cut her hair and wore a loose uniform in her 1946 picture. Under the surface of equality between men and women, female characteristics gradually faded away, and their gender preference was not attached to. When enemy planes bombed the city, men would not let women go first because they were equal. Women were encouraged to farm the land, carry the water, and work like men did, and men rarely helped them because they were equal.¹³⁰

Their female characteristics faded away, yet their statuses were still in a dilemma like before. From Ding Ling’s article, “*Thought on March Eighth*”, which caused an uproar in Yan’an, described this phenomenal on women: “All kinds of women comrades are often the target of served criticism.” “People are always interested when women get married,”. From her, women’s fate are the same as before, they can not even decided whether they’d like to get married “But women invariable want to get married. It’s even more of a sin not to e married, and single women are even more of a target for rumors and slanderous

¹²⁹ Chen, Xuezhao. *A Visit to Yan’an*. Guangzhou: Guangdong people Press, 2001:6.

¹³⁰ Chen, Xuezhao. *A Visit to Yan’an*. Guangzhou: Guangdong people Press, 2001:6.

gossip.”¹³¹ Ding Ling pointedly said that the hierarchy still existed inside the army, and the idea of basking in the glory of her husband’s fame still flourished. What’s more, she pointed out that the revolution did not shake the foundation of male domination, and the family structure of oppressing women still existed.

¹³¹ Ding Ling, *Thought on March Eighth*, trans. Tani E Barlow; Gary J Bjorge. *I Myself Am A Woman: Selected writings of Ding Ling*. Beacon Press, 1990.

Chapter 4: The Ballet *The White-haired Girl* in the 1960s and 1970s

1. The Rise and The Appropriation of Ballet and *The White-Haired Girl*

As I mentioned before, after many revisions of the opera *The White-Haired Girl*, as the dominant position of revolutionary political discourse solidified, the May Fourth spirit weakened, humanity disappeared from adaptations of the opera and Xi'er's class nature grew, closely connected to the social atmosphere and needs of the time and unique women's liberation policies of the CCP. With the founding of the New China in 1949, CCP established its absolute dominance under which the opera had to meet the needs of the governing party. This was particularly true in the 1960s, when an unprecedented revolutionary storm, the Great Cultural Revolution of the proletariat, occurred. Therefore, the previous versions of *The White-Haired Girl* no longer met the needs of times, so the new adaptation of *The White-Haired Girl* was put on the schedule again.

From 1964, to respond to the call of "revolution, nationalization and popularization" in the literary and artistic field, Li Mulin, the president of Shanghai Dancing School, organized a three-person production team, composed of Hu Rongrong and Fu Aidi as writer and director and Yan Jinxuan as composer, to adapt *The White-Haired Girl* into a ballet.

Why was the form of ballet chosen in this period? This is simply because "in different times, the ideology which should be highlighted and emphasized varies

naturally.”¹³² This was how some scholars interpreted the reason for the change of *The White-Haired Girl* from opera to ballet after thirty years. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, ballet was introduced as a new art form, and its symbolism gradually attracted the attention of Chinese artists. In the ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, Xi’er changed into the image of a strong female proletarian warrior full of class-based hatred. In the ballet, all her thoughts and actions are focused on carrying out the class struggle. As an art form with a strong symbolic atmosphere, ballet met the needs of the People’s Republic of China after it had been established for many years and while the CCP was carrying out the Cultural Revolution. A symbolic female image, represented by the immobilized facial makeup, was needed to express the national requirements faced by women in this period.¹³³

In October 1964, the medium-scale ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, consisting of five acts, was completed. In the premise of affirming that “the opera *The White-Haired Girl* is an excellent opera created in the period of democratic revolution,” the ballet “trie[d] to both keep the characteristics of original version and disclose the historical essence at that time more deeply.”¹³⁴ Therefore, the ballet intensified the class struggle and changed Xi’er’s stooping to compromise into all-out resistance. The performance of the ballet was well-received by the party and government leaders of Shanghai and by the audience. The creation team was encouraged greatly, and completed the large-scale form of the ballet

¹³² Yu, Xuelei. A New Flower of the Revolutionary Ballet, *Weihui Newspaper*, June 11 1965.

¹³³ Li, Yang. *A Study on Socialist Realism, 1942-1976*. Epoch Literature and Art Press, 1993.

¹³⁴ Yu, Xuelei. A New Flower of the Revolutionary Ballet, *Weihui Newspaper*, June 11 1965.

with eight acts in 1965 along this line of thought. The following is the content of the eight acts, Act One: Yang's family is preparing for the New Year when the tragedy occurs; Act Two: Xi'er is insulted, but she resists and escapes; Act Three: Huang's family pursues Xi'er, and Xi'er hides; Act Four: Xi'er hides in deep mountain and she vows revenge. Act Five: The Eighth Route Army led by Dachun liberates Yangge Village, Huang Shiren runs away and Dachun et al. trail him; Act Six: Xi'er encounters her enemy and chases and beats him; Act Seven: Dachun and Xi'er meet each other, and they go out of the cave; Act Eight: Xi'er returns home, denounces the landlord's criminal act and celebrates the liberation with others.¹³⁵

The ballet performance created a public sensation. At this point, the complete ballet had been completed and fully surpassed the opera. The ballet "expressed the main idea of class struggle more clearly and strengthened the characteristics of main characters."¹³⁶ The ballet shows Xi'er's resistance and struggle from the very beginning in the prologue. In the ballet, Xi'er abandons the complicated emotional turmoil. The ballet also removed the plots of helplessness, obedience, rape and illusion, for landlord Huang Shiren. Xi'er harbors bitter class hatred from the beginning of the ballet, and is always in the antagonistic position to Huang Shiren. At the end of the ballet, Xi'er is rescued from the cave. With a red flower on her breast and a steel gun in her hands, she leaves with the mighty troops to devote herself to the revolutionary struggle.

¹³⁵ Ballte *The White-Hired Girl*. Shanghai Dancing School, 1965 Premiere Version.

¹³⁶ Qu, Wei, Joy Watched the ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, *People's Music*, 1965 (5)

In 1964-1965, during the creation of the ballet, the opera *The White-Haired Girl* was still affirmed as a classic work and recognized as an excellent creation that “was well known to the public and had profound influence.”¹³⁷ But in 1966 and 1967, after the ballet had been performed many times, the opera suffered varying degrees of denial and was finally criticized.

On June 10th, 1966, Ding Yi published “A Fragrant Flower in the Great Cultural Revolution” in the Liberation Army Daily to celebrate the successful performance of the ballet *The White-Haired Girl*. The People’s Daily reprinted the whole article on June 12th. The opera writer passionately extolled the ballet, saying, “It sets a good example for revolutionary literature and art.”¹³⁸ Meanwhile, Yi Ding admitted that the opera “has certain limitations of times,” and was defective in character modeling. For instance, “it describes the submissive and obedient characters of Xi’er untruthfully, and over-describes her misfortune and humiliation. She doesn’t resist until she has no choice after bearing and forbearing. The design reduces the class quality of Xi’er and doesn’t fully show the typical characters of a typical role of the oppressed class.”¹³⁹ Therefore, it was necessary to “make a recreation according to the original opera.”¹⁴⁰ However, Ding Yi didn’t completely deny the opera at the moment and still believed the opera reflected the class struggle to some extent, only that it “failed to reflect deeply due to the limitations of

¹³⁷ Yu, Xuelei. A New Flower of the Revolutionary Ballet, *Weihui Newspaper*, June 11 1965.

¹³⁸ Ding, Yi. A Fragrant Flower in the Great Cultural Revolution, *Liberation Army Daily*. June 12, 1966.

¹³⁹ Ding, Yi. A Fragrant Flower in the Great Cultural Revolution, *Liberation Army Daily*. June 12, 1966.

¹⁴⁰ Ding, Yi. A Fragrant Flower in the Great Cultural Revolution, *Liberation Army Daily*. June 12, 1966.

times and original authors' class consciousness and ideological level.”¹⁴¹

This shows the appraisal of the opera changed gradually in this period. The “paradigm” of opera was weakened, while the ballet was valued. “The preciousness of the ballet *The White-Haired Girl* is that it is filled with the thoughts to make revolution and innovation and break the restraints of traditional views, and highlights the class struggle.”¹⁴² Therefore, the biggest difference between the ballet and the opera was that the themes of the Great Cultural Revolution and class struggle in the former replaced the political revolution theme of “Old Society forces people to become ghosts, and the New Society restores ghosts back to life” in the latter. Compared with the opera, the ballet had been remolded thoroughly and “purified;” characters were abstracted, and the shaping of each character was based on his class nature. A revolutionary story evolved into a myth of class that implied the ruling party's redesign of history and recognition of itself.

In November 1966, eight literary and artistic works, including the ballet, were announced to be the “revolutionary model opera” in the first Proletarian Cultural Revolution Conference of Literary and Art Circle in Capital convened by the Central Cultural Revolution Leading Group.¹⁴³ In the 9th issue of the magazine *Red Flag* published in 1967 *The Epoch-making Significance of Revolutionary Model Opera*, which lifted the model opera to a supreme position and considered it as an irreplaceable

¹⁴¹ Ding, Yi. A Fragrant Flower in the Great Cultural Revolution, *Liberation Army Daily*. June 12, 1966

¹⁴² Ye, Lin. Permanent Revolution, Permanent Win. *Guangming Daily*, May, 17, 1955.

¹⁴³ Eight Model Operas includes *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, *Shajia River*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*, *Ode of the Dragon River* and *On the Dock*

“weapon” in the class struggle.¹⁴⁴ In this way, the model opera was branded with a deep political mark. Since then, the ballet *The White-Haired Girl* has been officially canonized as the “model,” replacing the celebrated status of the opera.

So what was the ballet *The White-Haired Girl* adapted into? Why was it adapted in this way? What is the gender construction reflected by the ballet as adapted in this way? What about China’s women’s liberation movement in this period? How did the movement affect the adaptation of the ballet?

Before the opera was adapted into a ballet, it already had already begun to show the gradually increasing resistance consciousness and purified class nature of Xi’er. In the adaptation of the opera in Beijing in 1962, Xi’er no longer endured contempt in helplessness but eagerly hoped “my relatives can come to save me”¹⁴⁵ after she was raped and became pregnant. She hoped her lover Dachun could rescue her from the suffering. Xi’er’s attention to her body was replaced by the anxiety of hoping to be rescued. The sense of humiliation caused by losing her virginity only existed for a short time and was soon drowned out by class hatred. In this adaptation, she isn’t fooled by Huang Shiren’s lie of marriage, and she resists because of the strong class hatred, not just because of resentment against Huang Shiren for his lies. She hates Huang Shiren’s persecution of her family and what he did to her. In this adaptation, Xi’er has grown from a female individual into a class subject. She doesn’t feel resentment for what she has

¹⁴⁴ The Epoch-making Significance of Revolutionary Model Operas. *Red Flag*, the 9th issue, 1967.

¹⁴⁵ He, Jingzhi. and Ding, Yi. 1962 Version *The White-Haired Girl*. China Youth Publishing House, 2007. 53.

suffered as a woman, and she has hatred for only one reason: resentment for class oppression. After escaping deep into the mountain, she stands on the top of mountain with her white hair and sings, “My intense hatred is as deep as the sea, and I will wait for my revenge even if the stars go out and vanish.”¹⁴⁶ At this moment, Xi’er’s gender consciousness has disappeared. Daughter, woman and mother, the multiple identities of her body are disappearing gradually and being replaced by a non-gendered class image. Her emotional life focuses on revenge alone. In the 1962 version, there was a specially designed scene in which Xi’er meets Huang Shiren on the narrow path to the Nainai Temple, where Xi’er pours out her flames of fury, “I will tear you, throttle you and bite you!”¹⁴⁷

Xi’er has abandoned the emotional person she used to be, and her resisting and struggling spirit is strengthened gradually until she has become the goddess of retribution and vengeance, representing only the oppressed class. The adaptation of the opera in 1962 was just a prelude. The subsequent adaptation of the ballet made Xier’s class nature more pure, but her gender consciousness became weaker and even disappeared.

Xi’er’s image in the ballet is very different from the one in the opera. After Xi’er was grabbed by Huang’s family and forced to be a slave, she doesn’t endure contempt and submit to Huang; instead, with strong class hatred, she resists the abuse of the landlord’s family and resists Huang Shiren, who intends to act indecently towards her. The strong

¹⁴⁶ He, Jingzhi. and Ding, Yi. 1962 Version The White-Haired Girl. China Youth Publishing House, 2007.63.

¹⁴⁷ He, Jingzhi. and Ding, Yi. 1962 Version The White-Haired Girl. China Youth Publishing House, 2007.70.

hatred is inherent rather than bred gradually. “I’m not afraid that you will whip me, stab me and savagely beat me. The landlord beat my father to death and now tries to harm me. My hatred is endless and is deeper than the sea. My hatred is the fire that shall not be quenched. It has been engraved in my mind. I will have revenge!”¹⁴⁸

In the ballet, Xi’er is never raped. As a symbolic sign of the oppressed, the female body should be purified and can’t be associated with sex; therefore, the raped body of Xi’er was removed from the ballet. When Huang Shiren tries to be indecent to her in Huang’s family’s worshipping hall for Buddha, Xi’er picks up the incense burner and throws it at Huang, and Huang flees helter-skelter. A well-known article in the Cultural Revolution period appraised Xi’er in the ballet, “The scene in which she holds the censer higher and throws it at Huang Shiren is in stark contrast with the plot in the opera, where Huang intends to rape her. She lashes out not only at Huang Shiren but also at the old system. Then, a lofty image of a heroic and unyielding girl who is the daughter of a poor peasant is shaped for the audience.”¹⁴⁹ The common influence in the period of the Great Cultural Revolution on the ballet adaptation shows that the image of Xi’er has changed from a simple and vivacious rural girl into the goddess of divine retribution and vengeance, filled with an inveterate hatred. Xi’er has become the synonym for resistance, always full of revenge whether in the landlord’s house, in the wild forest or in the ramshackle Nainai Temple.

¹⁴⁸ Ballte *The White-Hired Girl*. Shanghai Dancing School, 1965 Premiere Version.

¹⁴⁹ Li, Xifan, “A pearl born from the sharp conflict between the two lines: Evidence from the creation of *The White-Haired Girl* of the bankruptcy of the ‘write about real life’ fallacy of Zhou Yang and those backstage,” *Guangming Daily*, 19 May 1967, 5-6.

In 1967, Gong Dun published his review of the ballet *The White-Haired Girl*: “The heroine Xi’er in the ballet *The White-Haired Girl* is entirely different from the image of Xi’er shaped in the opera *The White-Haired Girl*. Xi’er in the opera... acted as a slave girl in the landlord’s house obediently; she lived in the cave like a white-haired goddess...she lived bearing her shame and even had illusions of the landlord class. This Xi’er at most is a character with split personalities. If Xi’er in the opera was just a poor peasant’s daughter harmed and insulted, which was an image of a kind-hearted woman forced to escape from a gangrenous situation under the manipulation of fate, in the ballet, Xi’er is the sturdy grass withstanding high winds and the red plum blossoming in the frost and snow. She deserves to be called the daughter of poor peasant!”¹⁵⁰ The common understanding vividly shows the society’s appreciation for the ballet at that time.

In addition, in the ballet, the adaptors completely erased the plots about Xi’er’s child. The Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei version and the Yan’an version both mentioned the child of Xi’er and Huang Shiren. Xi’er not only raised the child in the cave, but even went out of the cave with the child under the help of Dachun. From the opera,

Da Chun: Who are you?

Xi’er: (standing there still and suddenly shouting aloud and rushing at Da Chun)

Ah!

Da Chun fires at Xi’er and Xi’er is shot and falls down, then gets up and rushes

¹⁵⁰Gong Dun, A Great Victory of Chairman Mao’s Revolutionary Line in Literature and the Arts—Some Ideas on the Adaptation of the Ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, *Renmin Daily*, June 11 1967.

out hurriedly.

(From the cave comes out a kid's cry)

(In the cave, it is lighted by a small flickering oil lamp and the faint light shows the darkness and horror of the cave. On a corner of the cave, some firewood, wild fruits, and food sacrificed by villagers are put there. One kid is struggling in the firewood and crying. Xi'er is busy with blocking the cave hole, and the kid, screaming, crawls over, "Mom, Mom..." (Then Dachun, holding the kid and holding on to Xi'er, walks out of the cave.)¹⁵¹

However, in the ballet, the plots were removed. The blood tie between Huang Shiren and Xi'er disturbed the absolute class antagonism to some extent, so the elimination of the plots ensured the purity of the goddess of divine retribution and vengeance of the oppressed.¹⁵²

Besides, the ballet adaptation also involved the relationship between Dachun and Xi'er. In the opera, they were lovers; in the ballet, their romantic relationship is no longer in existence and has been replaced by strong class friendship. Dachun's identity also changed from Xi'er's lover into the savior, rescuing Xi'er from the abyss of misery. In essence, Dachun has become the emblem of the CCP and the Eighth Route Army. In the ballet, the design of character relations and identities tried to minimize human feelings or humanity and even hide them in order to further strengthen the political class

¹⁵¹ He, Jingzhi, Ding, Yi. *The White-Haired Girl*. Beijing, Renmin Literature Press, 1954.

¹⁵² Meng Yue, *'The White-Haired Girl' and the Historical Complexity of Yan'an Literature*. Diss. 2003.

relationships of the characters.

At the same time, Xi'er's image and behaviors in the ballet tend to be neutralized or non-gendered. In the ballet, Xi'er's most common expression is a serious face with knitted brows, and the most common movement is goggling with anger and brandishing fists. The complicated expressions in the opera have almost disappeared, and only dull movement and expression are left.

Why was the ballet adapted like this? Why did Xi'er change into the pure symbol and representative of the oppressed class? What is the gender construction reflected by the adaptation? What about the women's liberation movement after the establishment of New China? How did the movement affect the adaptation of the ballet?

2. Women's Gender Construction and Liberation Movement from the Establishment of New China (1949) to the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

After the establishment of New China, the economic construction of the state became the first priority, so the problem of how to mobilize women on all levels to participate in economic construction seemed to be an urgent task. In this period, reporting about women in official newspapers and magazines changed greatly, mainly focusing on eulogizing female workers. *The People's Daily* eulogized female workers, "Heroic working women break through all barriers to devote themselves to the waves of learning modern technologies. Without stamina, they would have been daunted by the barriers, but women in New China are fearless in the construction of the motherland with the heroic

spirit they have shown in the struggle with enemies previously.”¹⁵³

In May 1958, CCP passed “Exert the utmost effort and strive for the best, trying to construct socialism better, faster and more economically” in the Second Session of the 8th NCCPC. In August, the Beidaihe Conference proposed the goal of surpassing the UK in industrial production within 15 years. After that, the whole nation entered into the period of the Great Leap Forward, the aim of which was “overtaking England and catching up with the United States.” In this period, because of the serious lack of labor force, many women walked out of the family to participate in social work, and some industries even saw the phenomenon of “women replacing men.”¹⁵⁴ The environment the nation wished to create women to work as men and even take jobs that only men could do in the past.

Characters like Mu Guiying¹⁵⁵ and Hua Mulan¹⁵⁶ gradually increased in this period and

¹⁵³ Gu, Ting. Lv Da Women in Heavy Industry. *Renmin Daily*, Jan. 18 1950.

¹⁵⁴ In May 1958, the CCP passed the general line of “Exert the utmost effort and strive for the best, trying to construct socialism better, faster and more economically” in the Second Session of the 8th NCCPC. In August, the Beidaihe Conference proposed the slogan to achieve a steel output of 10.7 million tons and the goal to surpass the UK within 15 years in the aspect of industrial product. Since then, the national people entered into the period of Great Leap Forward to overtake the west. By the end of August, 1958, the “Great Leap Forward” in industry caused a serious lack of labor force, and a lot of male labor force flew into the heavy industry. It was urgent to supplement the labor force. Therefore, mobilizing the women accounting for half of the population became a very urgent task. In the movement of the Great Leap Forward, the number of women participating in social labor was unprecedentedly high. From 1949 to 1957, the increased number of working women reached 2,000,000. In 1958, the total number of working women increased from about 3,000,000 in 1957 to 7,500,000 or so. The number of newly working women in 1958 was more than 10 times of the total number of working women before the liberation. By the end of 1959, the number of working women was more than 8,000,000, having increased by 5,000,000 since 1957. In rural areas, 90% of the female labor force participated in agricultural production. Civilian-run industry also had a “great leap forward.” According to the statistics on 22 provinces, cities and municipalities in 1958, more than 85% of workers in over 730,000 civilian-run industrial enterprises were women. In 1958, more than 7300 women participated in water-conservancy construction, and more than 6700 women participated in tree planting, and even in animal husbandry and breeding in pasturing areas, women accounted for 80% of the labor force. (These data come from Cai, Chang, *Women Workers Should Do Better to be Advanced Workers*. *Chinese Women*, Nov. 1959, and *Women Can do Everything and They Can Do Better*. *Chinese Women*, January 1960.)

¹⁵⁵ “Mu Guiying is a legendary heroine from ancient China’s Northern Song Dynasty and a prominent figure in the Generals of the Yang Family legends. She is the wife of Yang Zongbao and mother of Yang Wenguang. Brave, resolute and loyal, Mu is the cultural symbol of a steadfast woman. Mu led twelve widows from the Yang family to fight against the rebellion of the King of Xixia, a small kingdom to the west of Song; she won the battle and protected the country. “From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mu_Guiying, Jin, Yihong, Rethinking the ‘Iron Girls’: Gender and labor in China during the Cultural Revolution .” *Sociological Studies* 1 (2006): 008.

became vocabulary to extol the bravery and hardiness of women. It was an era of worshipping heroes and models, when women like Hua Mulan played guiding roles for ordinary women. The images of Mu Guiying and Hua Mulan, in fact, implied the psychological suggestion that women were as good as men and even stronger than men, which sowed the seed of the female de-gendering phenomenon in the period of the Great Cultural Revolution.

How to become a revolutionary and progressive new woman meeting socialist standards and requires in the new era? *Women of China*, the magazine that started publication in 1939 in Yan'an with the title inscribed by Mao Zedong, replaced various female magazines issued in the period of the Republic of China and became the women's life guide throughout China in the new era. The magazine spread aesthetical standards, value orientation and female work achievements nationwide. It can be imagined that the social celebrities, movie stars and cover girls with fashionable hairstyles, makeup and cheongsams who had been active in big cities became passé almost overnight, replaced by strong workwomen with short hair or two braids, red faces and work clothes. Besides fashion being replaced by work clothes, the contents of female magazine involving reading, opera, movies, going out, raising children and attending to husbands were replaced by productive labors such as sowing, harvesting and machine operation, and family scenes were replaced by worksites.

¹⁵⁶ "Hua Mulan is a legendary figure from ancient China who was originally described in a Chinese poem known as "The Ballad of Mulan." This poem is thought to be based on Lady Fu Hao. In the poem, Hua Mulan takes her aged father's place in the army. She fights for twelve years and gains high merit, but she refuses any reward and retires to her hometown instead." From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hua_Mulan

As the number of women participating in productive social labor increased, the corresponding evaluation and reward mechanisms also improved gradually. In 1960, the All-China Women's Federation decided to commend 10,000 women and woman-dominant labor collectives for outstanding contributions in various fields in the 50th anniversary of the International Working Women's Day (March 8) and give them the honorary title of "*sanba hongqi shou (three eight red banner hand)*."¹⁵⁷ After that, *sanba hongqi shou* was not only an honor but also an example for women to learn and strive for. As an affirmation of women's political and social identities, the title continues to this day. It indicates, to some extent, that since the 1950s gender construction in New China has become an important component of modern national state construction.

If *sanba hongqi shou* still retained an emphasis on the female gender or implied the differential treatment of male labor models to some extent, the title of "iron girl," begun in 1963, tried to eliminate the different standards between genders.¹⁵⁸ The "iron girl" was inseparable from what Mao Zedong said, "times have changed, men and women are the same. Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can achieve as well."

The title "iron girl" was intended to commend the indomitable and brave spirit shown by

¹⁵⁷ From Tian, Guang. *Chinese-Canadians, Canadian-Chinese: Coping and Adapting in North America*. Edwin Mellen Press, 1999., page 161: the Chinese *sanba* means March 8, which is the International Women's Day, *hongqi shou* (red banner hand) refers to the model worker who has been recognized by government, *sanba hongqi shou* means the government recognized female model worker.

¹⁵⁸ From Jin Yihong, "The Dazhai Iron Girl brigade came into being in 1963 during an enormous flood; the brigade first appeared as a model production squad that could bear any hardship and shoulder heavy burdens with iron-like shoulders. The brigade did not intend to contend with men, nor did it have any inclination to challenge the traditional gendered division of labour. After 1964, however, when Mao Zedong called on the nation to learn mobilisation techniques from Dazhai, the Dazhai brigade was no longer simply an advanced model in agriculture. It had turned into the cradle of all sorts of advanced experiences to facilitate different political movements – 'whatever experience you want, they got it'. "More information about Iron Girls, see Jin Yihong's "Rethinking the 'Iron Girls': Gender and labor in China during the Cultural Revolution." *Sociological Studies* 1 (2006): 008.

women in industrial production and construction. The title became the most influential gender sign in the period of the Great Cultural Revolution that began in 1966. The women's movement before 1966 and the gender construction of women in New China sowed the seeds of the disappearance of female gender role characteristics in the Great Cultural Revolution.

3. The Ballet *The White-Haired Girl* and the Great Cultural Revolution

As I mentioned before, in the adaptation of *The White-Haired Girl*, Xi'er's image changed from getting pregnant due to the rape in the original version into resisting to the end in the ballet. The change aimed to preserve Xi'er's purity, but in one sense it precisely eliminated Xi'er's gender role characteristics to make her the representative of the oppressed class. The final version of the change, the ballet *The White-Haired Girl*, became one of the eight revolutionary model operas in the period of the Great Cultural Revolution. The Great Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 had an indelible and profound influence on China's female-gender construction.

In 1965, after the national economy recovered and reached certain milestones, Mao Zedong thought the principal contradiction in China was the class struggle and believed a lot of capitalist representatives had sneaked into the CCP, the government, the armies and the cultural circles, so a class struggle was necessary. "Following the outline of class struggle" became the primary theoretical basis of the Great Cultural Revolution. In this Revolution, everyone had to transform personal emotions into collective emotions to form a society wherein the class was superior to the individual. Against this historical

background, gender, just like anything else in the period, was a tool to serve the “class struggle.” In this circumstance, the ballet *The White-Haired Girl* had to be made to serve the Great Cultural Revolution, and the disappearance of the gender characteristics of Xi’er, the heroine in the ballet, was inevitable.

In fact, the female revolutionization and non-gendering phenomenon appeared in not only the ballet but also in the seven other revolutionary model operas and in every form of literary and artistic activities. The heroines in the model operas generally appeared as heroic images. Viewing the female images as shaped in these model operas, it can be said that they generally have staunch and unyielding rebellious spirits, and the characters generally clench their fists and have a universal expression of knitted brows as if they are fearless heroines. It should be noted that almost none of the heroines experience love, especially in *The White-Haired Girl*, in several adaptations of which Xi’er and Dachun only have the relation of revolutionary comrades. In other model operas, heroines all neglect personal emotions for the revolutionary cause, even the married women whose husbands never appear in the operas.

The female images shaped in the model operas, including the Fang Haizhen in *On the Dock*, the Ke Xiang in *Dujuan Mountain*, the Jiang Shuiying in *Song of the Dragon River*, or the Wu Qinghua in *The Red Detachment of Women*, unmistakably share several important characteristics. Nearly all the heroines have no family, husband or child; they are fully revolutionary women. One scholar pointed out, “In the works, women have no love experience, and their characteristics as the daughter, the wife and the mother are

eliminated, and even their dressing, making up and thoughts are the same as men. The heroines are signs without family or love experience.”¹⁵⁹ The processing mode for female characters in model operas indicates that the dominant ideology emphasized the quality of men and women but neglected the objective reality of gender differences between men and women.

The non-gendering and revolutionized description of women was decided by the social environment and revolutionary situation at that time. From Mao in his *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*: “Revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous.”¹⁶⁰ A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.”¹⁶¹ That is, the revolution was the overwhelming ideology, and both the “refined, leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous,” traditionally masculine qualities, and “writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery,” portraying feminine qualities, were replaced by the violent class struggle of revolution.

The most visual manifestation of the lack of feminine qualities and the disappearance of female gender characteristics is the clothing of women at that time. There is a poem

¹⁵⁹ Peng, Songqiao. Model Opera: A Women Revolution Myth. *Journal of Jiangnan University*, Feb., 2014.

¹⁶⁰ From Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Transcription by the Maoist Documentation Project. Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm#g5. These were the virtues of Confucius, as described by one of his disciples.

¹⁶¹ Transcription by the Maoist Documentation Project. Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm#g5

written by Mao that was popular in China in 1960s and 1970s, and it went something like, “Spirited and attractive, with a five-foot rifle / arriving at the training ground with the first rays of morning sunshine / how magnificently ambitious Chinese women are / they prefer military uniforms to feminine clothes.”¹⁶² The poem shows that the dressing style of women at that time tended to be the military uniform.

American journalist Edgar Snow has been to China a few times. In 1970, he visited China again and motioned the scene he saw in his book, “The day’s theme was production and preparedness: blue and gray uniforms were everywhere...”¹⁶³ “There was more uniformity of dress: blue and gray jackets and trousers, in the winter padded with cotton, for both men and women, with a greater mixture of army or militia khaki and navy pale blue. Except for their red-starred caps and red-barred collar tabs soldiers were indistinguishable from civilians...where nearly all had stored away a silk or woolen garment or two for special occasions, but the street fashion was now proletarian.”¹⁶⁴ He observed the clothing style in the period of Great Cultural Revolution through the eyes of a foreigner. His comments show an image of woman warrior “prefer military uniform to feminine clothes.”

In my opinion, the military uniform here not only represents masculine characteristics, but should be explained by revolutionary ideology; i.e., women should contribute their intelligence and youth to the great revolutionary cause together with men.

¹⁶² Huang, Hui. “Do Not Cry for Me, Confucius: The Reconstruction of Chinese Female Identity During the Cultural Revolution.” *UCLA Center for the Study of Women* (2010).

¹⁶³ Snow, Edgar. *The long revolution*. Vol. 72. New York: Random House, 1972. 5.

¹⁶⁴ Snow, Edgar. *The long revolution*. Vol. 72. New York: Random House, 1972. 23.

Moreover, in my opinion, the most resounding slogan in this period, “The times have changed and women are as good as men,” meant women are as good as men, particularly on the road to revolution. It indicates the needs of revolution have overwhelmed the gender discourse.

In brief, in the Great Cultural Revolution, “following the outline of class struggle,” the grandiose narration of revolutionary ideology and class was advocated, while the individual, family and gender were neglected intentionally or unintentionally. Although New China called for the establishment of a society in which “men and women are equal” and “women can hold up half the sky,” the final society obtained was one that focused on class struggle, national liberation, revolution and production while the family, individual and gender disappeared gradually.

Conclusion

The classic status of The White-Haired Girl began with the folklore of the white-haired girl. After developing from a folk tale and spreading for more than half a century, the white-haired girl returned to the folk tale. Just as the farmers in northern China heard the legend of the white-haired girl in 1930, young people today can perceive the existence of this legend only from occasional bits of information in the media, such as a specific performance of the opera or ballet. Under the influence of the mass-media era and the market economy, The White-Haired Girl, opera or ballet, is no longer known by the whole country. Today, The White-Haired Girl appears more frequently in academic studies.

In modern times, with the emergence of new mass media and the development of a market-oriented economy, not only did the opera The White-Haired Girl change in its development, but so too did many revolutionary classics of the same nature, such as The Red Detachment of Women, The Red Lantern and Shajia River. These titles of the eight revolutionary model operas mentioned before were rearranged into TV plays. Most of the plays tell revolutionary stories and all have added some romantic elements (without exception) and put particular focus on the love between men and women and the fate of women. Thus, it can be seen that modern people's emotional structure and aesthetic appreciation have changed a lot, and the state centering on the development of a national state has also changed. Plays are more inclined to describe the personal emotions and development of women's fate and are more concerned about the independent personality

of women.

The development of market economy and mass media in the new period along with the effects of the establishment of a national state on *The White-Haired Girl* since the 19th century both lead to a conclusion that the gender issue does not exist independently. The conclusion is the establishment and development of a national state plays an important role in the development of *The White-Haired Girl*, but it should be admitted that in a concrete issue, any conclusion may have some deviations, which should not be ignored.

One should note that the gender issue is not self-existent; instead, it is an aggregation connected with social institution, ideology and cultural traditions, including manners and customs rather than an independent existence.

For example, it is believed that women held no political position in history, but they, especially aristocratic women, enjoyed a relatively high social status during the Qin and Han dynasties. The empress dowager's intervention in state affairs was a great feature of the Han dynasty. Women of different classes enjoyed different societal rights during different times. Therefore, the discussion of women's liberation during the May Fourth Movement involved the issue of class. Regarding political participation, the number of people who passed the imperial examinations, though having peaked in the period under the reign of the Qianlong and Jiaqing emperors of the Qing dynasty, accounted for no more than one percent of the population. It was true that women had no right to take the imperial examinations, but meanwhile very few men could participate in the management

of state affairs.

In history, men worked outside while women stayed at home, economically dependent on marriage and family, which was the root cause of women's servitude. However, literature of the Tang dynasty suggests that some housemistresses, either widows or single women, paid taxes and their economic independence was acknowledged by their groups and the local government. Thus, the divide between outside and inside was not insurmountable. In addition, with the economic development after the mid-Ming dynasty, women played an increasingly important role in social and economic life. During the 18th century Qing dynasty, women actually surpassed men economically in many areas.

Numerous examples showed that women were culturally enslaved and oppressed, but these issues could not be discussed without taking the specific social and historical contexts into consideration. Take chastity preservation, for instance. The government of the Ming dynasty advocated widows' preservation of chastity, but the lack of sources of livelihood usually forced widows to remarry, and the relatives, either of the widows or their husbands, often required the remarriage. Many Manchu widows could preserve chastity in the Qing dynasty because the Eight Banners system guaranteed their livelihoods. This issue was complex not only due to the economic factor, but also because of the family emotion and the physiological needs of the female.

Women's inferiority and being oppressed in history could not be denied by these individual cases. With respect to the long history, these cases make us note that the

gender problem wasn't a single existence but an aggregation. Therefore, the gender issue should be analyzed and explored in the specific historical context.

Besides, the paper can also make an in-depth exploration on some other topics, First of all, what is the road of Chinese women's liberation like? In the historical and modern development, in what way does the state intervene or affect the liberation of Chinese women? Secondly, what are the national influences on the intervention mechanism for women's liberation? What are the shortcomings of the women's liberation from top to bottom? Again, whether the top-down women's liberation conducted by Chinese government belongs to the category of state feminism? From Mayfair Yang, "The term state feminism has been applied to Scandinavia and Egypt in the 1960s to refer to a system of state support of women that includes employing women in the state sector, making women's reproduction a public rather than a private concern, and instituting progressive state laws that guarantee women's equality with men."¹⁶⁵ Scholars, as represented by Wang Zheng, applied it to the study of Chinese women policies, to discuss "the top-down women's development strategies and policies initiated by male politicians."¹⁶⁶ Third, what kind of attitude contemporary Chinese women should adopt for Western feminism? Whether Chinese Women can imitate or follow the path taken by Western women? Is there a common process for all women's movements? Do they need

¹⁶⁵ Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. "From gender erasure to gender difference: State feminism, consumer sexuality, and women's public sphere in China." *Spaces of their own: Women's public sphere in transnational China* (1999): 35-67.

¹⁶⁶ Zheng, Wang. "'State Feminism'? Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China." *Feminist Studies* (2005): 519-551.

to achieve a universal status? Is there a universal feminism?

In short, *The White-Haired Girl* was constantly retold throughout the 20th century. It has a very long history and has made a great impact. As Meng Yue says, “In fact, in those classic revolutionary stories spread in all walks of life, men and women, the old and the young, in the mainland cities and villages in the 20th century, the most widely circulated and the most widely-known is White-haired Girl.” The development history of *The White-Haired Girl* also mirrors the development history of the Chinese women’s emancipation movement, from the end of the 19th century to the late 20th century. Despite its many limitations, the Chinese women’s emancipation movement has been incomparable and effective.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hong, Fan. *Footbinding Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China*. Routledge, 2013.

Eberhard, Wolfram, ed. *Folktales of China*. Vol. 2. University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Duara, Prasenjit. *Rescuing history from the nation: Questioning narratives of modern China*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.

McBride, Dorothy E., and Amy G. Mazur. *The politics of state feminism: Innovation in comparative research*. Temple University Press, 2010.

Zhong, Xueping, Zheng Wang, and Bai Di, eds. *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*. Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Rofel, Lisa. *Other modernities: Gendered yearnings in China after socialism*. Univ of California Press, 1999.

Judd, Ellen R. *The Chinese women's movement between state and market*. Stanford University Press, 2002.

Croll, Elisabeth. *Feminism and Socialism in China (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge, 2013.

Barlow, Tani E. *The question of women in Chinese feminism*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Edwards, Louise P. *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China*. Stanford University Press, 2008.

Teng, Ssu-yü. *China's response to the West: a documentary survey, 1839-1923*. Harvard University Press, 1979.

Belden, Jack, and Owen Lattimore. *China shakes the world*. NY: Monthly Review Press, 1970.

Brandt, Conrad, Benjamin Isadore Schwartz, and John King Fairbank. *A documentary history of Chinese communism*. Harvard University Press, 1952.

Hershatter, Gail. *Women in China's long twentieth century*. Univ of California Press,

2007.

Selden, Mark. *The Yen'an way in revolutionary China*. Vol. 62. Harvard Univ Pr, 1971.

Wang, Zheng. *Women in the Chinese enlightenment: Oral and textual histories*. Univ of California Press, 1999.

Eberhard, Wolfram. *Chinese fairy tales and folk tales*. Folcroft Library Editions, 1937.

Ko, Dorothy, Zheng Wang, and Wang Zheng, eds. *Translating feminisms in China*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

Johnson, Kay Ann. *Women, the family, and peasant revolution in China*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

McDougall, Bonnie S., and Zedong Mao. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an conference on literature and art": a translation of the 1943 text with commentary*. No. 39. Center for Chinese Studies, The University, 1980.

De Bary, William Theodore, ed. *Sources of East Asian Tradition: Premodern Asia*. Vol. 1. Columbia University Press, 2008.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso Books, 2006.

Liu, Jianmei. "Revolution Plus Love: Literary History." *Women's Bodies, and Thematic Repetition in Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

Gilmartin, Christina K., ed. *Engendering China: women, culture, and the state*. Vol. 10. Harvard University Press, 1994.

Mann, Susan. *Precious records: Women in China's long eighteenth century*. Stanford University Press, 1997.

Liu, Lydia He, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko, eds. *The birth of Chinese feminism: Essential texts in transnational theory*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

Huang, Ray. *China: A macro history*. ME Sharpe, 1997.

McBride, Dorothy E., and Amy G. Mazur. "The politics of state feminism: Innovation in

comparative research." (2010).

Cahill, Suzanne. "Performers and female Taoist adepts: Hsi Wang Mu as the patron deity of women in medieval China." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1986): 155-168.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest*. Routledge, 2013.

Ko, Dorothy, and Romeyn Taylor. "Teachers of the inner chambers: Women and culture in seventeenth-century China." *History: Reviews of New Books* 24.1 (1995): 41-42.

Judd, Ellen R. *The Chinese women's movement between state and market*. Stanford University Press, 2002.

Andors, Phyllis. *The unfinished liberation of Chinese women, 1949-1980*. Indiana Univ Pr, 1983.

Wang, Zheng. *Women in the Chinese enlightenment: Oral and textual histories*. Univ of California Press, 1999.

Croll, Elisabeth. *Feminism and Socialism in China (Routledge Revivals)*. Routledge, 2013.

Zito, Angela, and Tani E. Barlow, eds. *Body, subject, and power in China*. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Snow, Edgar. *Long Revolution*. Vintage Books USA, 1973.

Duara, Prasenjit. *The global and regional in China's nation-formation*. Routledge, 2008.

Edwards, Louise P. *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China*. Stanford University Press, 2008.

Gilmartin, Christina K., ed. *Engendering China: women, culture, and the state*. Vol. 10. Harvard University Press, 1994.

Hsiao, Tso-liang. *Power Relations Within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934: The Chinese Documents*. Vol. 2. University of Washington Press, 1961.

Meng Jiangnü Brings Down the Great Wall: Ten Versions of a Chinese Legend.

University of Washington Press, 2011.

Jackal, Patricia Stranahan. "Changes in policy for Yanan women, 1935-1947." *Modern China* (1981): 83-112.

Jia, Jinhua, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao, eds. *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity, and Body*. SUNY Press, 2014.

Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford University Press, 2007.

Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. University of Texas Press, 2010.

Qian, Nanxiu, Grace S. Fong, and Richard Joseph Smith, eds. *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China*. Vol. 16. Brill, 2008.

Stranahan, Patricia. *Yan'an women and the communist party*. No. 26. Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley Center for Chinese Studies, 1983.

Strong, Anna Louise. *The Chinese Conquer China*. Doubleday, 1949.

Teng, Ssu-yü. *China's response to the West: a documentary survey, 1839-1923*. Harvard University Press, 1979.

Johnson, Kay Ann. *Women, the family, and peasant revolution in China*. University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Roberts, Rosemary A. *Maoist model theatre: The semiotics of gender and sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)*. Vol. 2. Brill, 2010.

Lv, Meiyi and Zheng, Yongfu. *The Chinese Women's Movement, 1840-1921*. Henan, Henan People's Press, 1990.

Wang, Zheng. *Gender and China's Modernity*. Tianjin, Tianjin Renmin Press, 2004.