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Yan'an Women and the Communist Party

Patricia Stranahan



INSTITUTE OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

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Map*facing page 1*

This study of women is dedicated to the women I most admire

Joan Coale

Emma Jackal

Adele Rickett

and, especially,
my mother

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SHAANXI-GANSU-NINGXIA BORDER REGION

- Designated area
- Provincial boundary
- ⋯ Great Wall
- Capital

0 50 KM



I

Introduction

During the course of the Chinese revolution, Communist party leaders have sought to replace the traditional political and economic system with a socialist one. To achieve that goal, they have worked to win the support of the people by implementing programs that would benefit the majority while, at the same time, move society toward socialism. This difficult task has created ongoing conflicts between ideology and reality. Until ideology is revised to reflect the actual situation, reality determines the formulation and implementation of programs. The need to solve crises supplants long-term revolutionary goals. Yet even when revolution takes second place to survival it does not mean that the end is forgotten; rather, it often continues to be pursued within the framework of meeting immediate needs. Such was the case for Yan'an women.

Yan'an was the capital city of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, an area covering parts of the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia, governed by the Chinese Communist party (CCP) from 1935 until 1947. The twelve years the Central Committee spent there were unique in the party's history because they provided the only opportunity the leadership had up to that time to run a stable government in one central location relatively undisturbed by outside forces. These were not entirely years of peace and harmony, but they did offer a respite during which party leaders could experiment with social and economic policy and further define their revolutionary ideology.

Although the other areas the party held before, during, and after the anti-Japanese war (1937–1945) played critical roles in the formation of party ideology and programs, none rivaled the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region in importance.¹ In this barren and desolate area, far removed from

¹ Some scholars, among them Carl Dorris, believe that Yan'an should not be considered the most important area under party control during the anti-Japanese war. Dorris argues that strategies and methods for mass mobilization were developed in the Shaan-Gan-Ning

the pulse of China, the Central Committee set up a revolutionary workshop. There it developed the theories of government and policy that the party used to make radical changes in China's social, economic, and political structure after 1949. There, too, many of the ideological principles later categorized as Maoist and destined to make major contributions to social, economic, and educational life in the People's Republic first emerged. But even more remarkable than these accomplishments, the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region was and continues to be important because it symbolizes to the Chinese people revolutionary determination at its highest level.

The Yan'an period, therefore, left a threefold legacy. It was a time of almost mythological significance, a time of contemplation and experimentation, a time whose lessons were used in the years ahead. Nevertheless, although the broader implications of the era have provoked much discussion and argument, few scholars have studied specific policies hammered out in this revolutionary workshop. By ignoring the details of how the party and government developed and carried out programs to transform life in the Border Region, many scholars have failed to determine adequately how the Communist party won the support of the people, and how later policy evolved from foundations laid in Yan'an.

Of course, a detailed study runs the risk of becoming so convoluted that it provides no additional information on the crucial issues of a time or place. Furthermore, its very narrowness often limits comprehensible answers to questions raised. One way to avoid this is to focus on a specific problem in a broader context: here, policy for women. A study of this kind is appealing not only because the difficulties of raising the status of women in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region were manifold but also because it is an excellent case study of how policy is formulated.

Problems of women have been one of the central issues of the communist movement since its inception in 1921. In principle, party leaders believed that equality for women was crucial to their goal of building a communist state. Practically, they viewed women as a vast

Border Region because it was the seat of government, but he insists that the area was not typical of the other areas in North China governed by the Communist party and did not have the same problems as those areas behind enemy lines. Rather, Yan'an benefitted from the experiments and policy developments made in other North China bases. The best example of this is the Rectification Movement of 1942-1944, which sought to put into practice mass line, a concept that, in Dorris' opinion, grew out of the experience of other base areas. He believes that rectification was imperative in Yan'an where commandism and bureaucratism had become so strong that cadres saw no need to win over the peasants. See Dorris, "Peasant Mobilization in North China and the Origins of Yen'an Communism," p. 719.

reservoir of support for the revolution because they were among those who could benefit the most from it. Consequently, any study of policy must also look closely at the role of women in the revolution during the critical Yan'an years.

Examining the relationship between ideological goals and policy in action throws additional light on the conflict between theory and practice that has plagued the Chinese Communist party throughout its history. Mao Zedong summed up the problem well in his 1937 essay "On Practice" when he said: "But generally speaking, whether in the practice of changing nature or of changing society, men's original ideas, theories, plans or programmes are seldom realized without any alteration.... That is to say, it does happen that the original ideas, theories, plans or programmes fail to correspond with reality either in whole or in part, and are wholly or partially incorrect."² Nowhere are his words more applicable than regarding policy toward women in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region between 1937 and 1947. Even though party leaders there followed what they believed to be the Marxist line that women would achieve equality by working in production, actual policy rarely adhered to this ideal but was reshaped by the social and economic needs of the area.

It was virtually impossible to implement a policy based on accepted Marxist doctrine in Yan'an. To be successful any policy (based, however loosely, on ideological guidelines) had to appeal to men and women steeped in traditionalism. It had not only to result in desired goals, but also to conform to the region's economic conditions and local customs. Moreover, policy had to work in a time and place where revolutionary transformation was secondary to survival. Coercion was out of the question, so was class, so was equality for that matter.

Neither nationalism nor the prospect of socialism had much appeal to the backward and uneducated women of Yan'an. Because this was the era of the United Front, when Communist party leaders called upon all strata of society to join in the fight against the Japanese, cadres could not even play upon class tension in their quest for support. The often bitter class struggle that characterized the revolution in the late 1940s and early 1950s did not exist on any large scale in Yan'an until after the anti-Japanese war. In fact, throughout the Yan'an period class played only a minor role in policy regarding women, and then only after 1945.

The prize offered to women for participating in party programs was never full equality; it was a better life. For women who had spent their whole lives in poverty and despair and who foresaw nothing better for

² Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], "On Practice," *Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 305-306.

their children, this was often reward enough. Cadres worked to generate support by telling women that if they participated in the social and economic changes underway, they would better their own lives and the lives of their families, as well as life in their villages in general. It was not a matter of being for or against the revolution, or one of common interest. In the age of New Democracy, when the state promised not to “to forbid the development of such capitalist production as does not ‘dominate the livelihood of the people,’” it was a question of self-interest.³ When women worked to raise their own standards of living, cadres argued, they would be contributing to the advancement of all society. The goal was not to make women equal to men but to raise their status and to gain better treatment for them in a society moving slowly toward socialism.

Interestingly, during the Yan’an period party theoreticians formulating policy concerning women appeared to have in mind not revolutionary transformation, but only survival. They revised policy when conditions demanded, then usually only in response to a crisis. Any continuity appeared to be coincidental. It is easy, therefore, to argue that women were manipulated for ends appropriate at the moment—defeating the Japanese, achieving economic self-sufficiency, or preparing for the civil war—without regard to raising their position in society. But this was not the case; there was a deliberate pattern in policy. Each revision expanded the role of women, taking them from a stage in which their problems were segregated from those of the rest of society, to one of partial integration in which they played constructive roles within the family economic unit, to a third one of full integration in which, if everything had worked as planned, women were to work not only with other women but with men outside their families to solve common problems.

This study examines the development of policy concerning women and the effect of that policy on Yan’an women. After a brief summary of the ideas and experiences party leaders brought with them to the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, it will trace the evolution of policy by examining the three stages of policy, looking specifically at what policy emphasized at that time, why it was revised, and what conditions brought about change. Although the study encompasses only one part of life during this crucial transitional period, its implications are broad. It is a tightly focused example showing why the Yan’an era—a period of growing party sophistication, real gains, and remaining ambiguities—means what it

³ Mao, “On New Democracy,” *Selected Works*, vol. 2, p. 353.

does in the history of the Chinese Communist party.

A Note on Sources

Sources for a study of policy on women vary in their reliability and must be used carefully; only a few provide the kind of information necessary to arrive at verifiable conclusions. Chinese materials for the period fall into five categories. The first is observations by sympathetic Chinese journalists who visited the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region during the war. These general, often biased, impressions are useful only as supplemental materials. Collections of articles and stories prepared by the All China Democratic Women's Federation in the late 1940s and early 1950s comprise the second group. Because they were compiled after the Central Committee left Yan'an, these, too, must be used cautiously. The same can be said about the third category: collections of documents pertaining to women, also published after the Yan'an period. Such collections usually contain only ideological statements on how policy makers wanted women to achieve equality and present a stereotyped picture of women reaching equality through production. The fourth category is short pamphlets of approximately 100 pages published in Yan'an explaining policy. Although only a few are relevant to this study, these are good, and I have relied on two in particular: *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu di minzhong yundong* [Mass movement in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region] and *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu minjian fangzhiye* [The Border Region's popular spinning industry].⁴ These are more formal surveys with facts and figures that, in many cases, can be checked against materials found elsewhere.

In addition, there are the numerous travelogues and firsthand observations written by foreigners who visited or lived in that part of China from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the anti-Japanese war. Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China*, Gunther Stein's *The Challenge of Red China*, and John Service's reports to the State Department are among the more famous.⁵ These are valuable to understanding life in the Shaanxi area both before and during the Yan'an period, and are superior to comparable Chinese materials. But, while they provide rich detail about life during the period, none are substantive social

⁴ Lu Mang, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu di minzhong yundong*; Luo Qiong, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu minjian fangzhiye*.

⁵ See Joseph W. Esherick, ed., *Lost Chance in China*, for the dispatches of John Service.

or economic studies. Furthermore, they often contain their own biases.

The fifth category of Chinese materials and the best material for a study of policy concerning women is found in the *Jiefang ribao* [Liberation daily, hereafter *JFRB*], the region's daily newspaper from 1941 to 1947. As the party's major organ, it provided the most detailed and systematic information on what took place in the area. Gunther Stein, the American journalist who visited Yan'an in the mid-1940s, described the *JFRB* as "more than a newspaper in the ordinary sense. It is the official gazette and the authoritative tutor of the cadres in government, party and army organizations all over Communist-controlled China."⁶ He went on to compare it with newspapers in other areas: "The *Liberation Daily* seems to me an incomparably better and more factual paper than any of the dozen dailies in Chungking [Chongqing] which are so dependent upon the materials of the government-owned *Central News Agency* and so strictly censored in their editorials and their individual reporting that they are almost uniform in their insipid contents and their colorless character."⁷

Stein's assessment of the *JFRB* is a good one. Although it was party-owned and controlled, and the staff were party members or loyalists, the *JFRB* was not a restatement of official policy. The newspaper was, rather, a forum for discussion on what constituted good policy and how it should be carried out. In addition, it provided an opportunity for people to air their complaints about conditions in the Border Region. Within its limits, and compared with later publications, it was a remarkably frank and forthright document.

Several reasons account for this openness. The *JFRB* was intended to be a means of communication among party and government people, even though nonofficial people in all the base areas read it. It was not deliberately kept out of the hands of the masses, but its 2,000–2,500-character vocabulary was too difficult for most people. For less sophisticated readers, the government published a simpler newspaper with a 1,000-character vocabulary.⁸ Furthermore, because the Border Region suffered from a severe paper shortage—often resorting to paper made from grass—and also because the area had only one printing press, circulation had to be restricted. At most only 7,600 copies circulated at any one time, and most of these were within a twenty-mile radius of Yan'an city. The scarcity of paper made the *JFRB* expensive to print, forcing the government to subsidize it heavily.⁹

⁶ Stein, p. 226.

⁷ Ibid., p. 228.

⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

⁹ Claire and William Band, *Two Years with the Chinese Communists*, p. 256.

Originally published at ten-day intervals, the *JFRB* became a daily in May 1941 and continued that way until it ceased publication in February 1947 as the Guomindang army approached Yan'an. Although many of its articles were signed, a complete list of editors and staff never appeared. We do know that the paper had several editors during its lifetime. One was the woman writer Ding Ling; another was Bo Gu, a leader of the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks, director of the New China News Agency, and a leading party theoretician until the Rectification Movement of 1942–1944. He served as editor-in-chief for most of the Yan'an period.

The newspaper actively supported all Border regionwide campaigns, but it had one prevailing reason for its existence. The editorial in the first edition on May 16, 1941, stated it clearly: "To unite the whole nation to fight and defeat Japanese imperialism is, in a word, sufficient. This is the general line of the Chinese Communist party, and it is also, then, the mission of the newspaper." Indeed, until the war ended, it was a rare day when war news either from Europe or Asia did not dominate the front page. Occasionally, some special topic took over the entire front page, or even an entire issue. This might be the commemoration of an important date such as the 1911 Revolution, Sun Yat-sen's birthday, or International Women's Day; an event that affected the entire Border Region, such as elections, land reform, or the Great Production Drive; or a report of the proceedings of an important Central Committee meeting or a major gathering of people of the region.

Articles on the remaining three pages dealt with a variety of topics, many of which are important to a study of social change. Education, health care, youth, women, village life, and cooperatives were among the many subjects written about in these pages. Page four regularly contained sections devoted to topics ranging from youth, to women, to health, to the enemy, alternating weekly. Many essays and serialized short stories appeared also. Two of the most revealing features were letters to the editors and a question-and-answer section in which readers wrote expressing their opinions or asking for advice. These provide an interesting picture of everyday life in the Border Region and of topics of particular concern to readers.

Yet, despite the richness of its materials, the *JFRB* must be approached cautiously. Because the party controlled the newspaper, information from it cannot be used to demonstrate what actual changes took place. The researcher must be careful not to mistake the occasional propaganda story for a factual report. The *JFRB* editors appear to have made up stories occasionally to illustrate certain points of policy or to teach cadres how to do things (e.g., the two articles cited in chapter two).

These stereotyped articles are not difficult to identify, and even though they might not be literally true, they can be useful in identifying the major concerns of the period.

If used with the above restrictions in mind, the *JFRB* provides the best source of material available for a study of policy concerning women. Articles shed considerable light on the formation of policy, how cadres and citizens perceived it, and how it was implemented. Although it has biases, the newspaper is the closest thing we have to a daily record of the Yan'an period; from it we can reconstruct a fairly accurate picture of what life in the Border Region was like.

Let us now turn to policy concerning women.

II

Yan'an Heritage

Developing a policy for Yan'an women that was acceptable to the population, compatible with ideological goals and, most importantly, workable in that particular time and place was no easy task. Success required not only an understanding of the special conditions of the area, but also some knowledge of Marxist theory on female equality and a certain amount of practical experience. Therefore, if we are to understand why party policy makers did what they did between 1937 and 1947 we must look first at their possible theoretical background and exposure to the problems of women during the pre-Yan'an years. The conditions that greeted the Central Committee upon their arrival in North Shaanxi will be left to the next chapter. Here, we will concern ourselves only with ideas that party leaders may have brought with them.

Theoretical Background

Documenting the practical experience of men and women who became party leaders is easier than discussing background in theory because, although much is known about the early communist movement for female equality, no definitive statement on the women's issue appeared before the Yan'an period. Moreover, no record exists of what party leaders read of Marxist writings on women. Given the problems of survival they faced in the 1920s and early 1930s, it is doubtful they had much time for theoretical thought on any subject.

One way to assess the points that future party policy makers assimilated from Marxist thinkers is to look at what they emphasized in their policy statements. Liberating women through production has been the cornerstone of all Chinese Communist party policy and the most important concept party leaders borrowed. In one form or another it was the only route to equality offered from the 1920s through the Yan'an period.

Theoreticians took what they believed to be the orthodox Marxist position on female liberation from Frederick Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*. In it Engels wrote: "[T]o emancipate woman and make her the equal of man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time."¹ He believed women would attain equality only when the means of production reverted from private to common ownership and household management became public. When most of their household duties were taken over by outside groups, women would be free to work in wage labor.

The Chinese found further explanation on the woman question from Lenin, who agreed with Engels that women could achieve true equality only under a socialist system. Like Engels, Lenin saw production as the answer to women's emancipation. According to Lenin, women were crushed by the drudgery of housework and would find relief under socialism, where they were free to work in wage labor.² He summed up his thoughts in "The Task of the Working Women's Movement in the Soviet Republic": "Owing to her work in the house, the woman is still in a different position. To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialized and for women to participate in common productive labor. Then women will occupy the same position as men."³

Under Lenin's direction, initial Bolshevik legislation gave women equal employment rights with men and the right to equal pay for equal

¹ Frederick Engels, *Origins of the Family*, p. 148. The fact that party theoreticians based their policies for women on Engels' and Lenin's ideas leads us to believe that Chinese Communist party leaders were familiar with their works.

Cheng Hsueh-chia found that before the October Revolution most Chinese intellectuals who could not read French, German, or English read Marx and Engels in Japanese. When Chinese intellectuals began to translate Marx after the October Revolution they used the Japanese translation, which made for numerous inaccuracies. A translation of Engels' *Origins of the Family* appeared in 1929. Cheng argues that the translations that appeared after 1930 were more accurate than the pre-1930 ones because translators understood the concepts of Marx better and were aware of developments in the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin. There is no record of when Lenin's writings on women were translated into Chinese. See Cheng, "A Brief Account of the Introduction of Karl Marx's Works into China," pp. 8-10.

² V.I. Lenin, "Speeches at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women," *Collected Works*, vol. 28, pp. 180-182.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 30, p. 43.

work. These guarantees were in addition to the other rights they received: the right to vote, to marry freely, to divorce, and to take paid maternity leaves.⁴ This legislation, aimed at raising the status of women, undermined the strength of the family, which was still a vital economic unit. During the 1930s, under Joseph Stalin, legislation concerning women became more conservative as policy makers recognized the positive role of the family in society and adjusted policy to keep changes in the rights accorded to women from unduly disrupting the family unit.⁵

Party leaders also borrowed from Engels his view on the class position of women. Engels discussed class only briefly when he assigned women to the proletariat, reasoning that because men controlled the means of production, they were part of the bourgeoisie; because women worked for men, women were part of the proletariat.⁶ Engels never elaborated the point further, and no other Marxist philosopher has taken it up. As a result, the question of class stand remains ambiguous.

Phyllis Andors, in discussing the situation in China in the 1960s, argues that Marxist philosophers have never adequately explained the class women as a group occupy because they have always viewed women as a revolutionary force. She believes that theoreticians, thinking that class oppression causes sexual oppression, assume that when classes are eradicated under socialism, women are emancipated. Liberation, then, becomes a product of socialism and not a part of its construction. For these reasons, she concludes, Marxist thinkers have never explored the relationship between class and sex in a systematic way.⁷

Andors' assessment is simplistic; but certainly from the outset of the Chinese communist movement, the theoretical ambiguity regarding the class status of women caused problems for party leaders. For example, during the United Front (1937–1941) Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region cadres organized associations whose purpose was to raise the consciousness of women to unite them against the common enemies: the Japanese and the traditional system. These multi-class associations worked well until the mid-1940s, when class became important during the campaigns for land reform and for the reduction of rent and interest. At that time, a woman's class background once again mattered.⁸

⁴ William M. Mandel, *Soviet Women*, p. 55.

⁵ Norton T. Dodge, *Women in the Soviet Economy, Their Role in Economic, Scientific, and Technical Development*, p. 2.

⁶ Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, cited in Paul Chao, *Women under Communism*, p. 17.

⁷ Phyllis Andors, "Politics of Chinese Development: The Case of Women, 1960–1966," p. 119.

⁸ In their book *Revolution in a Chinese Village: Ten Mile Inn*, David and Isabel Crook cite one example of how the village they studied in Taihang subregion dealt with the class prob-

In contrast was the policy for dealing with the class of women in the earlier Jiangxi soviet (1931–1934). According to the 1931 Land Law, even though the patriarchal family system had discriminated against all women, women of the exploiting classes were not considered among the exploited masses. That the wife of a rich peasant or a landlord had never held title to land did not mean she had not enjoyed the benefits of that holding. There was, of course, the problem of women who changed class when they married. Government leaders addressed this problem in “Decisions concerning some problems arising from the agrarian struggle.” They ruled that women who had married before the revolution had the class status of their husband’s family if they had lived the life appropriate to that class for any length of time. In the case of women who married after the revolution, poor women retained their status even if they married into a landlord family. Women of landlord families who married into poor families lost their landlord status only if they engaged in labor—including domestic labor—for five years.⁹ No such document was found for the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region.

The Chinese Communist party leaders took what they understood from Engels’ and Lenin’s views on production and Engels’ ideas on class stand and used them to form the theoretical basis for policy concerning women. But these men also understood the importance of historical reality and the role it played in shaping the course of the revolution. Therefore, although freeing women to work in wage labor remained the consistent theoretical ideal throughout the party’s history, actual policy was determined by historical realities such as the Japanese invasion and new democracy.

Mao Zedong, the dominant policy maker in Yan’an, believed that Marxist doctrine alone was not a sufficient basis from which to carry out the revolution. He argued that the circumstances of a given time and place had a direct bearing on the course of the revolution. In his 1940 essay “On New Democracy” Mao wrote, “Chinese communists must fully and properly integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution...in no circumstances can it

lem. There, during the anti-Japanese war, all the women of the village were organized into women’s associations united against what cadres perceived as the enemies of women. When the war ended in the mid-1940s, these things were no longer important; class struggle had come to dominate the peasants’ thinking. Women’s associations composed of women from all classes became meaningless in the class-oriented struggle for political rights and the campaign for double reduction (rent and interest) that took place at that time. Women now belonged to the class of their families. See David and Isabel Crook, p. 104.

⁹ Delia Davin, *Woman-Work*, p. 27.

[Marxism] be applied subjectively as a mere formula. Marxists who make a fetish of formulas are simply playing the fool with Marxism and the Chinese revolution, and there is no room for them in the rank of the Chinese revolution.¹⁰ The first concern of Mao and his associates was solving the problems of the Border Region in order to build a strong and self-sufficient area. Therefore, theoretical plans for liberating women were often disregarded in the urgency of meeting immediate needs. When economic and political priorities changed, policy for women changed.

Because this chapter focuses only on the ideas and experiences that party leaders brought with them to the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, it is not appropriate here to examine specific ideological writings of the Yan'an era. We will look at the influence of those works on the formation of policy for women when revisions in policy are discussed. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that although theory as Engels and Lenin proposed it was not a perfect blueprint for women's liberation, its goal of equality for women was the inspiration for and long-term goal of policy during the decade between 1937 and 1947.

Practical Experience

Devising theory is one thing; applying it successfully is quite another. That requires practical experience with the problems involved. Many policy makers came to Yan'an armed with some experience in working with women. Communist party leaders were as much influenced by the events of the period as they were by Marxist theory. These people had grown up during the 100 Days of Reform (1898), the 1911 Revolution, and the May Fourth Movement when two contending philosophies developed. One argued that equality could be achieved without a revolution, while the other argued that equality was unattainable without a thoroughgoing social, economic, and political revolution. Members of the newly formed Communist party followed the second line and, within a year of its founding in 1921, had developed a policy for women's liberation as part of its revolutionary program. The first philosophy was not abandoned, however; many men and women continued to work for female equality without involving themselves in the Communist revolution.

The concept of female inferiority goes back to the earliest dynasties of China. Regardless of the notable exceptions throughout Chinese history, within traditional society women generally were subordinated to

¹⁰ "On New Democracy," pp. 380–381.

men by both law and custom and had few opportunities to challenge their status. Women occupied a low place in the family hierarchy and were part of a rigid social system that expected obedience to those higher on the social scale.

Most traditional families did not value their daughters as highly as their sons because, even though girls might contribute to the family's livelihood before marriage, their economic ties to the family in most cases were not permanent. Generally, families were unwilling to spend money on education or technical training for their daughters because they would not be able to use their knowledge to enhance the family's position. Lacking an education and denied the right to own property, the majority of women had little choice but to depend upon their families for maintenance. Even if they developed marketable skills, society offered few employment opportunities for them and, in most cases, looked down upon those women who did leave the home to work.¹¹

The dependent position of women was reinforced by the traditional marriage system. According to the custom, parents arranged their children's marriages. Those with sons sought brides of an appropriate class who were healthy, efficient workers, and lacked mental or physical defects. Parents with daughters sought grooms of the same class or better who would be able to support their daughters.

When a girl married, she took her place without allies at the bottom of her husband's family hierarchy. Neither her husband, who in the Confucian tradition obeyed his parents even in action against his wife, nor her parents, whom she was discouraged from seeing for fear they might object if she was mistreated, could offer her much help. To emphasize her status in the home, the family called her a kinship name, her husband's surname, or, more formally, her own surname prefixed by her husband's, but rarely by her given name. Only when she bore a son did her treatment improve; then, she became a full-fledged, but not necessarily equal, member of the family.

This is not to say that women did not exert any power within the family. An older woman who had sons gained a measure of equality with men. Sons established a woman's importance in the family because they made her an ancestress, and therefore as immortal as her husband. Many older women also exercised great power as mothers-in-law. It was not uncommon in traditional China for the mother-in-law to unleash years of

¹¹ In *Daughter of Han* Ida Pruitt tells the story of Ning T'ai-t'ai, who was forced to leave her home first to beg in the streets and then to work as a maid. She supported her children and her husband this way for many years. See Pruitt, *Daughter of Han*.

pent-up tension by treating her daughter-in-law with such mental and physical cruelty that the younger woman committed suicide to escape her tormentor.

Some women did not wait until they were older to exert their influence in the family. In this regard, the noted Chinese intellectual Hu Shih wrote: "No other country can compete with China for the distinction of being a nation of hen-pecked husbands."¹² Although his remark is humorous, it contains an element of truth. If women were to have any control over their lives at all, they had to use whatever means they could.

The discrimination a woman experienced economically and within the family was sanctioned by law. Traditional legal codes afforded women little protection while punishing them severely for offenses against their parents, in-laws, or husbands. Although women had no right to divorce, men could divorce their wives for any one of seven reasons: childlessness, wanton conduct, neglect of husband's parents, talkativeness, theft, inveterate infirmity, and envy. Under only a few circumstances was the woman protected from divorce. If she had no home to return to, or if she and her husband had been poor when they married but had since become rich, the marriage could not be dissolved.¹³

Divorce was not common in traditional China, and it meant disaster for a woman when it did occur. Once divorced, she had no right to her children, who became the responsibility of the husband's family. She could rarely remarry because in the eyes of society she was a "used" woman. Moreover, her own family often refused to take her back because they could not afford to maintain her and did not want to be associated with a woman stigmatized by divorce. Rather than face life as a social outcast, many women committed suicide.

It was not considered proper for a wife to repudiate her husband. If she freely left his home, she was guilty of having run away and was punished accordingly. Because a woman was to remain faithful to her husband for life, an adulterous woman could be divorced automatically or, in some cases, even killed. Like many other traditional customs, faithfulness was a one-sided practice. Men who were wealthy had free reign to seek romantic outlets with prostitutes or concubines.

Although a limited number of educated women and their advocates attempted to better the position of women as early as the 100 Days of Reform in 1898, efforts on their behalf prior to the New Culture and May

¹² Hu Shih, *Chinese Renaissance*, cited in Paul Kwang-yi Chao, "Analysis of Marxist Doctrine of Family with Testing its Validity in Soviet Russia and Communist China," p. 163.

¹³ G. Jamieson, *Chinese Family and Commercial Law*, p. 41.

Fourth movements of 1917 and 1919 were unorganized, individualistic outpourings of emotion in which the women involved were simultaneously trying to bring about social and political reform nationwide and to improve their own status. Their lack of unified goals was one among several reasons why few actual gains were made. Despite their weaknesses, these early efforts were important because the defeats women suffered then laid the foundation for future victories. For the first time, many women realized that as a group they had strength and that their goals were part of a social alternative, not just isolated demands. As a result, some women began to develop a social and political consciousness.

Although the 1911 Revolution produced changes in rhetoric, the real impetus for change came at the time of the May Fourth Movement when the call for a "family revolution" went out. Although progressive intellectuals had no organized program, their demands were clear: a new role for women within the family, sexual equality within society, free association between the sexes, free choice marriage, and reform of the family institution on a Western model. Even though these intellectuals lacked any formal organization, they were sufficiently vocal to draw attention to the need for change in the family.

By the early 1920s many traditional families in urban areas were under strain. Both the new liberal thinking and the increasing industrialization with all its attendant social changes undermined family traditions. This upheaval gave a few progressive, educated women the opportunity to marry whomever they wanted and to pursue careers. In addition, with the expansion of urban industry many women of lower class background went to work in factories. By 1927, for example, 58.7 percent of all factory workers in Shanghai were women.¹⁴

Despite the social and economic changes of the period, urban women made only limited progress toward equality during the 1920s. They were not as secluded as they once had been, and they were able to mingle more freely with men and women outside their own families. If they found their marriages intolerable, they could obtain work outside the home to support themselves. However, most urban women remained subordinate first to their families and then to their husbands. Arranged marriages continued to be the accepted practice.

In the late 1920s the Guomindang government passed legislation guaranteeing women certain rights in areas under its control. The 1930 Law of Kinship Relations dealt with the concept of individual rights for the first time. Although the family remained a patriarchy, equal rights for

¹⁴ Olga Lang, *Chinese Family and Society*, p. 103.

women were recognized at least in theory. In addition, the law stipulated that agreements to marry must be made by the marrying couple themselves and that either husband or wife could obtain a divorce for a number of reasons. The divorced father usually retained custody of the children, but the mother could keep them if they were very young, or if their father had deserted them, or if the father was declared unfit by the court. Perhaps the most important advance the law made toward female equality was the recognition of the woman's right to own property. Under the Nationalist code, the sexes were considered equal, and a woman was free to hold and manage her own property.¹⁵

The revolution in family relationships and the liberalization of legal codes in the 1920s and early 1930s were significant steps forward, but in practice the policies touched only a few women. The crises that pervaded life in the countryside at that time prevented the tangible social and economic advances made in the cities from reaching rural areas. For the most part, peasant families lived in the same manner as their forefathers had.

Before examining early Communist party policy regarding women, we should review briefly the Nationalist government's attempts at rural reform between 1928 and 1937 to understand not only the situation the Communist party leadership faced in Jiangxi and later in the Northwest, but also conditions generally throughout rural China. There is little doubt that the quality of life deteriorated during the first half of the twentieth century. The disruptions caused by foreign intervention, the chaos of warlord fighting, the growth of finance capitalism in the cities, and the depression that struck rural areas between 1931 and 1935 all made life precarious for Chinese peasants.

During the late 1920s a number of groups associated with intellectuals or Protestant missions and connected in some way to the government did attempt to improve conditions in the countryside. The International Commission for the Struggle against Famine, the Movement for Rural Reconstruction (sponsored by some of the preeminent names of the May Fourth Movement), a movement to improve seeds and silkworm breeds, and the Movement for Education of the Masses begun by Beijing teachers all aimed at improving agricultural techniques and the livelihood of the people. These had little lasting effect because they focused solely on technology and finance, and ignored fundamental social and political problems.¹⁶

¹⁵ Marc van der Valk, *An Outline of Modern Chinese Family Law*, pp. 91–111.

¹⁶ Jean Chesneaux et al., *China from the 1911 Revolution to Liberation*, p. 194.

In *Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915–1949* Lucian Bianco argues that the problem was not that the government could not solve the crisis but that it did not want to. Political unification had priority, and in the countryside power depended upon the support of the landlord class. As a result, there was little commitment at top levels to rural reform. A good illustration of this disinterest is the percentage of the national budget allotted to rural reconstruction during the early 1930s. In 1931–1932, 0.2 percent went to help rural areas; in 1933–1934, 0.5 percent; in 1934–1935, 3.9 percent; and in 1935–1936, 3.7 percent. From these and other facts, Bianco concludes that the Guomindang “made no real effort to transform China.”¹⁷

Although he reaches the same conclusion, Lloyd Eastman does not believe that the Guomindang ignored problems in the countryside simply because the leadership did not care. He argues that the predominant factor was a severe depression triggered when China, caught up in the international monetary crisis of the early 1930s, went off the silver standard and changed to a managed currency. The depression brought an already ill rural economy to a critical stage, driving millions of peasants from the land and forcing some landlords, who could not raise enough money from rents to pay taxes, to giving their land away. Eastman observes: “There was probably little that the Nanking government could have done to prevent this economic disaster... [It] can be blamed, however, for exacerbating a bad situation with its inequitable systems of taxes and onerous practices of ad hoc conscriptions and expropriations.”¹⁸ Then like Bianco he concludes, “[T]he Nationalist regime’s demonstrated and continuing administrative ineffectiveness, its emphasis upon urban at the expense of rural matters, and its apparent determination to perpetuate the existing socioeconomic order in the villages, did not portend meaningful improvements in the lives of the masses.”¹⁹

Guomindang leaders were concerned enough about social problems that in 1934 they initiated the New Life Movement in an overt attempt to return to the moral values of Confucianism. Like so much else they attempted, it was a temporary and superficial campaign that could not result in much-needed change. The movement sought to regenerate all

¹⁷ Thomson, *While China Faced West*, cited in Lucien Bianco, *Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1916–1949*, pp. 110, 112. Bianco adds that provincial budgets did allot about one-sixth of their total funds to rural aid but that money came largely from land taxes, which were ultimately extracted from the peasants.

¹⁸ Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927–1937*, pp. 224, 225.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 274–275.

areas of life by endorsing a code of ascetic self-discipline and obedience to the leader. Part of this code was support for the patriarchal family and male supremacy.

Although it had little effect on the progress being made by some urban women, the New Life Movement reinforced the traditional system in the countryside. Uneducated and ignorant of what went on outside their immediate vicinity, the majority of peasant women knew nothing about the advances made by women in the cities and were not aware that any different social patterns existed. In addition, because the peasant family remained the primary economic unit, it retained its rights to exercise authority over those who were dependent upon it. As a result, little change took place in the traditional system as it continued in rural areas. Thus, when the Communist party initiated its program for social change in the Jiangxi soviet and the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region it began almost from scratch.

Even though officially allied with the Guomindang until 1927, the Communist party developed its own policy for women during the 1920s. Its first statement on the issue came a year and a half after the party was established. The proclamation demanded rights for women and announced that a special bureau, headed by a woman named Xiang Jingyu, was being formed to bring women into the party. As bureau head, Xiang was more interested in getting urban working women into the party's labor movement than she was with other feminist issues. Rather than allying with the bourgeois movement for women or working among peasants, she concentrated her energies instead on organizing women workers and planning strikes.

The existence within the party organization of a separate women's department, divorced from other party activities, irritated Xiang Jingyu, who wanted it integrated into other larger concerns of the party. The leadership finally acceded to her wishes in the mid-1920s when they began shifting their emphasis from segregating women to incorporating them into general party activities. This loss of separate identity meant that the movement was no longer identifiably feminist. Concern with feminist issues did not reappear until several years later, when the party shifted its efforts to rural areas.

The failure to organize large numbers of women factory workers and later loss of identity were not the only problems that the policy for women encountered during the early years; others existed as well. Cadres were not trained to handle matters of special concern to women. Even when party officials acknowledged the need to work among the peasants, they did not give cadres any instruction on how to help women improve their status.

The Peasant Movement Training Institute, established as a part of the Guomindang's Peasant Department in Guangzhou in 1924, was the source of cadres destined for the countryside. Although part of the Guomindang bureaucracy, the Institute was controlled by the Communist party (one of its principals was Mao Zedong) and served as the school for the party's rural agitators. Because of the demands of the time, the curriculum was devoted almost entirely to military training and did not include any courses on women's issues.²⁰

Perhaps the most serious problem with policy concerning women, and with the Communist movement as a whole, was the lack of organizing activity among the peasants. The Central Committee had made no real attempt to gain peasant support before 1932, when it fled to Jiangxi to escape the Guomindang reign of terror, although during the early 1920s several individuals had attempted, without the endorsement of the party, to organize peasants. The most famous organizer was Peng Pai, who established the Hailufeng soviet in Guangdong, where the government reallocated land; established an eight-hour day for women and juveniles; and organized associations including a women's union to act as a communications network.

The first important party leader to recognize the revolutionary potential of the peasants was Mao Zedong. In "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan," written in 1927, Mao stated that the success of the revolution depended upon the mobilization of the masses, and from that time on he concentrated his efforts on organizing peasants.²¹ Any prospect for an urban-based revolution ended when the Central Committee moved to Jiangxi in late 1932 or early 1933; the success or failure of the Communist party now rested on peasant support.

Once the party leadership shifted its emphasis to rural areas, the policy of mobilizing women workers in the labor movement became less important. Women factory workers had the same general concerns as men: more pay, better conditions, freedom to organize; but in rural areas women had two overriding concerns: marriage and divorce. Even peasant women who recognized the existence of broader revolutionary goals were primarily concerned with reforming the traditional marriage system and

²⁰ Jane Price, "Women and Leadership in the Chinese Communist Movement, 1921-1945," pp. 19-20. In addition, Price found that very few women even attended the institute. Although records are poor, she found that 2 out of 33 students in the first class, 11 out of 142 in the second, and 7 out of 76 in the fourth were women workers. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹ Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan," *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 27.

granting women divorce rights. They saw their struggle as against husbands and fathers, not landlords. Because of this, work among women once again was separated from the general work of the party.

Although the problems of the countryside were vastly different from those of the city, the work of the party before the arrival of the Central Committee in Jiangxi was not entirely futile. A number of valuable lessons had been learned from the experience within the party, as well as from the accomplishments of the Nationalist government. The Guomindang's legal recognition of women's rights represented one big step forward. Communist party policy makers could build upon the advances made in the Law of Kinship Relations. More importantly, party officials had mastered organizational techniques that would prove invaluable in the years ahead.

In 1928 the Communist army under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Zhu De left its base in Jinggangshan, the area covering the borders of Jiangxi and Hunan where Mao had had his headquarters since 1927, and established a new soviet on the border of Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong provinces. This area served as its central base of operation until 1934, when the army once again fled the Guomindang army. Constant warfare, internal struggles, poor communication, and a hostile population plagued the soviet government throughout the period. Nevertheless, it managed to implement a number of practical social and economic measures. Raising the status of women was one important goal of these policies.

Women had equality with men under all soviet law; but two laws in particular affected their social status, and both of these became models for similar laws formulated later in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. The Soviet Land Law of November 1931 provided for the confiscation of land and its redistribution among hired hands, laborers, and peasants regardless of sex. Party realists knew it was important to carry out land reform as quickly as possible because peasants would not give the government the support it needed unless they had land and saw the prospect of increased production. By giving women their share of land, the soviet leadership acknowledged the legal equality of women. They adhered to the orthodox party line that women would achieve equality by working in production, and in Jiangxi that meant working the land. Party leaders reasoned that if women owned their land, they had the means to gain economic freedom.

There were problems in the Jiangxi law as there would be in future land laws. The problem of class status has already been discussed, but other problems existed as well. For example, the law did not make clear how land was to be distributed. There were two ways to do this. If land were distributed according to the number of people in the family, families

with a large number of old people, children, and women with bound feet, who could not work the land, received more land than they could farm efficiently. In land were distributed according to the amount of labor power a family possessed, families who had members incapable of working would not receive enough land to support themselves. Rather than settling the question, the 1931 law suggests only that in distributing land both factors be considered based on local conditions and in a way favorable to middle and poor peasants.²² Another problem was the ever present one of who controlled the woman's share of land. Without agricultural skills and experience, and living in a society still dominated by men, women had a difficult time exercising control over their own land.

After land reform, party leaders moved on to their next target: the traditional marriage system. No meaningful changes in the marriage law could take place until women had economic independence. In December 1931 the government announced new regulations which, according to the preamble, were founded on three principles: (1) marriage was to be concluded on the basis of free choice now that men and women were economically equal, (2) the interests of women were to be paramount in the case of divorce because women had suffered more under the old system than had men, and (3) careful attention had to be given to the protection of children because they represented the new society's future. As for divorce, either party could obtain one without giving any grounds. Because the law was defined vaguely and, therefore, difficult to implement, it was frequently violated.²³

The government issued a revised marriage law three years later. Differing in several respects from the 1931 regulations, the 1934 law considered men and women who were living together married even if they had not registered with the government. This stipulation was included to protect women who might be left without support if men were not legally bound to maintain their wives. The law also established the acceptable marriage for men at twenty and for women at eighteen. Little is known about the implementation of the law, but we do know that government officials took great pains to make it known that the law was not meant to create trouble between the sexes.²⁴

²² Davin, *Woman-Work*, p. 28 For a more detailed discussion on the distribution of land see Ilpyong J. Kim, *The Politics of Chinese Communism: Kiangsi under the Soviets*, chap. 5.

²³ Hu Chi-hsi, "The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet," pp. 482-484.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 485-487; Davin, *Woman-Work*, pp. 29-30.

Having granted women these fundamental rights, party leaders turned their attention to directing women's energies in the most socially constructive way possible. Clearly, the emphasis the Jiangxi soviet was working in the war effort. But, as would happen in Yan'an, the policy ultimately developed for women was inconsistent and determined largely by expediency, not by a long-term plan to achieve equality.

Because the central focus of the government was the war with the Guomindang, soviet officials urged women to replace their soldier-husbands in production (primarily in agriculture). Justifying this as the way for women to raise their status, cadres organized women for the war effort by forming teams to launder, sew, carry food, and make shoes for the army. In 1933 the soviet government sponsored a campaign to finish 100,000 pairs of shoes for the army before the anniversary of the October Revolution. In addition, women served as nurses, supply carriers, and spies.²⁵ Most of the jobs women were asked to do were extensions of their domestic roles and were not efforts to integrate them into work associated with men, except as temporary replacements. On the other hand, men were not asked to take part in any of the work normally done by women.

There is little information on the extent to which policy concerning women was successful in the Jiangxi soviet. Women's organizations did exist, but although we have records about how they were set up, we know little about what they did. In many areas, these appeared to be sham organizations. Women belonged either to the Committee to Improve Women's Lives, which was appointed from above and served to propagate policy and act as a listening post, or to a Representative Congress of Women Workers and Peasants. Judging from the way they are described in surviving documents, the second group was more important than the first. The representative congresses, made up of delegates who represented fifteen to twenty women, met at the village or district level every three to six months and elected women to serve in county congresses. At all levels, women's representative congresses appear to have been more concerned with the general cause of the soviet than they were with specific demands of women. A list of the topics discussed at the district level congresses in 1933 provides a good illustration. The subjects included enlarging the Red Army, aid to the Red Army, looking after the dependents of Red Army soldiers, learning to plow, and selling jewelry to buy government bonds.²⁶

²⁵ Davin, *Woman-Work*, pp. 23-24; Delia Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," p. 75.

²⁶ Davin, *Woman-Work*, pp. 25-26.

Women also participated in local government. In his investigation of Caixi district (Shanghang county) in Jiangxi province, Mao Zedong found that in 1931 approximately 30 percent of the representatives to the district congresses were women. The proportion rose to approximately 60 percent in 1932 and stayed at that level in 1933. Delia Davin accounts for this rapid rise by the increased number of men away fighting. Nevertheless, she believes that the first number is surprisingly high and argues persuasively that it indicates that people in the soviet accepted women's involvement in public affairs at lower levels.²⁷

Despite these efforts in behalf of women, party leaders could not devote much time in the Jiangxi soviet to developing long-range policies for them or assisting cadres who worked with women. As a result, throughout the period leadership was inconsistent and cadres remained untrained. Policy for women was not a complete failure during this time, however. Party leaders had recognized the fundamental problems of women and had begun to devise means to overcome them. Jiangxi was similar to the area of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region in that both were poor, remote, mountainous areas where male labor predominated and women were more backward than in many other areas of China. Thus, when the leadership of the party reached northern Shaanxi after the Long March, it carried with it ongoing theories, ones that did not always fit reality but ones that laid a foundation upon which party leaders could initiate a new movement to liberate women.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

III

“Attack Our Oppressors” (1937–1941)

Initial Conditions in the Northwest

On October 25, 1935, the first contingent of the battered Red Army arrived in Shaanxi from the Long March. Led by Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and other party officials, the troops sought refuge in the last Communist stronghold in China. They found a desolate and poverty-stricken area ravaged by war and famine, and abandoned by any kind of recognizable government. The devastation the Red Army encountered as it entered Shaanxi was not solely the result of the political, economic, and natural disasters of the early twentieth century; the breakdown of social and other institutions had begun generations before. The upheaval of the early part of the century merely hastened a deteriorating situation.

Shaanxi province, which eventually became the center of the Border Region, had once been the site of major dynasties. But when China's economic and political center shifted to South and Central China during the Song dynasty, the area declined. Ringed on three sides by mountains and lacking its former social and government vitality, the region became increasingly isolated from the rest of China. By the 1930s the province had only a few public roads and just one railroad line.¹

The area of the future Border Region was one of the poorest in China. Although Shaanxi had mineral resources, industry never really developed because the region lacked supplies and adequate transportation. Most of the population eked out a living by farming, but at least 20 percent of these people were unable to grow enough to feed themselves.²

¹ Murata Shirō, “Sen-Gan-Nei sekishoku henku no genjō,” p. 77.

² John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China*, statistics cited in Peter Schran, *Guerrilla Economy: The Development of the Shen-Kan-Ning Border Region, 1937–1945*, p. 37. Schran believes that by combining Buck's information on average farm size with estimates of most frequent yields one can estimate the ability of the natives to feed themselves by growing crops. Schran found that 50 percent of the peasants in Dingbian in the northwest part of

Peter Schran, comparing data on the standard of living for this region with the rest of China (see Table 1), observed that although the consumption of grain was lower in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region than anywhere else in China, it made up more than 93 percent of the total caloric intake of the population, compared with 83 percent elsewhere. Moreover, farmers in other areas were able to retain more than four times as much of their income share for other expenditures than were peasants of the region making up the future Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. From these figures he concludes that "the [Shaan-Gan-Ning] territory was an extraordinarily poor area within China."³

Table 1
Comparison of Non-Grain Expenditures

	China 1929-1933	Shaan-Gan-Ning region 1930-1931
Crop product*	446†	197
Subsidiary income (farm wages)	68.6	58
Total net income	490	238
Grain consumption	220	180
Residual	270	58

*Per capita of farm population

†Kg of grain equivalent

SOURCE: Schran, *Guerrilla Economy*, p. 40.

There are a number of reasons for this poverty. Millet, rye, and soybeans could be grown; but yields were low because of the combination of cold climate, scanty rainfall, and, therefore, easily erodible loess soil. Added to the infertility of the land, the region's meager population and cultural backwardness did little to increase production and made subsistence even more difficult. Furthermore, the numerous natural and manmade disasters that had plagued the region for years prevented the development of mineral resources or more technical production such as textiles.⁴

what became the Border Region and 10 percent of the peasants in Xunyi in the southern part could not feed themselves solely from what they grew. By extension, Schran estimates that at least 20 percent of the population of the Border Region could not feed themselves.

³ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

⁴ Murata, p. 78.

Although landlordism never reached the proportions here that it did elsewhere, it did increase appreciably, especially absentee landlordism, during the famine of 1928–1933, when many peasants had to sell or mortgage their land to get money to pay taxes or buy food. A League of Nations investigation reported: “In the famine of 1930, twenty acres of land could be purchased for three days’ food supply. Making use of this opportunity, the wealthy classes of the province built up large estates, and the owner-cultivators diminished.”⁵ Between 1928 and 1933, for example, the rate of tenancy among poor Shaanxi peasants rose approximately 24 percent.⁶

In addition to their economic problems, both Shaanxi and Gansu were the scenes of constant fighting during the warlord period. By 1925 the provinces were controlled by the “Christian” general Feng Yuxiang, who, while famous for such social reforms as prohibiting prostitution and footbinding for women under twenty, squeezed all possible revenues from the peasants and took village food reserves for his troops.⁷ Tension grew between Feng’s troops and the local populace; in the spring of 1928 the situation exploded as Muslims from Gansu fought the warlord army. By September an estimated 100,000 people had been killed in the fighting.⁸

The most devastating blow to the area was the Northwest Famine, which struck between 1928 and 1933. It covered approximately 340,000 square miles of the Northwest and affected twenty to twenty-five million people in several provinces. The China International Famine Relief Commission estimated that 2,500,000 people, almost one-third of Shaanxi’s population, had died by 1929. Desperate for survival, countless people fled the province or sold members of their families during the famine years—an estimated 400,000 people from Shaanxi alone. Conditions in Gansu became severe enough that incidents of cannibalism were reported. Because of the war with the Muslims, the small number of

⁵ A. Stampar, *The North-western Provinces and Their Possibilities of Development*, cited in Mark Selden, *The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China*, p. 7.

⁶ Hsü Yung-ying, *A Survey of Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia Border Region*, vol. 2, p. 57. James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-hsiang*, p. 105. Excessive taxation was among the most important factors contributing to the disintegration of the region. It was common for more than one warlord to tax people of the same area, and taxes were often collected three to five years in advance. The worst tax was the military levy. In Suide xian, for example, taxes increased from \$20,000 in 1930 to \$170,000 in 1934, largely to finance military operations. See Selden, *The Yen-an Way*, pp. 14–15. Gansu had forty-four universal taxes, not including special or local taxes: e.g., skin overcoat tax, kettle tax, uniform alteration tax, hemp shoe tax. See Edmund O. Clubb, *Twentieth Century China*, p. 187.

⁷ J. Sheridan, p. 214.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 249–250.

relief expeditions sent out failed to reach the starving people.⁹

Jan Myrdal in his study of Liu Ling, a village in North Shaanxi, recounts the stories of several families who suffered during the famine. One was the family of Mao Geye, who moved in 1924 to the village of Niuchang.

We paid 600 *jin* (a *jin* is $1\frac{1}{3}$ pounds) rental for sixty *mu* [*sic*] (a *mou* is $\frac{1}{6}$ acre). We used to get in 5,000–6,000 *jin* of corn and, when we paid our taxes and rent, there was just enough left to enable us to survive. Then came the great famine year of 1928. We starved in 1929, too. We plucked leaves and ate them, and we mixed chaff and elm-bark and made bread of it. The fact that we went so hungry in 1929 was not so much because of the harvest. Taxes and rental had taken their due, of course. But our harvest wasn't so bad. What happened was that I got married that year. That wasn't cheap. I had to pay 120 silver dollars for my wife. The following year I had a wife, I know, but the whole family had to go hungry, of course.¹⁰

Given the economic and political difficulties and natural disasters that befell Shaanxi and Gansu during the 1920s and 1930s, it is not surprising that little of the social progress being made in other areas of China was felt in that region. For the most part, peasants lived in the same manner as their forefathers and practiced the same customs.

The widespread poverty meant that there was little social inequality. There was, however, marked inequality in the number of men and women; in 1930–1931 government reports estimated that the region had only 100 women for every 135 men. That difference had a significant impact on marriage customs in the region.¹¹ As with any scarce commodity, the lack of women in North Shaanxi made them expensive; the process of obtaining a wife was a potentially crippling financial blow to the groom's family. Because North Shaanxi had no tradition of giving dowries with the girl, the groom's family could recoup their losses only through the work they obtained from the new bride. It was not uncommon for a poor man to hire himself out to a woman's family as a laborer in lieu of the traditional betrothal gifts of money, cloth, and jewelry. After ten to fifteen years of service, he paid off his debt and was

⁹ China International Famine Relief Commission, *Annual Reports, 1928–1939*, cited in Selden, *Yenan Way*, p. 6; Clubb, p. 186; J. Sheridan, p. 251.

¹⁰ Jan Myrdal, *Report from a Chinese Village*, pp. 65–66.

¹¹ Except where specifically cited, the discussion on traditional marriage patterns of northern Shaanxi is taken from Hua Chang-ming, *La Condition Féminine et les Communistes Chinois en Action*, chap. 1. Hua obtained most of her material from a 1930 government report on conditions in the area entitled *Minshangshi xiguan diaocha baogaolu* [Report on investigations into civilian and commercial customs], 2 vols. (Nanking, 1930).

free to establish his own home.

The process of selecting mates differed little from that practiced in other areas of China. An intermediary approached the family of the girl, and if they expressed interest, the couple's horoscopes were cast to determine compatibility. Technically, drawing up the horoscope confirmed the betrothal, but to announce it officially the boy's family pasted strips of red paper with the girl's birthdate written on them on the door of her family's home. Because few people knew how to read, the paper had little value. The intermediary was the actual guarantor of the match, and knowledge of it in the village the only formal contract.

On the day of the wedding, a delegation of men from the groom's family went with a sedan chair to fetch the bride. Dressed in red and accompanied by a delegation from her own family equal in number to that from the groom's, the bride traveled to her new home. When she arrived, an aunt or sister-in-law invited her to enter the house. The ceremony itself lasted two days. On the first day the bride and groom prostrated themselves eight times before the Tablets of Heaven and Earth, and joined in the wedding feast. The next day the ceremony concluded when they prostrated themselves before the ancestral tablets and before the family elders, and formally thanked the intermediary.

Myrdal reports that in Liu Ling the bride was forced to sit on the *kang* for three days after the bridal night.¹² She received just enough food and drink to keep her alive and could relieve herself only at night. On the third day the couple visited her family with gifts. This was the last time the young woman would see her family for three years; she would not be allowed beyond the gate of her husband's home for that period.¹³ The practice of forbidding a newly married woman from leaving the confines of her husband's home is not as cruel as it might sound because, in general, women lived secluded lives, rarely leaving their homes. Because most had their feet bound, it was difficult for them to travel too far from home. When they did go out, they often hid their faces with towels so they could not be seen.¹⁴

Delia Davin suggests two reasons for the confinement of women. First, because the region was once a frontier subject to frequent border raids, families by tradition kept their women out of sight. Second, because the farming done there required extensive plow cultivation,

¹² A *kang* is a raised platform that can be heated. It is found in homes in northern China. The family sleeps on it at night and sits on it during the day.

¹³ Myrdal, pp. 24-26.

¹⁴ Chen Yan, *Shaan-Gan diaocha*, p. 156.

women rarely worked in the fields. Plowing was done by men; women joined the work only in the infrequent cases when the family lacked manpower and could not afford to hire help.¹⁵ Although no figures were given for Shaanxi and Gansu, the Buck survey showed that in neighboring Shanxi—an area in which the same kinds of crops were grown as in the area of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region—women did less than 1.3 percent of the farm work.¹⁶ Because the majority of families depended upon their crops for survival, the limited participation of women in crop production was a major factor in their low social status.

The scarcity of women and their high price produced some interesting variations in marriage patterns. In Gansu, for example, there were instances where several brothers shared a wife. The first male child born belonged to the eldest brother, the second child to the second oldest brother, and so on. Cases also were reported of men whose wives had produced no male heirs or who were too poor to buy a wife hiring women to bear sons for them. The woman lived with the man for two to three years or until a son was born; then she returned to her original home.

Perhaps the most interesting variation of traditional marriage practices was the frequency with which widows remarried. In most areas of China widows did not remarry but remained loyal daughters-in-law, serving their dead husband's parents. In North Shaanxi, however, widows were a valuable commodity, often fetching a higher price than younger women. Their value lay in their being more experienced workers than younger women. In some cases even their children left the dead husband's family and became part of the second husband's.

If the dead husband was an only son, his family would try to obtain a husband who was willing to come into their family. He might even adopt the family name if he had no children from a previous marriage. Those men who chose to retain their own names were considered only temporary members of the family. Nevertheless, their first-born sons were full-fledged members of the dead husband's family and eligible to perform the rites of the ancestors. Sometimes men sold only half their names, choosing to use two names. Their children were then divided between their own families and those of the first husband.

Very poor families sometimes sold a young daughter as *tongyangxi* (daughter-in-law-to-be) to a boy's family, who paid a minimal price and then brought the girl up as a family member. This practice allowed the boy's family to avoid most of the expense of marriage because the couple

¹⁵ Davin, *Woman-Work*, pp. 34, 118–119.

¹⁶ John Lossing Buck, *Chinese Farm Economy*, p. 235.

married with little ceremony and no gifts when they reached puberty. In addition, the family already had the benefit of an additional worker who worked for no wages. This kind of marriage was common in families where the groom was much older. If he died before the marriage ceremony took place, the girl remained in his family.

Such was society as it existed in most parts of Shaanxi and Gansu when the Central Committee arrived in 1935. Despite the disasters of the first three decades of the twentieth century, the area claimed one of the few viable Communist party branches left in China. Unlike most of its counterparts in other areas, the Shaanxi party had not only survived the setbacks caused by the conflicts with warlords and the Guomindang in the late 1920s and early 1930s but had gained enough peasant support that its leadership announced the formation of the Shaanxi-Gansu Provisional Government in January 1935.¹⁷ Ideally situated in the mountains of North Shaanxi, far from the center of Guomindang government, the new soviet encompassed a receptive population accustomed to bandits and other antigovernment forces, and plagued by higher rates of tenancy than other parts of the province. The initial land reform of 1934–1935 proved especially effective in generating peasant support because it actively involved many of them in the revolution for the first time. Party forces provided the impetus and leadership, while the masses contributed the manpower necessary to stand up to the landlords. When it took control of the Shaanxi-Gansu area, the Central Committee set aside land reform to devote its full energy to the ever increasing Japanese threat. For the next six years, party officials directed almost all their attention to defeating the enemy. They knew that if the Chinese were to be victorious, the Communist party would have to conclude a temporary truce with the Guomindang so both groups could concentrate on fighting the Japanese. In late summer 1935 Mao proposed a coalition, calling for all classes to join together to fight the aggressor under a united national government. But despite pressure from within his own ranks, Chiang Kai-shek refused to join a coalition; he remained adamant about first crushing the Communist forces. Only after he was kidnapped by two of his generals and forced to meet with Communist party officials, among them Zhou Enlai, did Chiang agree to a united front.

The coalition was always shaky and any pretense to it ended in 1941; nevertheless, for most of the war years, Communist party leaders continued to base their policies on the concept of a united front. In August 1937 they implemented a new moderate land policy that called for

¹⁷ Selden, *Yenan Way*, pp. 22, 62.

reducing rent and interest and ending the confiscation of landlord property, among other things.¹⁸ To guarantee tenant rights and prevent landlord excesses, cadres received instructions to build up strong village peasant associations. Permanent land equalization would have to wait until after the war because the leadership needed support from all classes, not just the impoverished peasantry. Redistribution, which had already begun in some areas, was not followed through; and in many villages conditions returned to their prerevolutionary state.

In the winter of 1939 the ideological guidelines for the United Front appeared in a textbook for cadres entitled "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party." Reinforcing the moderate course begun with the 1937 land policy, the document called again for all Chinese to unite against the external enemy, saying that the democratic revolution against feudalism as represented by the landlord class was secondary to the task of defeating Japanese imperialism. Because imperialism was the main support of feudalism, it had to be overthrown before peasants could concentrate on the landlord problem. Only the worst landlords were targets; ones considered anti-Japanese were an integral part of the United Front and should be left alone. The revolution, according to the textbook, was in its "new democratic" stage, which meant that it was bourgeois-democratic directed against imperialism and feudalism but not against capitalism.¹⁹

What did all this mean in concrete terms? In politics, the authors called for a joint dictatorship of all revolutionary classes to defeat the Japanese. This group included national bourgeoisie, intellectuals, small tradesmen, professional people, workers, and peasants. Although women, too, were called upon to participate in this stage of struggle, the document did not specifically cite them as a revolutionary force. For the economy, the writers of the guidelines demanded the nationalization of all big enterprises, the confiscation of the capital of "imperialists, traitors and reactionaries," and the distribution of land among peasants. At the same time, most capitalistic enterprises were to be preserved. Clearing the way for capitalism in China would create the prerequisites for socialism.²⁰

¹⁸ Kataoka Tetsuya, *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front*, p. 122.

¹⁹ Mao, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," *Selected Works*, vol. 2, pp. 305-334.

²⁰ Ibid.

Policy concerning Women during the Late 1930s

As "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" indicated, party officials were mainly concerned during the late 1930s with mobilizing people for the war. In this light they instructed cadres to organize individuals of the same age, sex, occupation, and interests into groups whose chief function was to educate members politically and give them the skills they would need to help in the war effort. These mass organizations were useful tools because they actively involved peasants in new economic and social relationships that would eventually lead to the restructuring of village life and to their taking responsibility for their own welfare and defense. Membership was not mandatory; most people appeared to have joined out of group pressure or a desire to contribute to the war. More importantly, mass organizations served as a device whereby the Border Region government could control the people. Cadres could educate people and gather information from them more easily when those people were organized into groups. In addition, by organizing individuals the government had the means to create the enthusiasm necessary to support official demands.²¹

Like everyone else, women fifteen years and older had their own local associations. The responsibilities and goals of these associations were outlined in a pamphlet entitled *The mass movement of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region*, published in 1938. According to the document, the primary duty of women was "to aid in the war effort." Simply being organized was not enough; women were to take an active part in the United Front by participating in the United Front, participating in the political and economic struggle to assure male-female equality, joining defense work, voting in the upcoming elections, and demanding protection for their rights. Led by the party, women were urged to fight to eliminate their feudal bonds and eradicate traditional practices such as cursing, arranged marriages, and footbinding. Lastly, the document called upon women to join study groups and song groups and thereby raise their cultural levels.²²

²¹ Organizations found in the Border Region in 1938 included peasants' associations, women's associations, youth save-the-nation associations, public-school student associations. See Zhongguo xiandai shi ziliao congkan, *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi jiefangqu gaikuang*, p. 13; Mark Selden, "Revolution and Third World Development," p. 217; Chao Kuo-chun, *Agrarian Policy of the Chinese Communist Party*, p. 48. Mass organizations lost their importance with time. They are infrequently mentioned in the forties, and the implementation of campaigns without reference to them suggest that they became obsolete.

²² Lu Mang, *Minzhong yundong*, pp. 37-38.

The mass movement of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region summarizes policy for women during the United Front and illustrates the lack of direction in such policy. All policy in the Border Region at this time focused on the defeat of the Japanese; yet because the enemy was never at their doorstep, it was difficult for women to engage in actual war work. The activities described in this pamphlet, although directed more toward social reform than toward national defense, fell under the heading "aiding the war effort." Cadres, therefore, encouraged women to participate in general social reform programs. Yet even these lacked clear direction.

Fuzziness of purpose increased during the United Front because party leaders feared upsetting the fragile balance of social forces by initiating an aggressive liberation. Therefore, they exercised utmost caution in carrying out policy to emancipate women. Officials told women that by contributing to the war effort, they could break away from the traditional system that had oppressed them for centuries. Activities such as participating in social and economic struggle, voting, and eliminating feudal practices were all offered as ways for women to make their contributions; but the party gave women little tangible advice on how any of these things would help them achieve social equality. The lack of clarity in *The mass movement of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region* was characteristic of policy throughout the United Front period. Even influential party people dealt in vague generalities. When Nym Wales, interviewing Kang Kejing, wife of army commander Zhu De in May 1937 asked about the problem of emancipating women, Kang answered that even though women were politically more backward than men, they were capable of hard revolutionary work if they could be freed from their household duties.²³ Beyond that, she said nothing. concerned with the war and with improving the economy of the area, the party had not yet developed a well-defined policy to raise the status of women. As a result, efforts to achieve equality for women failed to gain much momentum in the early years.

Furthermore, even though membership in women's associations grew, many women were at first reluctant to join, fearing reprisals from relatives angered that they had joined a group with the power to attack repressive family members. Party cadres were able to attract female members only after they convinced women that through group strength they could withstand retaliation from outraged families. Apparently many women were convinced. By 1937 about 130,000 out of approximately 700,000 women belonged to associations, according to Li Jianzhen, chief

²³ Nym Wales [pseud. of Helen Foster Snow], *My Yenan Notebook*, p. 47.

of the Soviet Women's Department. Of these, 80,000 regularly attended meetings and joined in work projects. A year later membership had increased sharply, to 194,254 women.²⁴

Party officials, however, made what they later acknowledged as two mistakes with these early associations. Not only did they place leadership of the associations in the hands of untrained cadres, they also issued cadres few instructions on implementing policy. Directives that were handed down, such as those found in *The mass movement of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region*, provided no firm guidelines. As a result, lacking a definitive plan, cadres did not know what to do except allow women's groups to vent their anger at cruel family members. Sometimes the unleashing of pent-up fury took the form of divorce.

The 1939 Marriage Regulations allowed an individual to obtain a divorce without the other partner's consent in cases involving bigamy, incompatibility, ill-treatment, and incurable disease. The government investigated the situation and heard arguments from both sides only if the divorce was contested. The regulations also gave women a right to their children after divorce and to child support from the husband until the children were sixteen years old.²⁵ Encouraged by the local associations and with the knowledge that they would not lose their children, women sought divorce on grounds of incompatibility as a means of striking back at their husbands and their husbands' families.

Divorce was never recognized in Yan'an, but cadres at first did not recognize that it posed a potential threat to society. Instead, they saw divorce as an easy for women to break their feudal bonds and emancipate themselves, and allowed women to obtain divorces without first trying mediation—a process that later became mandatory. Furthermore, party cadres, particularly women cadres, viewed divorce, which touched upon all classes, as a means of attacking the traditional family system. Women could liberate themselves through divorce without disturbing the United Front's goal of class harmony. This easy attitude toward divorce, prevalent in the late thirties, was apparent in a statement by Li Jianzhen: "Women get more divorces than men. Because marriage was early here

²⁴ The estimated population in the Border Region in 1937 was 1,400,000. See appendixes 1 and 2 for 1946 population figures. The 700,000 figure is undoubtedly high because it is known that there were more men than women. Also, it is not known how many of these approximately 700,000 females were girls under fifteen and, therefore, not members of local associations. Wales, p. 86; Qi Li, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu shilu*, p. 103.

²⁵ Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu, *Kang-Ri genjudi zhengce tiaoli huiji*, pp. 135–136. The usual practice in the case of a divorce was for children under five to remain with their mother, while those over five could choose with which parent they wanted to live.

and by purchase so there has [sic] been no love marriages and they want a change."²⁶

An article that appeared in the *JFRB* on July 16, 1941, also illustrates the attitude that divorce was a quick and easy solution to the problem of liberating women. The article portrayed a child bride, looking much older than her eleven years, who wandered into the courtyard of the *qu* (subdistrict) government in Anding. When the author of the article asked the girl what she wanted, she began to talk haltingly about her difficult life. She said that in her old home, there were many mouths to feed and life was not good. The year before, she had married; but she found life no better in her new home where, she said, the father was a "dragon." Although she watched the children, cooked the food, and cleaned the house, the family still beat and scolded her.

"Do you want a divorce?" the author asked.

"No," she replied. "I just want them to stop beating and cursing me. If they don't stop, then I want a divorce."

"How did you know to come to the *qu* government?"

"Formerly, I didn't dare come because they [cadres] were all men. Later, I heard that some women came."

The article concluded with the author telling the girl to think the situation over and come back the next day.²⁷ Ironically, by the time the article was published, policy makers were reconsidering policy and attempting to keep families together.

Some families, fearful of losing a worker, did treat a woman better if she threatened divorce; but many families did not reform and, consequently, were broken up by divorces. Such disruptions proved disastrous. Cadres who understood neither this backward society nor women's roles in it created more problems than they solved when they offered divorce as a means of liberation. Stimulating women's consciousness, although important at this stage, allowed women to destroy the family and potentially devastate an economy that remained family-based throughout the Yan'an period. Furthermore, in a social system so bound to the past, accepting divorce proved impossible, even if women could find jobs to support themselves outside the family. The failure to implement a well-defined policy for women and to maintain social harmony by following a moderate course created what the party wanted to avoid—the potential for social and economic upheaval.

²⁶ Wales, p. 86.

²⁷ "Lihun di shensu" [Report on divorce], *JFRB*, July 16, 1941.

Arousal and anger are important in any movement intent on social change. As Mark Selden points out, "In the very act of lashing out at local landlords, men cut the ties binding them to the traditional power structure and its values of subservience to entrenched landlord power, and committed themselves to the new order."²⁸ The same was true for women who, before they could assume a constructive role, needed to resolve their anger and, in some cases, bitter hatred of that group causing their misery. Women's associations played an important part in this process because they offered women sympathy and encouragement. Supported by a large group, many women gained the confidence to attack their families. Nevertheless, cadres allowed this spirit of reprisal to go on for too long, causing many peasants ultimately to resent party workers whom they felt were trying to incite quarrels among family members.²⁹

Recognition of Problems in Policy

By mid-1941 party leaders were aware that problems existed in the formulated policies regarding women, although they did not yet realize how weak that policy was.³⁰ As can be seen in the early editions of the *JFRB*, policy makers began to change their attitudes toward women. The article "Husband and Wife," which appeared in the July 2 and 3, 1941, editions, illustrates the party's new emphasis: encouraging women to avoid drastic action and to achieve liberation within the family. According to the article, members of a women's association became aware that a man who had recently moved to their village was very cruel to his wife, beating and cursing her and allowing her little to eat. They decided to help the woman by asking her to attend their educational meetings. Her husband, however, would not allow her to go; he locked her in the house. One night she escaped, and appeared at a women's meeting half-starved.

Angered by her condition, the association members confronted her husband, who became so enraged that he grabbed his wife from among the group and forced her to go home. Encouraged by the strong and

²⁸ Selden, *Yenan Way*, p. 115.

²⁹ *Yan'an di nǚxìng* [Women of Yan'an], (n.p., 1944?), p. 21.

³⁰ The sixth plenary session of the Communist party (November 6, 1938) reorganized the party to include seven departments, among them a women's department. Cai Chang, the only woman with full membership on the Central Committee, headed it. Although it had no power to make policy, the department was responsible for study and investigation of policy for women, inspection of women's work, presentation of suggestions and recommendations, and guidance and motivation for the women's movement. See Ho Kuo-cheng, "The Status and the Role of Women in the Chinese Communist Movement, 1946-1949," pp. 50-53.

forceful action of the women's association on her behalf, the wife decided to free herself by earning enough money from needlework to support herself. Shortly thereafter, she left her husband and initiated divorce proceedings.

Feigning grief at her absence and promising to reform if she returned, her husband persuaded her to come back; once he had her back, however, he returned to his old ways. When the village women struggled against him again, he defended his actions, saying that the old books defined the role of women, and he did not intend to go against sacred knowledge. Hearing this, his wife realized that reform work began in one's own home. No longer afraid of her husband and taking strength from her friends, the wife committed herself to helping her husband see the error of his ways and become a useful member of society.³¹

Yet despite recognition of the problems inherent in women's search for equality, as portrayed in the *JFRB*, women received no more practical advice on raising their status than before: resistance against Japan remained the only road to equality. An article in the *JFRB* on October 12, 1941, for example, asked women to take the first step toward liberation by coming out of the house and joining the war effort. It argued that female equality would be meaningless under fascist rule; consequently, while emancipation was important, it was not the primary responsibility of the women's movement at that time.³² Current party thought dictated that liberation had to take second place to resistance. Cadres still offered women the same advice on working in the war effort that they had three years earlier: women could best contribute to resistance by participating in production, education, and politics. How such participation would result in equality remained a mystery.

Of the three outlets, production was the most important because women were needed to take over jobs, particularly in agriculture, left vacant by men away fighting. One government directive in the late thirties ordered cadres "to mobilize women, boys, and old men to participate in spring planting and cultivation, each according to his ability to carry on either a principal or an auxiliary task in the labor process of production."³³ Women came to work in the fields in large numbers. In

³¹ "Fu fu" [Husband and wife], *JFRB* (July 2 and 3, 1941). This article, like the two cited below, is idealized and may not be based entirely on fact. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that the incident is typical of the period.

³² "Dongyuan funü canzhan yu baohu funü si liyi di guanxi" [The relationship between women mobilizing for war and protecting women's personal rights], *JFRB* (October 12, 1941).

³³ E. Snow, p. 237.

1938, 42,060 Border Region women participated in the spring plowing, while in 1941, 89 percent of the women in Baoan joined production by forming a "look-after-the-livestock regiment."³⁴ Women also sewed shoes and made uniforms for the army, and acted as nurses and supply carriers. Nevertheless, most of the work done by women involved taking over jobs normally performed by men, or doing special wartime work. Production had not yet advanced to such a point that it could support a large influx of women as permanent additions to the work force. As a result, even though they were working, women did not have the opportunity to play a permanent role in raising the family's standard of living.

Women were also urged to contribute to resistance through education. In 1937 the Border Region government established three separate educational programs—elementary, secondary, and part-time—and began an intensive effort to attract students. It failed in its efforts, however, because most people found the educational programs too political and irrelevant to their immediate needs; educational policy during the United Front was directed toward the war effort and paid little attention to more practical matters such as the economy. A July 1937 manifesto stated that all "newspapers, books and magazines, films, plays, literature and art should serve national defence."³⁵ Peter Seybolt argues that policy makers devised this kind of policy because they mistakenly believed that participation could be encouraged by appealing to people's patriotism. Such a strategy might have worked in an area under direct Japanese attack; but it had only minimal appeal in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, where little fighting took place.

In addition to the general lack of interest among Border Region residents, party leaders faced another problem when they tried to attract women students. Many men did not want their wives to go to school. Women in this region traditionally had been secluded and rarely took part in activities outside the home. Men did not want their wives to leave the house for a community activity. Furthermore, they feared that once women were educated they would no longer want to do housework and might consider divorce. The idea of educated, potentially independent, females was too advanced for many men; as a result, few women went to school. The government had little luck in educating women until the production drive of 1943.³⁶

³⁴ Qi, p. 106; "Zhidan funü shengchan relie" [Baoan women's production is fired up], *JFRB* (September 22, 1941).

³⁵ Peter J. Seybolt, "The Yen'an Revolution in Mass Education," pp. 646–647.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 645–649.

Voting in the 1939 and 1941 elections for representatives to the *xiang* (township) and *xian* (district) and Border Region assemblies was the third way for women to participate in resistance.³⁷ Government officials told the people that they could help the war effort by voting in elections to insure a strong government able to run the Border Region efficiently at all levels. Voting also was an effective way to mobilize women for political activity, however briefly. Guaranteeing political and economic gains required maintaining class harmony; Border Region leaders, therefore, extended suffrage to all classes, including landlords. Everyone over eighteen could vote or seek office in these elections “regardless of sex, religion, race, financial situation, or culture.”³⁸ Moreover, because it was concerned at that time with integrating community and politics, the government worked hard to rally people to vote. Its propaganda campaigns proved successful: 80 percent of the eligible voters in the Border Region voted in the 1941 elections with voter turn-out as high as 95 percent in Suide, Yanchuan, and Qingjian.³⁹ These campaigns also urged women to run for office on the grounds that since they were participating in the war they were equal to men and thus qualified to be representatives.⁴⁰ As one editorial put it: “Stir up your bravery; raise your faith, enthusiastically participate in the election movement. Who says that among you, you cannot produce women of ability who can lead the country?”⁴¹

Just as many men resented government efforts to educate women, many resented government efforts to get women to vote. In one village, according to an account in the *JFRB*, husbands tried to stop their wives from voting; but on the morning of the election all eighty-nine adults eligible to vote, men and women, gathered. Having risen early to do their housework, every woman in the village attended the election meeting. At

³⁷ The administrative divisions of the Border Region were *xian* (district), *qu* (subdistrict), *xiang* (township). *Xian* and *xiang* both had elected councils. The highest government organ was the Border Region Council; but when it was not in session, a Border Region Government Committee, chosen by the council, ran the government. A supervisory office of the Border Region government supervised affairs of several *xian*, while *qu* supervisory offices handled the affairs of several *qu*. See Lyman Van Slyke, ed., *The Chinese Communist Movement*, p. 131.

³⁸ Selden, *Yenan Way*, p. 128; James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China*, p. 58.

³⁹ *Kang-Ri zhanzheng . . . gaikuang*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ “Funü zai xiangxian xuanjuyun” [Women in the village voting movement], *JFRB* (November 9, 1941).

⁴¹ “Dongyuan bianqu funü lai canjia xuanju yundong” [Mobilizing the Border Region women to participate in the election movement], *JFRB* (June 21, 1941).

first they were reluctant to speak, but finally one old woman with bound feet stood up and told how her husband had tried to prevent her from coming. She said she had told him that she had every right to participate in the meeting. Then, a woman holding a child said she thought that women had a special interest in selecting a good government. In her opinion, such a government would work to eradicate diseases harmful to juveniles and help mothers raise their children.⁴²

Irate husbands were not the only hindrance to women participating in local elections; many women were reluctant to make a decision—something few had ever done. Yuan-tsung Chen portrays this hesitancy well in *The Dragon's Village*, an autobiographical novel of a young woman cadre assigned to the village of Longxiang in Gansu in 1951. The village's first election was scheduled for midday; but like most things in the village, it had started late. Many women grew tired of waiting and made motions to leave.

"My hen will soon lay her egg. If I don't put it away in time, it'll be stolen either by the rats or the kids," someone proclaimed. "I'd better go home...."

"The sun is so bright," said another woman shielding her eyes with her hands... "I have to take a look at those turnip tops drying on the roof. I'm making pickles, dried turnip top pickles. If they get too dry, they'll be leathery...."

Some really did have work to attend to, but we knew others just had no intention of voting; they came to the election just to show their good will.

Voting meant choosing, taking sides, something they had no wish to do.⁴³

Although involvement in elections, education, and production gave women a sense of belonging to society, such involvement did not move them noticeably closer to the party's goal of equality for women—a goal party leaders held out as attainable but which seemed unreachable at that time.

This failure to better the position of women was just a symptom of more serious problems emerging in the Border Region in late 1941. One of these problems was that cadres, under orders to mobilize the peasants from the top down, had built mass organizations that were intricately structured but lacked a solid base of mass support. In November 1939 the Politburo issued a directive for cadres to "go deeply among the masses and lead the mass movement to fight for its own welfare and gradually

⁴² "Bianqu funü di can zhenghuodong" [Border Region women participate in the government movement], *JFRB* (May 24, 1941).

⁴³ Yuan-tsung Chen, *The Dragon's Village*, p. 211.

organize the large majority of the masses into unions, peasant associations, women's leagues, youth corps, children's leagues, and peoples militia."⁴⁴ By relying on the "majority of the masses," the party was reinstituting class status as a basis for revolutionary action. This was impossible, however, because the class accommodation of the United Front had eroded mass activism. Furthermore, the United Front emphasis on social stability after 1937 permitted village life in isolated areas to stagnate and revert to its prewar patterns. In many areas of the Border Region, life was essentially unchanged in 1941.⁴⁵

Within the government the bureaucracy grew strong and independent by assuming increased administrative functions; at the same time, bureaucrats became alienated from the peasants and ignored the need to win their support. To make matters worse, many cadres sent to work with the peasants were urban intellectuals who did not understand nor make any attempt to learn the peasant way of life. As in the case of the policy toward divorce, their ignorance was compounded by the absence of guidance from above. Consequently, cadres often pursued policies different from the party line and resented direction from others.⁴⁶

The extent of the problems became clear to the government during the last half of 1941 when it faced two crises. In the late summer the Japanese initiated an all-out attack on the Communist army in North China. Employing what the Communist party called the "three-all" policy (burn all, kill all, loot all), they dealt the Communist forces their worst defeats of the war and severely crippled the Eighth Route Army. Before the government recovered from these losses, the Guomindang government cut off subsidies for the Eighth Route Army and the Border Region government, and imposed a tight blockade on the entire area.

When Yan'an officials tried to gather support to meet these crises, they found the Border Region ill-prepared for the task. Changes necessary for an effective mobilization of society had not taken place. In addition, party leaders found cadres, whom they relied upon to initiate change, ineffective because they neither understood policy nor had any

⁴⁴ "Decisions of the Central Committee on the work of penetrating the masses," *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, ed. Conrad Brandt et al., p. 348. See also James P. Harrison, *The Long March to Power*, p. 312.

⁴⁵ Dorris, p. 703; Selden, *Yenan Way*, pp. 224-225.

⁴⁶ For criticisms of cadres working with women see Cai Chang, "Yingjie funü gongzuo di xin fangxiang" [Welcome the new direction in women's work], *JFRB* (March 8, 1943). In 1942 the party moved to control the work of these cadres more strictly. See "Genjudi geji funü cuzhi gongzuo tiaolie" [Various levels of women organize work regulations], *JFRB* (March 13, 1942).

significant contact with the masses. To correct this weakness within the party, the leadership instituted a series of campaigns culminating in *zhengfeng* (Rectification Movement) of 1942–1944. Zhengfeng began as a movement to educate the large number of people who had joined the party since the beginning of the anti-Japanese war in Marxist-Leninist ideology and its specific adaptations to Chinese conditions. It evolved, however, into a campaign in which mass mobilization became the basis for generating economic and social change. As part of this, party leaders simplified the government by reducing the power of the bureaucracy at all levels through strengthening lower-level leadership and increasing popular participation. Their goal was to develop organizations and local leadership within the village to manage village affairs without outside help. They also sought to make the Border Region an economically and politically independent area supported by the masses, who were to take the lead in initiating change. The political conservatism characteristic of the base areas up to 1941 now took a more progressive course, a course that did not change until the end of the war.

During the first stage of the Rectification Movement, government officials looked into what had been done to raise the status of women; they discovered numerous shortcomings, particularly among cadres who worked directly with the peasants. Among other things, the government accused cadres of indifference to the special problems of women, making plans without taking into consideration the actual conditions of women and wasting women's time by making them attend useless meetings. Above all, it blamed cadres for failing to integrate themselves fully into village life.⁴⁷ Although the investigation failed to produce a new policy for women, articles published in the *JFRB* make it clear that the party was seriously reevaluating its policy.

Signs of Change

The first evidence of the impending change in policy appeared in party directives criticizing the women's movement for not considering the social and economic reasons for women's low status. A newspaper article of October 26, 1941, attacked women's associations and their cadre leaders for their erroneous ideas. It argued that associations failed to

⁴⁷ Cai Chang, "Yingjie . . ." Apparently women cadres were given little training on how to handle the problems of women. Jane Price reports that the subjects required of all women at the Women's University in Yan'an, only one dealt with women. See Price, "Women and Leadership," p. 21.

investigate the real social and economic reasons for women's inferior status; instead, they blamed women's bitter plight entirely on men. Because cadres had mistakenly led women to believe that struggling against men was enough, women never tried to liberate themselves in any other way. Achieving liberation by struggling against men alone and not against the whole traditional system was a feudal remnant of the traditional opposition between men and women. The article concluded that the problem of women was just one obstacle toward the goal of freeing all society.⁴⁸

At this same time, government officials asked women to reevaluate themselves and their contribution to the family's well-being through self-examination and group discussion. They also encouraged women to attend educational meetings and to participate in village government and in production.⁴⁹ Women's associations no longer incited disruption; instead they began to serve as forums for educational and propaganda discussion as well as coordinators of child care and production.

Great emphasis was placed on women cadres taking the lead in education and production. Up to this time, male party members had dominated; their female counterparts often lagged behind, usually because household duties limited their freedom and the time they had to devote to party work. Now party leaders directed women party members to be the vanguard by organizing study groups designed to raise female cadres' cultural level and to help them to understand their role in the work of society. If a village had more than three women cadres, they formed their own study groups; if not, they organized groups with men on the basis of male-female equality. Once they had a rudimentary education, cadres were to advance education among village women by setting up half-day schools, winter schools, and character-learning groups.⁵⁰

The best examples of this new orientation are two long articles published in the *JFRB* during the fall. Although both still dealt with the role of women's associations in women's liberation, the articles are concerned with more than just attacking family members.

The first one, which appeared on October 26, 1941, tells of the difficulties one village women's association had in reforming both the village's mothers-in-law and its cadres. The association criticized mothers-in-law for refusing to allow their sons' wives to attend women's meetings, for starving them as punishment for attendance, for

⁴⁸ "Lüe tan funü gongzuo zuofeng" [Generally discuss women's work styles], *JFRB* (October 26, 1941).

⁴⁹ "Xiangge women di bianqu canyiyuan" [Presenting our Border Region's representatives], *JFRB* (November 9, 1941).

⁵⁰ The article did not indicate how men reacted to male-female study groups. See "Dui xiancun nüdangyuan jiaoyu di yijian" [The opinion on rural village women party members' education], *JFRB* (October 2, 1941).

encouraging their sons to beat their wives, and for calling women's meetings "broken shoes" (i.e., prostitute) meetings. At their meetings the women discussed various methods for dealing with these mothers-in-law who had been educated but who had not yet reformed. The chairwoman, a cadre, suggested that errant mothers-in-law wear hats throughout the village to acknowledge their mistakes. The village women thought that such treatment was very harsh for older people. Nevertheless, because they feared they would be accused of opposing the revolution if they challenged the cadre, the women said nothing. At last, one woman spoke out, saying that if women had to wear hats through three villages they would not change; they would only become more vengeful toward their accusers. This remark made the cadre in charge so angry that she had the critic removed from the meeting. "See how times have changed," the cadre cried, "now they [members of the association] oppose wearing hats, parading and beatings. What accounts for this?" Thoroughly disgusted with the cadre's outburst, the women left the meeting, determined to take the matter into their own hands. But what could they do? Without cadre leadership, they feared they could not force anyone to reform.

A short time later a propaganda team came to the village with information on divorce. The women thought they had the weapon they needed at last. By threatening to divorce their husbands, they would make family members treat them with respect because no family could bear the shame of a divorce nor the prospect of losing a worker. In their excitement, however, the women failed to recognize, as did the team, that the structure of village society had no place for divorced women. The new freedom they heard about provided no real answer to their problems.

Again, what were the women to do? There seemed no way out until one day a different, more experienced work team arrived in the village. This group of cadres talked not only with daughters-in-law, but with mothers-in-law and husbands as well. Women who were accepted as equals, they explained, could participate wholeheartedly in the war effort; they would be happy and satisfied knowing they were contributing to the defeat of Japan. These women, according to the work team, would be obedient to their husbands, filial to their mothers-in-law, and in general, better members of the family. This was a line more people could accept.⁵¹

⁵¹ "Bushu haoban" [Bad management], *JFRB* (October 26, 1941). The material published at this time did not define the term "woman." Obviously, mothers-in-law were women, and had suffered just as much under the traditional system; they were often as eager as younger women for change. By "women" United Front writers meant young women, those still directly influenced by a mother-in-law. Mothers-in-law were targeted not as individuals but as symbols of the traditional system. After policy was revised in 1942-1943, one rarely found mothers-in-law mentioned. The new policy promoted family harmony and sought to include women of all ages. An article in *JFRB* in September 1942, for example, called for organizing women of all ages and said that young women no longer looked down upon older

Another example of the new direction is an unusual article on how suggestions made by mothers-in-law helped a village women's association become more viable. One day as the members were meeting to talk over their problems, village mothers-in-law broke in and criticized them for spending all their time discussing people who were cruel to them and constantly offering the same solutions to correct the problems. "Why not talk about other problems in the home?" they asked. "Aren't problems of managing the house and family just as important as personal problems?"

Upon hearing these complaints, the members decided the time had come to examine their own organization and expose its shortcomings. Because they did not know how to carry out the investigation, they read Mao Zedong's "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan" to find guidance. According to that essay, they first had to decide what material they should use. Because they were striving to understand their friends and enemies as well as themselves, they had to start by collecting information on the establishment and administration of various women's movements from the different classes. Then they gathered materials on politicians, teachers, and other model women, and on women's movements in foreign countries. Members paid particular attention to the living conditions of each group and to their unique problems, working to relate the material to their own experience.

The second question was, how to proceed? Because no one had the time to do all the investigations, and because each group had different experiences, the association drew up a plan in which members established certain criteria for research. Lacking the time and the money to travel, the group had women who were literate collect much of the information by reading newspapers, magazines, and accounts of other research projects. Cadres met with groups of three to five women from their own areas and talked with them about the conditions in their villages. These women did not do field work without training, however. When they set out, they were given the following instructions: be patient, establish a friendly atmosphere, avoid jumping directly into a subject, avoid using judgmental words, record information only after returning home, and talk with people, then supplement with data from neighbors. The village women's groups completed their self-examination using this procedure and subsequently devised a format for their meetings that they believed better served the interests of all members. In the end, they felt that they had a truly workable group as a result of the suggestions of a few dissatisfied mothers-in-law.⁵²

women but worked to help them "turn over." See "Yijiusilingnian sidaidahui—yijiusiernian wudaidahui" [1940 fourth assembly—1942 fifth assembly], *JFRB* (September 27, 1942).

⁵² "Zenyang zai funü yundong zhong zhankai diaocha yanjiu gongzuo" [How to expand research and investigative work in the women's movement], *JFRB* (September 29, 1941).

While the majority of articles in the *JFRB* were factual reports used to support policy, the editors appear to have made up propaganda stories occasionally to teach cadres how to do things—the process of carrying out an investigation is a good example. It is thus possible that the articles summarized above are not records of actual events. Even if the incidents were not actual ones, however, the ideas the articles were trying to convey were valid and were typical of the problems arising at that time.

The first of the two articles carried a more radical message than the second; in it the cadres were clearly in the wrong. This was one of the first of numerous attacks on cadres appearing during late 1941 and early 1942. Nevertheless, there is a pattern of cadre change here that is interesting in light of the “to the village” movement and other attempts of the party undertaken at that time to familiarize cadres with peasant life.⁵³ The first cadre, who suggested that unreformed mothers-in-law wear hats throughout the village and became furious when someone opposed her, represented unreformed cadres who were ignorant about peasant life. She did not understand the reaction of the women against humiliating older people, especially those who might be another woman’s mother. Moreover, in having the critic removed from the meeting, she showed that she thought herself superior to the peasant women and unwilling to learn from them. The second group, the propaganda team, knew more about peasant needs than the first cadre and attempted to educate the village women through discussion. Like their predecessor, however, they did not understand village society, failing to recognize that it contained no place for divorced women. The third group, the work team, had apparently undergone the government’s reeducation programs, which characterized the first stage of rectification, for they came to the village intent on solidifying the family rather than destroying it. Their method for helping the women also was through education, but this time education involved discussion with all family members and offering women an alternative means for raising their status.

Although not as significant as the first, the second article contained two unique elements. The first was the positive contribution of the mothers-in-law, which was a marked change from their former role in the eyes of the party. This change in official attitudes toward the mother-in-law was important because it reflected the growing realization that the problem with mothers-in-law was not a class contradiction and, therefore, could not be treated the same way as peasants had rid themselves of oppressive landlords. It also pointed toward the new trend of promoting family harmony. Although this idea did not receive much attention at the time, it became important later on. Second, the article depicted a

⁵³ The “to the village” campaign began quietly in July 1941 with the cadres and students going to villages to help with the harvest and to live and work among the peasants, thereby getting a feel for the problems and concerns of peasants. See Selden, *Yenan Way*, p. 226.

women's group reevaluating itself with the aim of becoming a stronger, more constructive body. Such a self-education process, guided by Mao's writings, was common during this time.

These examples typified the new direction in policy that was taking shape in late 1941. By forcing cadres to study Marxism-Leninism and to work in production, the party was strengthening their revolutionary spirit. Simultaneously, it impressed upon cadres the importance of family unity and the need to integrate themselves into village life. Cadres were directed to stop inciting family quarrels and to start teaching women skills they might use to assume some of the family's economic burden. With women in the work force, party leaders hoped that tensions in the home would relax, allowing everyone to get on with the work of making the Border Region economically self-sufficient. Once again policy concerning women was taking a secondary role to more pressing economic needs.

IV

“Participate in Production” (1942–1945)

Mao Zedong officially launched *zhengfeng* on February 1, 1942, in two speeches stressing the roles of ideology in the Chinese Revolution and criticizing those who studied Marx, Lenin, and Stalin without relating them to the Chinese revolution.¹ Mao argued that party theory had not kept pace with revolutionary experience; as a result, theory and practice did not always coincide. He urged party members to learn from experience and relate it to theory, saying, “We have not yet raised this rich experience [i.e., revolutionary experience] to its necessary theoretical level.”²

Mao exhorted his fellow party members to maintain the link between theory and practice by continually going among the masses to discover their needs and desires, to use that knowledge to formulate policy, and finally to return to the people to propagate policy and have them carry it out. This method followed the guidelines he set forth in “On Practice”: “Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth. Start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and objective world. Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge.”³

The concept of mass line became the core of the party’s methodology. Translated as “from the masses, to the masses,” its purpose was to keep theory in tune with practice through a close working relationship between cadres and the people following the procedure outlined above. It focused on policy implementation because, as Andrew Watson points out, mass line was promoted at a time when party leaders

¹ For a translation of one of these speeches, see “Reform in Learning, the Party and Literature,” in *Mao’s China*, ed. Boyd Compton, pp. 9–32.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³ Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], “On Practice,” *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 308.

were debating questions of principle. He stresses that it “allowed for considerable flexibility within the confines of a defined and all-embracing ideological framework” and “was a practical working style which coincided closely with Marxist-Leninist principles concerning the role of the Party and its relationship with the masses.” Moreover, it allowed lower-level cadres to take the initiative in different situations without first having to consult with superiors.⁴

The zhengfeng movement was an outgrowth of the tension that pervaded the Border Region in late 1941 and early 1942. The strain between cadres and women discussed in the previous chapter was just one symptom of the illness that plagued all strata of society and interrupted the smooth operation of party programs. The Japanese offensive and the Guomindang blockade have already been cited as external reasons for the problem, but other causes existed as well. One was the heavy economic burden borne by poor and middle peasants at that time. This can be blamed on the spiraling taxation and inflation rates as Border Region officials tried to restore the economy of the region after the Guomindang imposed its blockade. Taxes in 1941 more than doubled, to an all-time high of 200,000 *piculs* (a picul equals 400 pounds) of millet; and in 1942 inflation rates soared 1,400 percent (as compared to 160 percent in Guomindang-held areas).⁵ Although the government had both taxes and inflation under control by 1944, the interim strained the relationship between leaders and those classes whose support was essential if party programs were to succeed.

This strain was not the only problem; tension mounted within the leadership itself. In the early 1940s two views—loosely classified as bureaucratic and revolutionary—existed in Yan'an, often within the same people. People with the bureaucratic view sought stable administration and political reform under the banner of the United Front. Many of those advocating this strategy were students and intellectuals, usually in administrative positions, who had come to Yan'an to fight the Japanese.

⁴ Andrew Watson, trans., *Mao Zedong and the Political Economy of the Border Region*, p. 20.

⁵ Selden, *Yenan Way*, pp. 180–181. Harrison points out that in 1943 the increase was one-half the previous year or 700 percent. The Yan'an government was eventually able to curb inflation and bring it under control. This was in sharp contrast to the rest of China, where inflation was increasing more than 1,000 percent a year by the late 1940s. See Harrison, p. 316. In 1942 the government introduced a new tax system based on progressive income and property taxes. Rates varied from 7 percent on the lowest income to 65 percent on the highest. In 1942 the tax rate on the high incomes was reduced. Taxes were generally paid in grain. See Van Slyke, p. 52.

Ding Ling escaped with light criticism. At a public meeting on June 11, 1942, she admitted that her March 9 article was divisive and negative, but she refused to deny the basic truth of what she had written. She said that the main error in her article was its lopsided view of the problem, pointing out only the dark side and not affirming the bright future.¹⁷

Although not as famous as "Reflections on March 8, Women's Day," two articles appearing in the *JFRB* at about the same time voiced criticisms of party policy for women as strong as Ding Ling's. One of them blamed the large number of vacancies for female cadres on party leaders' failure to relieve women party workers of the double burden of child care and party work. The article urged unmarried women cadres to stay single and those already married to have no children until a solution was found.¹⁸

Another critical article appeared on the same day as Ding Ling's. Written by the vice-chairman of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Assembly, Xie Juezai (under the name of Wang Dingguo), it related an incident that took place when he and a friend visited a certain village over the new year's holiday. There they talked with a young girl of seventeen or eighteen who spoke bitterly about her life. She said that her husband and father-in-law sometimes beat her and threw her out of the house, forcing her to sleep outside. The day after these beatings, the villagers always advised her to return home and give her father-in-law a "knock on the head." Although they were persuasive, the girl knew she could not do this and had no alternative but to go home and submissively face her father-in-law. When she returned, the father-in-law would make her kneel down and knock her head three or four times on the ground. The men told the young woman that she had the same rights as men and encouraged her to seek the support of the local women's association. She protested that if she sought help, those at home would find out and beat her when she returned. "I really have no place to go," she told the cadres; "I'm asking you to help me find a way out. Come to my house and take a look."

In Xie Juezai's opinion, this was not an isolated incident; beating and cursing by men and buying and selling of women for marriage were still common practices in the Border Region. He concluded that if party leaders thought women were achieving freedom, they were wrong, and

¹⁷ Benton, pp. 94-95. Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, "Ting Ling's 'When I Was in San Chuan [Cloud Village]'," p. 276.

¹⁸ "Dedaole xie shemma jiaoxun" [Attaining some instructions], *JFRB* (February 16, 1942).

that work among women fell far short of its intended goals.¹⁹

Judging from the accounts published in the newspaper after March 9, party leaders were shaken by these accusations, especially Ding Ling's. In what appeared to be a move by the leadership to divert attention from itself until it could produce a formal policy statement, the *JFRB* printed a number of articles attacking specific problems of cadre behavior.

Among the severest attacks were two directed against women cadres. The general tone of each reflects the party leaders' dissatisfaction with the inability of most cadres to bring about social change—a concern present from late 1941 on and a focal point of *zhengfeng*. However, the criticisms leveled in these is stronger than anything published before March 1942. The first article, which appeared on the front page of the *JFRB*, stated that cadres neither analyzed nor understood the conditions in the areas to which they were assigned. Furthermore, because they had not acquainted themselves thoroughly with government policy, many plans did not work. In addition, cadres had not yet organized all women. The article concluded by charging that many women cadres were narrow-minded and that the general caliber of cadres was very low.²⁰ The second article pointed out that many women cadres had not yet achieved their own liberation. How could they expect to set examples for other women, it asked, when they still submitted to their husbands and mothers-in-law at home and allowed members of their own families to continue traditional practices? The article also reprimanded male cadres who did not treat women equally and expected their own wives to play traditional roles.²¹

Changes in Policy

On February 26, 1943, the Central Committee finally issued a formal statement on policy for women, calling for them to achieve liberation by participating in production. Production, a nebulous part of the policy before this time, now became its keystone. This document deserves to be quoted at length because in it the Central Committee openly accepted the blame for the lack of progress in work with women and stated clearly the reasons for revising its policy.²² It began by detailing the deficiencies in

¹⁹ Wang Dingguo [pseud. of Xie Jeuzai], "Tingting xiangli funü jiao kusheng" [Let's listen to village women speak bitterness], *JFRB* (March 9, 1942).

²⁰ "Yijiusilingnian sidaidahui—yijiusiernian wudaidahui" [1940 fourth assembly—1942 fifth assembly], *JFRB* (September 27, 1942).

²¹ "Dui peiyang nongcun funü ganbu di yijian" [Supporting the opinion of women cadres in the villages], *JFRB* (November 22, 1942).

²² "Zhongguo zhongyang guanyu ge Kang-Ri genjudi muqian funü gongzuo fangzhen di jueding" [Decisions of the Chinese Communist party's Central Committee on the present

Also included in this group were local elites who for various reasons had entered into an uneasy alliance with the Communist party. Those with the second view, the revolutionary, were often men and women who had suffered under the old system; they wanted a thorough social change. Both views sought the defeat of Japan, but the contradiction between them guaranteed an unstable party situation in the Border Region.

When Mao launched *zhengfeng* in February 1942 he reflected the ideas of the party leadership who sought to revive the faltering revolution and restore the relationship between ideology and reality. The intensive intraparty debate it initiated attempted to educate cadres in Marxism-Leninism and impress upon them the need for absolute loyalty to the party. If cadres were to carry out the change in rural life necessary to transform the Border Region into a self-sufficient revolutionary society, party leaders could not afford to have dissension within the ranks. Furthermore, they had to have cadres committed both to implementing a complete social revolution and to fighting the Japanese.

Thus, party leaders sought to bind the varied elements who had joined the party because they believed it to be the only group actively fighting the Japanese into a coherent whole by motivating and inspiring them. At the same time they would provide these new members with a uniform methodology and tighten ideological standards. Party leaders also shifted away from a formal and bureaucratic administration in government and party toward a more decentralized and informal structure. Finally, they revised economic policy to concentrate on increasing production to make the Border Region self-sufficient and to improve the people's standard of living.⁶ For women, this was the most important change.

Zhengfeng reached the highest levels of party, government, and army at the Senior Cadre Conference held between October 1942 and January 1943. There, Border Region leaders developed what they believed to be a workable program to solve the problem facing the region. From that time on, all party policy was directed toward mobilizing people to restructure social, economic, political, and military life at the village level. To do this, a different kind of leadership was needed. Cadres were no longer delegated to rouse the peasants to seize land from landlords but to lead them in increasing production and redefining power at the local level.

Harnessing the creative energies of the peasants to build a new society by transforming village life became the cornerstone of all policy, including that concerning women. To encourage change from below

⁶ Watson, pp. 19-23.

through popular participation and the power of the community, the government and party initiated two programs. The first was a revised land policy. The United Front had produced no well-defined land policy, relying instead on the status quo. But in accordance with the new emphasis on mass mobilization, the Politburo issued its first major land statement on January 28, 1942, several days before zhengfeng officially began. The statement recognized among other points that capitalism was the more progressive mode of production in China at the time; and that because most landlords were anti-Japanese and some were even in favor of democratic reforms, party policy aimed only at helping peasants reduce feudal exploitation and not at eliminating it entirely. It also guaranteed collection of rent but promised to reduce both rent and interest rates, reasoning that such reductions were prerequisite to increasing agricultural production.⁷

Even though the document reintroduced class terms such as "feudal exploitation," which had not been seen since the beginning of the United Front, and signs of impending class struggle appeared after the harvest of 1942, land policy continued to be moderate. The emphasis was on class cooperation. If peasants were able to keep more of the harvest, they would work harder to increase their crop yield, would have more money to reinvest, and would be more willing to join in the forthcoming cooperative movement. Radical land reform would have to wait until 1947.

The new land policy paved the way for the second major program: the Great Production Drive of 1943. Change in economic policy was one of the principal outcomes of the Rectification Movement. At the Senior Cadre Conference, Mao detailed the proposed revisions, saying that the goal was not to transform the economy radically but to reform it and help it grow. After all, in 1942 the principles of the United Front still applied, if only in name. His plan sought to raise people's standard of living and increase production, all the while following the party line. The role of the government and party was no longer just collecting revenue; it was also, and now primarily, stimulating the growth of the private sector. To Mao the private sector meant agriculture, handicrafts, and commerce—activities that provided for the people's livelihood.⁸

⁷ The maximum allowed for rent was 37 percent of the crop. See Israel Epstein, "Journey to the North," p. 63, and "Decisions of the Central Committee on land policy in the anti-Japanese base areas," in Brandt et al., pp. 277-279.

⁸ Watson, pp. 22-23.

The new plan was part of an intense campaign to survive the blockade and make the Border Region self-sufficient. During the Great Production Drive government officials sought to make every man, woman, and child a producer. Even government functionaries and students participated in labor for two hours a day. The leadership did everything it could to increase production: it urged people to experiment with new methods and teach each other new techniques, it offered incentives to make people work harder and produce more, it guaranteed interest-free loans for agriculture and tax exemptions for cotton and grain, and it encouraged refugees to settle in the area (about 8,000 were settled). Moreover, to keep enthusiasm high, the government sponsored production contests and honored outstanding workers as Labor Heroes.⁹

The production movement also sought to make organized labor exchanges, like cooperatives and mutual-aid teams, the fundamental agricultural units in the base areas. Cooperatives had existed in the Border Region before 1943, but they had been organized and dominated from above, and were concerned primarily with commercial transactions.¹⁰ Before the spring planting in 1943 the government initiated a campaign to persuade peasants to pool their labor voluntarily. They appealed to people's self-interest with the argument that if the teams were successful, peasants would live better. Because membership was voluntary and there was little pressure to join, few peasants did; most preferred to stick with old methods.

Textile cooperatives, however, were successful. These spinning and weaving cooperatives, which were not so much capitalistic enterprises as they were organizations to assist women in getting supplies and distributing their goods, became the mainstays of the cooperative program in the Border Region from 1944 on. The movement to organize a variety of types of cooperatives does not appear to have been successful; the number of cooperatives in other areas of production fell drastically after 1944. Agricultural cooperatives, for example, became very rare.¹¹

⁹ "Annual Report of the Shen-Kan-Ning Border Region Government for 1943," in *The Chinese Communists*, ed. Stuart Gelder, pp. 114-116. Everyone including the army joined in production. The most famous army effort was the development of the barren Nanniwan area south of Yan'an by the 359th brigade. See Harrison, p. 317.

¹⁰ Selden, *Yenan Way*, p. 238. Nan qu cooperative in Yan'an xian was the model cooperative throughout the Yan'an period. It began as a simple consumer cooperative in 1936; by 1939 it incorporated nine economic units (consumer cooperatives, animal stores, salt transportation brigade, etc.) in four locations. Between 1939 and 1942 it implemented a variety of financial and administrative reforms that made it a territorial holding organization. See Peter Schran, *Guerrilla Economy*, p. 73.

¹¹ Schran, pp. 72-73.

Both the revised land policy, which continued to protect private property, and the Great Production Drive, which sought to increase production by offering material incentives to producers, complied with the guidelines of new democracy—the ideological basis of party policy during these years. In his 1940 essay “On New Democracy” Mao argued that it was not yet time to introduce socialism into China and called upon party members to be patient in their quest for it. He wrote: “The present task of the revolution in China is to fight imperialism and feudalism, and socialism is out of the question until this task is completed. The Chinese revolution cannot avoid taking the two steps, first of New Democracy and then of socialism. Moreover, the first step will need quite a long time and cannot be accomplished overnight. We are not utopians and cannot divorce ourselves from the actual conditions confronting us.”¹²

If the Border Region was to achieve self-sufficiency, everyone had to take part in carrying out the policies of new democracy. This included women. But the United Front policy for women contained a serious contradiction. In a decentralized economy that emphasized local and household industry, the family was, more than ever, the primary unit of production. Women could not be allowed to destroy the family’s capacity for unified action; they had to work harmoniously within the family toward common goals. Therefore, policy for women had to change.

Criticism of Policy

During the early stages of the Rectification Movement signs emerged that a new direction in policy for women was taking shape, but most of the impending revisions were still under discussion when zhengfeng reached its peak. The delay in producing definitive proposals for raising the status of women made leading party members a prime target for criticism. The strongest attack on the party came from the writer Ding Ling, probably Yan’an’s most outspoken and free-thinking woman. As a member of a propaganda group that traveled throughout the Border Region performing plays for the peasants, she had ample opportunity to observe what life in the area was really like. Ding Ling occasionally allowed her prejudices to color her thinking, but she was an astute observer of the situation. Her article “Reflections on March 8, Women’s Day” caused considerable furor when it was published in the March 9, 1942, edition of the *JFRB* and was one of the important events of the Rectification Movement.

¹² Mao, “On New Democracy,” p. 358.

Her criticisms fell into two categories: those blaming the party for failing to change the people's attitudes toward women effectively, and those blaming the party for failing to foster a social situation that could accommodate progressive working women.¹³ She wrote that people in Yan'an still did not accept the idea of equality between men and women and that a woman was capable of performing tasks outside the home. This nonacceptance was due to cadres' failure to convince people to disregard their traditional beliefs. Instead, society still fluctuated between the equality of the future and the oppression of the past, and most people continued to believe that everyone must marry and produce children. This traditionalism was hard on women who found themselves burdened with the entire responsibility for domestic work and child care. Many young women who had taken part in the formation of the new society before marriage found themselves in a situation similar to that of Ibsen's Nora after marriage. If they remained at home to raise their children, they were criticized for not being liberated women contributing to the creation of a better society. If they hired nurses to take care of their children, or left them in nurseries while they worked, they were accused of being bad mothers, and heard such things as "Isn't giving birth to children also work?" of "If you didn't want to raise children, why did you get married in the first place?" Caught in a dilemma, these women either obtained abortions and remained childless or, more frequently, submitted to social pressure and stayed at home. Many men divorced their wives because they were politically backward; but how could women be anything else, Ding Ling asked, given the above conditions?

Ding Ling concluded her remarks by offering some advice to the party and to women. She suggested that the party take three steps to remedy the situation: (1) it should have less empty talk and more discussion of practical matters, and should not separate theory from practice; (2) it should emphasize self-cultivation (i.e., consciousness raising) rather than divorce; and (3) it should work to make women feel capable of doing things outside the home. As for women, they must strengthen themselves inwardly if they wanted equality and unite with other women to raise their status. To this end, Ding Ling advised them

¹³ Ding Ling, "Sanbajie you gan" [Reflections on March 8, Women's Day], *JFRB* (March 9, 1942). For a translation, see Gregor Benton, "The Yen'an Literary Opposition," pp. 102-105. The synopsis here is my own. Women's Day is an international holiday to honor working women and is, today, one of the yearly six and one-half paid holidays given to Chinese women. It was begun in 1910 by Clara Zetkin, a German socialist, who proposed that March 8 be proclaimed International Women's Day to commemorate strikes in 1857 and 1908 by women in the United States.

to attain personal happiness first—not through the mere satisfaction of living, but through the struggle to survive. She urged them to strive every day to contribute something of worth to society and live lives that respected human dignity. Women, she said, must sacrifice their romantic illusions, resolve to endure hardships, and persist to the end.

The views expressed in “Reflections on March 8, Women’s Day” were the most honest and perceptive evaluation of the women’s movement to date. Ding Ling’s three suggestions proved to be of great significance because they addressed problems that party leaders had either failed to consider or did not know how to resolve. Although they had conducted an investigation into the problems, they had not come as close to the truth as she did because they had relied upon their own people to carry out the investigation, and these people were afraid to risk their careers by telling officials that much of the blame for the problems in work with women lay with party leadership. Consequently, most officials still could not recognize that the United Front policy was a failure. This is evident in two articles appearing in the *JFRB* within a few days of Ding Ling’s. In rhetoric straight from the United Front years, both articles told cadres that their primary duty toward women was to organize them and lead them in participating in the resistance movement.¹⁴ One stated: “Therefore, for women, the only way to fight for their own happiness is to leave the family and enter society; to join the work of resisting Japan, to join in social activities, and, especially, to join in social production careers.”¹⁵

Ding Ling was not the only one criticizing the party in general or, more specifically, policy for women in 1942. She was one of three well-known writers who wrote critical essays on the party and government at that time. These authors saw themselves as social watchdogs and, drawing courage from Mao’s own attacks on the bureaucracy in his February 1, 1942, speeches, wrote about the dark side of life in the base areas in an attempt to expose tendencies toward bureaucratism and elitism.¹⁶

Even in the general upheaval of zhengfeng, however, Mao and other party leaders would not tolerate this kind of criticism from lower levels and quickly challenged the three writers. One of them, Wang Shiwei, stood trial for his remarks and was sent to work in a matchbox factory.

¹⁴ “Genjudi geji funü cuzhi gongzuo tiaolie” [Various levels of women organize work regulations], *JFRB* (March 13, 1942).

¹⁵ “Xiang jiating? Dao shehui?” [Toward family? toward society?], *JFRB* (March 8, 1942).

¹⁶ Benton, p. 93; Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China*, pp. 20–21. The other two writers were Wang Shiwei and Luo Feng.

Ding Ling escaped with light criticism. At a public meeting on June 11, 1942, she admitted that her March 9 article was divisive and negative, but she refused to deny the basic truth of what she had written. She said that the main error in her article was its lopsided view of the problem, pointing out only the dark side and not affirming the bright future.¹⁷

Although not as famous as "Reflections on March 8, Women's Day," two articles appearing in the *JFRB* at about the same time voiced criticisms of party policy for women as strong as Ding Ling's. One of them blamed the large number of vacancies for female cadres on party leaders' failure to relieve women party workers of the double burden of child care and party work. The article urged unmarried women cadres to stay single and those already married to have no children until a solution was found.¹⁸

Another critical article appeared on the same day as Ding Ling's. Written by the vice-chairman of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Assembly, Xie Juezai (under the name of Wang Dingguo), it related an incident that took place when he and a friend visited a certain village over the new year's holiday. There they talked with a young girl of seventeen or eighteen who spoke bitterly about her life. She said that her husband and father-in-law sometimes beat her and threw her out of the house, forcing her to sleep outside. The day after these beatings, the villagers always advised her to return home and give her father-in-law a "knock on the head." Although they were persuasive, the girl knew she could not do this and had no alternative but to go home and submissively face her father-in-law. When she returned, the father-in-law would make her kneel down and knock her head three or four times on the ground. The men told the young woman that she had the same rights as men and encouraged her to seek the support of the local women's association. She protested that if she sought help, those at home would find out and beat her when she returned. "I really have no place to go," she told the cadres; "I'm asking you to help me find a way out. Come to my house and take a look."

In Xie Juezai's opinion, this was not an isolated incident; beating and cursing by men and buying and selling of women for marriage were still common practices in the Border Region. He concluded that if party leaders thought women were achieving freedom, they were wrong, and

¹⁷ Benton, pp. 94-95. Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, "Ting Ling's 'When I Was in San Chuan [Cloud Village]'," p. 276.

¹⁸ "Dedaole xie shemma jiaoxun" [Attaining some instructions], *JFRB* (February 16, 1942).

that work among women fell far short of its intended goals.¹⁹

Judging from the accounts published in the newspaper after March 9, party leaders were shaken by these accusations, especially Ding Ling's. In what appeared to be a move by the leadership to divert attention from itself until it could produce a formal policy statement, the *JFRB* printed a number of articles attacking specific problems of cadre behavior.

Among the severest attacks were two directed against women cadres. The general tone of each reflects the party leaders' dissatisfaction with the inability of most cadres to bring about social change—a concern present from late 1941 on and a focal point of *zhengfeng*. However, the criticisms leveled in these is stronger than anything published before March 1942. The first article, which appeared on the front page of the *JFRB*, stated that cadres neither analyzed nor understood the conditions in the areas to which they were assigned. Furthermore, because they had not acquainted themselves thoroughly with government policy, many plans did not work. In addition, cadres had not yet organized all women. The article concluded by charging that many women cadres were narrow-minded and that the general caliber of cadres was very low.²⁰ The second article pointed out that many women cadres had not yet achieved their own liberation. How could they expect to set examples for other women, it asked, when they still submitted to their husbands and mothers-in-law at home and allowed members of their own families to continue traditional practices? The article also reprimanded male cadres who did not treat women equally and expected their own wives to play traditional roles.²¹

Changes in Policy

On February 26, 1943, the Central Committee finally issued a formal statement on policy for women, calling for them to achieve liberation by participating in production. Production, a nebulous part of the policy before this time, now became its keystone. This document deserves to be quoted at length because in it the Central Committee openly accepted the blame for the lack of progress in work with women and stated clearly the reasons for revising its policy.²² It began by detailing the deficiencies in

¹⁹ Wang Dingguo [pseud. of Xie Jeuzai], "Tingting xiangli funü jiao kusheng" [Let's listen to village women speak bitterness], *JFRB* (March 9, 1942).

²⁰ "Yijiusilingnian sidaidahui—yijiusiernian wudaidahui" [1940 fourth assembly—1942 fifth assembly], *JFRB* (September 27, 1942).

²¹ "Dui peiyang nongcun funü ganbu di yijian" [Supporting the opinion of women cadres in the villages], *JFRB* (November 22, 1942).

²² "Zhongguo zhongyang guanyu ge Kang-Ri genjudi muqian funü gongzuo fangzhen di jueding" [Decisions of the Chinese Communist party's Central Committee on the present

attempts to develop a women's movement before 1943. "Although our work with women has been effective, we still do not have the spirit of seeking truth from reality and a true mass viewpoint. We have failed to immerse ourselves into this very difficult work and become one with the masses." For these reasons party officials had failed to regard production as the most important work for women, to investigate women's unique feelings and conditions, or to consider their home duties and physical limitations.

We have made up slogans for the women's movement, devised projects, established organizations, and made women attend frequent meetings, wasting both their labor power and material resources instead of determining what women can and should do at a given time and place. To accord with our own subjective views, we have mobilized them without purpose. As a result, work with women has been too loose, the organization too formalized; both have lacked a true mass base.

The statement continued by making clear what the new direction of the women's movement was to be:

...it is production, something at which women can and should be particularly good. Their part in production is as important a struggle as that of the soldiers at the front...If women produce a lot and are thrifty, their families will have a higher standard of living. This will not only play a big role in developing the economy of the base areas, it will also provide women with the material conditions they need to overthrow feudal oppression...[this] is the new direction of work for women in all the anti-Japanese base areas.

To carry out the new direction, the form and methods of working with women must change radically.

To keep policy for women in line with the party's current social and economic goals, seven major changes were to be made. First, local women's associations were to "go deep into the countryside" to teach women new skills and help them solve problems associated with production. Second, productive goals were to be made in accordance with the economic plan of the rest of the family. Third, organizations were to be set up on the basis of local women's needs and not just for the sake of forming an organization. Fourth, cadres were to reduce the number of meetings village women had to attend so that they could devote their full energies to more productive labor. Fifth, cadres were to encourage reform in matters affecting women's health and work (e.g., footbinding).

work with women in the anti-Japanese base areas]. For a translation see Davin, *Woman-Work*, pp. 198-200. The translation in the following paragraphs is my own.

Sixth, women were to be educated politically and culturally through their work (e.g., learn characters concerned with production). Finally, cadres were no longer to consider political and productive work unimportant.

Interested in making its revised policy clear to everyone, the party repeated the ideas put forth in the February 26 statement almost verbatim in a *JFRB* editorial on Women's Day, March 8, 1943. Written by the leading woman in the Border Region government, Cai Chang, the editorial told women that work in production was the most important and most suitable work for them. With economic freedom, it argued, women could liberate themselves from feudal discipline.²³

The new policy followed the guidelines of new democracy and fit in well with the government's campaign to strengthen the economy and promote social cooperation. It did not, however, answer one essential question: what kind of productive activities were women to engage in? Policy makers knew that because there were still not enough nurseries and child care centers, women had to be involved in activities they could do in or near the home.²⁴ Agriculture was a possibility; but many women, for one reason or another, could not work in the fields. Given the household burdens of women and the requirements of the Border Region, the best solution, according to the party, was for them to spin and weave. Many women already knew how to do this work and they could do it at home. In addition, in spinning and weaving, women could remain an integral part of the family's economy. More importantly, textile production would alleviate the shortages of cloth and shoes that had developed in the Border Region as a result of the blockade. Cloth, the major import into the area, had become so scarce that between 1940 and 1943 its price rose twice as fast as that of grain.²⁵ The region's loess soil could grow cotton; all that was needed was to expand its production and sharpen women's spinning and weaving skills.

The plan was to organize women to spin and weave. By "organizing," party leaders did not mean taking women out of the home and setting up structured work groups. Although formal cooperatives and mutual-aid teams existed in many progressive areas, the majority of

²³ Cai Chang, "Yingjie funü gongzuo di xin fangxiang" [Welcome the new direction in women's work], *JFRB* (March 8, 1943).

²⁴ Ester Boserup believes that in developing areas, employment in home industry is preferred for women because "it does not entail contact with persons outside the woman's own family, and particularly because the woman does not have to risk being under the supervision of men who are not members of the family." See Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, p. 116.

²⁵ Selden, *Yenan Way*, p. 180.

women worked independently at their own pace or in loosely knit groups. When figures for the number of organizations are cited (for example, see Table 2), they represent both partially structured groups and more formal work teams. Cadres tried to minimize the disruption that textile work might cause in the family and maximize the enjoyment and additional income it would bring to women. Women were encouraged to work with their neighbors so that they could pool their resources, study together, or provide communal child care. As we will see, the lack of widespread formal organizations created as many problems as it solved.

Table 2
Expansion of Spinning Industry in Nan Qu Cooperative

Year	Organizations	Weavers	Wheels	Yarn (in jin)
1938	80	756	512	2,268
1939	98	849	621	2,547
1940	102	935	756	4,002
1941	130	1,436	1,164	11,208
1942	no figure	2,241	1,445	15,679

SOURCE: "Yanxian di fufang yundong" [The women's spinning movement in Yan xian], *JFRB* (February 10, 1943). See also Luo, pp. 21–22.

The emphasis on women spinning and weaving was not entirely new; many women in the more advanced areas of the Border Region had been engaged in textile work for some time. In Qingjian, for example, women had supplied the area with the cloth it needed since the war began. About one-half the 32,000 women in Qingjian reportedly were working in this important industry. In July 1942 the women boasted that at the time they owned 10,195 spinning wheels and 2,754 looms, and had produced 92,477 *zhang* (a *zhang* is approximately ten feet) of cloth and had spun 26,821 jin of cotton yarn the previous year. Even though women in some sections of Qingjian had traditionally been engaged in spinning and weaving work, the quality of their work was still not very good. In 1942, for example, women produced few goods of high enough quality to be sold outside the immediate vicinity.²⁶

In the model cooperative of Nan qu in Yan'an xian, the number of women involved in spinning and weaving increased from 756 in 1938 to

²⁶ "Qingjian banshu funü canjia shengchan" [Half of Qingjian's women are participating in production], *JFRB* (July 18, 1942).

2,241 in 1942. During that time 935 new spinning wheels were purchased and the amount of yarn produced increased from 2,268 to 15,679 jin.

Yan'an xian appears to have been more advanced than any other area in organizing women for production—understandably, because the capital city was there. As early as March 1942, cooperatives for textiles were operating and even awarding monetary prizes to outstanding spinners and weavers.²⁷ A year later Yan'an xian, in accordance with the government's cooperative movement in all areas of the economy, expanded its cooperatives from simply organizing women to work, to investing capital and supplying materials.²⁸ Such action was not taken in other sections of the Border Region, no matter how advanced, until much later.

Mao discussed the need to produce more and better yarn in his 1942 assessment of the Border Region's economy. "We must greatly expand the amount of spinning done by the people, and improve the quality of the yarn," he said. "Therefore it is extremely important for the Border Region to gradually expand handicraft spinning and weaving among the people, to increase the quantity, and to improve the quality."²⁹ To do this he proposed several measures. Among them were reorganizing and expanding spinning and weaving in Suide (an area that was already doing textile work); investing 1,000,000 yuan there to help produce more yarn and a further 1,000,000 yuan either as loans or share capital in the existing weaving cooperatives to help them expand; investigating spinning techniques to improve the quality of goods produced so that cloth could be made entirely from local yarn; and encouraging official personnel to wear clothes made of local fabric. The government did in fact invest 2,000,000 yuan in the Suide weaving industry in March 1942. According to the *JFRB*, the investment was made because textile work in that area had declined because there were insufficient funds to buy new machinery.³⁰

²⁷ "Hezuo zhilingju jiang Yan'an deng xian fangzhi yingxiong" [Cooperative leaders reward Yan'an and other xian spinning and weaving heroines], *JFRB* (March 4, 1942).

²⁸ "Funü hezuoshe deng bei jiu xu" [Women's cooperative almost ready], *JFRB* (February 14, 1943).

²⁹ Quoted in Watson, p. 108.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 108–110. See also "Zai Sui touzi liangbaiwanyuan fazhan Jingqu fangzhi gongye" [In Suide 2,000,000 yuan invested to expand the spinning and weaving industry in Jingqu], *JFRB* (March 10, 1942).

Policy in Action

The overall goal of policy was to involve women in the work of making the Border Region self-sufficient without provoking social conflict; but, in fact, self-interest—the idea of women obtaining material benefits from productive work—became the central theme of the women's movement from 1942 to 1945. The *JFRB* focused almost entirely on this theme; articles on women usually centered on one of three topics: women actively taking part in production, profits earned from spinning and weaving, and women being rewarded for outstanding work.³¹

The most common type of article discussed the increase in the number of women in production over a certain period in an area and the resulting increased output and improved quality. Once this point was made, many articles explained why the village or qu was successful in attracting women to work. A typical example is an article about the villages of Dingbian and Yanchi in the northwestern tip of the Border Region. In those two villages the number of women in production rose from 26 women in March 1943 to 169 in September. Three reasons were given for this increase. The “correct leadership” of the party had loaned the towns 100,000 yuan to get spinning started and had had 400 spinning wheels built for the women. As the movement got underway, model textile workers visited the towns to give direction and encouragement. Finally, party cadres urged village women to organize themselves and to take the lead in bringing into the movement women who were reluctant to join.³²

Other articles cited different reasons for similar successes. One frequent theme was the example set by a village woman, such as Li Guotai of Nan qu. Before the textile movement began supposedly the only productive work women did was to help men occasionally in the fields. When the Border Region government promoted women in production, local officials divided them into small groups to spin and

³¹ Women in production became a very popular topic in the *JFRB*. Between January and April 1943, for example, thirty-four articles dealt with the subject. This does not include the March 8 edition, which focused entirely on women in production. Production replaced the war as the major headline. Comparing this period with May–July 1941 shows how important production became. During that earlier period, the major news story was the war, with the election running second; only two articles on organizing women to produce appeared during the entire three months.

³² “Fangfu zengjia liubu” [Spinning women increase six times], *JFRB* (September 16, 1943).

weave; however, most women in these groups did not know how to do either. The xian government attempted several times to solve the problem, but women did not seem interested in learning. Finally, government officials took all the cotton yarn to Li Guotai, a woman with textile skills, and asked her to weave it. When she finished, they rewarded her efforts by giving her nine yuan. The more she wove, the more money they gave her. Nine months later, more than 200 women were working in textiles.³³ In another article Mrs. Li's husband summarized her success: "In our house, there were three people, all depending on me to support them. Outside of food we still had to buy clothes. Before [the time his wife started to weave] we didn't even have shoes.... My wife was among the first [to participate in production] and this year she has already woven more than 800 jin of cloth."³⁴

In Chishui, a village in the southern part of the Border Region, two villagers taught local women how to spin and weave, thereby increasing the number of spinners to 505 and weavers to 249. (No figure for the original number in production was provided.) One of the two was a woman of fifty-one, whose textile work supported her family. In addition to spinning and weaving to supply the family with clothing and to earn enough to buy other items the family needed, she also organized a small group of women to spin and taught five of them how to weave.³⁵

The efforts to train women and to improve the quality of goods produced is another reason cited for the success of the program. In Huan xian a four-week training program was held for 80 women who wanted to learn to weave cotton. After the sessions the women were skilled enough to increase the amount and raise the quality of the cotton cloth they produced. Within seven months two-thirds of the 7,000 *ding* (a *ding* is a bolt of cloth 105.97 feet by 2.56 feet) of cloth woven was the highest quality cotton—a figure much higher than ever before. At the same time 300 of the 790 women spinners in the xian were learning to spin a better quality cotton yarn. When the article was written cadres from the xian were planning to go out into other areas to set up similar training sessions.³⁶

³³ "Yan'an Nanqu fa fufang di jingyan" [Yan'an Nan qu expands the experience of women spinning], *JFRB* (March 28, 1943).

³⁴ "Funfū fangsha zai Nanqu" [Women textiles in Nan qu], *JFRB* (January 28, 1943).

³⁵ "Fangzhi funū da qibaiyuren" [Spinning and weaving increases to more than 700 people], *JFRB* (November 8, 1943).

³⁶ "Huanxian fadong funū tuji fangbu guangshe—xunlianban tigao tusha zhiliang" [Huan xian expands women's weaving and establishes training sessions to raise the quality], *JFRB* (December 31, 1943). See also "Zichang juanli funū fang jidian" [Zichang establishes women's spinning], *JFRB* (July 11, 1943).

Raising the quality of both yarn and cloth was a constant concern to the government. Many women were eager to spin and weave, but the goods they produced were of such low quality that in some cases it was unusable. To improve quality the government scheduled meetings to teach women better skills and also offered higher prices for better quality cloth. In Nan qu, for example, a whole new system of buying yarn was established to encourage women to spin finer quality yarn. The government divided yarn into three classes and assigned a value to each. The highest, class one, was worth fifty-five yuan; class two, fifty yuan; and class three, forty-five yuan. This meant that women needed to spin less of the high quality yarn to make a profit (for class one, they needed to spin seven ounces; class two, eight ounces; and class three, nine ounces). It also meant that if women spun the same amount of yarn they always had, but yarn of higher quality, they would make more money. Needless to say, most women began to spin class one yarn.³⁷

The final reason cited for success was the formation of cooperatives to streamline production and help in marketing surpluses. In the first ten months of its existence in 1943, one cooperative near Yan'an received 14,237 articles of clothing and 17,894 jin of yarn from its 975 members, claiming a profit of more than 150,000 yuan. The cooperative's goal for 1944 included increasing production of wool yarn and cloth, expanding into other needed goods such as shoes, and organizing more women to weave.³⁸

Articles about profits that women earned from their work also appeared in the *JFRB* at this time.³⁹ Elements of capitalism in party policy will be discussed later, but it is important to note that a strong profit motif ran through all these articles even when money was not the main focus. One example is the article about "spinning heroine" Zhang Jinhua. From July to November 1942 Mrs. Zhang spun seventy-five jin of yarn, earning 5,570 yuan. Not only did she provide her family with clothes, but she was

³⁷ "Yan'an Nanqu fa fufang di jingyan."

³⁸ "Bianqu funü hezuoshe shigeyue yingyu qianwubaiwanyuan" [Border Region women's cooperative earns more than 150,000 yuan in ten months], *JFRB* (December 31, 1943). For other articles on cooperatives see "Zichang baqian funü fangxian lingwansanqian jin" [Zichang's 8,000 women spun 23,000 jin], *JFRB* (October 30, 1943); "Zou xiang shengchan zhanxian" [Going toward the production battle front], *JFRB* (February 5, 1943). Stein estimates the rate of exchange for 1943 as approximately 1,000 Border Region dollars to one dollar US. No more precise figures were found. See Stein, *Challenge of Red China*, p. 184.

³⁹ For example, see "Yanchang tigao gongzuo jiangli funü fangsha" [Yanchang raises wages to encourage women to spin yarn], *JFRB* (May 29, 1943); "Suiwuqing fangzhiye fada" [Suiwuqing textile industry develops], *JFRB* (April 4, 1943).

able to buy a sheep, among other things. When the article was written in April 1943, she was planning to sell her yarn to a factory that would provide her with a new spinning wheel. Once she learned how to use the new wheel, Mrs. Zhang would be able to spin six jin a day to earn 336 yuan daily.⁴⁰

Mrs. Zhang was behaving like a capitalist; she was expanding. Through her efficiency at spinning, Zhang Jinhua personally gained control of both the raw materials and the process to turn those materials into a finished product. At first she had to rely on someone else for wool; but when she earned enough money, Mrs. Zhang bought her own source—a sheep. Once her raw materials were ensured, she turned her attention toward marketing, arranging to sell her finished product to a factory in return for a spinning wheel. She thereby assured herself of continued good profits and a rosy economic future.

The 1943 Central Committee statement on policy made clear that the money women earned by producing was one of the primary incentives for getting them to work. Mao Zedong endorsed this idea in his 1942 analysis of the economy when he said: “The primary aspect of our work is not to ask things of the people but to give things to the people.... Under the present conditions of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, we can organize, lead and help the people to develop production and increase their material wealth.”⁴¹

Because the inflation rate in the Border Region was so high in the early 1940s, the profits earned by women sound greater than they really were. Nevertheless, even though profits were not always large, they did contribute to a growing sense of economic freedom for women.⁴² It was much easier to rally women to work by telling them it would raise their family’s standard of living than by telling them it would contribute to the defeat of an enemy who was not at their doorstep or by arguing that it would strengthen the economy, a concept most peasant women would not understand.

Officials presented policy to women in terms of bettering their own lives because that was what they understood best. Yet no matter how the message was relayed, the short-term goals of policy had been adapted once again to reflect the critical needs of the Border Region. In contrast to the

⁴⁰ “Mizhi fufang yingxiong Zhang Jinhua jiang shoujiang” [Mizhi spinning heroine Zhang Jinhua receives an award], *JFRB* (April 4, 1943).

⁴¹ Watson, p. 232.

⁴² Money was of minor importance in the area because most transactions (buying, selling, tax collecting, etc.) were done in kind with millet as the standard of value. See Van Slyke, p. 155; Hsü, p. 14.

period between 1937 and 1941 when it never quite matched ideology, policy in practice from 1942 to 1945 was in tune with the ideas of new democracy.

The most interesting articles on women were those praising model workers and labor heroines. During the Production Drive of 1943 the government, borrowing from the Stakhanovite movement in the Soviet Union the idea of honoring outstanding people as heroes, began a hero emulation campaign to praise the best men and women workers. The campaign included elections during which villagers selected those among them who they felt deserved to be honored as model workers or labor heroes.⁴³

In recognizing outstanding workers, government leaders sought to create at the local level a pool of dedicated leaders ready to lead the transition to a cooperative economy. In other words, they wanted local activists through whom cadres could implement policy. The emulation campaign sought to promote people's "strong points," to praise their success, and to encourage competition, mutual study, and the example of good models. It was intended to be a means of raising the people's enthusiasm while recognizing individual and group achievement.

The naming of labor heroes demonstrated that men and women were capable of changing reality through hard work and perseverance. They also proved that people could increase production, and in the process add to their material wealth, by using their wisdom, skill, and experience. Border Region officials wanted to use them three ways: as standards of work and production, as links between the leadership and the masses, and as inspirations for cadres.⁴⁴

To help publicize the movement and maintain enthusiasm among the people, the *JFRB* published articles on particular heroes. In 1943 during the height of the campaign, these appeared daily, often running from a third to a half page. The articles all followed a strict format: a small picture of the hero or heroine at the top, a brief account of his or her life (usually describing previous difficulties), an outline of production

⁴³ "Guanyu laodong yingxiong hotan gongzuozhe wenti" [Regarding the labor hero and model worker question], *JFRB* (January 9, 1945). The concept of hero emulation was not new to China. According to Mary Sheridan, "Emulation was the mainstay of Confucian education in the form of stories about great emperors, generals, poets, magistrates and filial children." One of the most famous heroes in China's past was Zhuge Liang, the scholar-hero of the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, who at twenty-seven devised a plan to restore the Han dynasty for a second time. See Mary Sheridan, "The Emulation of Heroes," p. 47; and Robert Ruhlman, "Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction," pp. 163-164.

⁴⁴ "Guanyu laodong yingxiong...wenti," *JFRB* (January 9, 1945).

record and methods, and finally some public statement of achievements and rewards. The latter ranged from money for outstanding units or individuals to small tokens like banners with the writing of Mao Zedong or Zhu De, matches, or, for individuals, something needed in their work.

Outstanding men and women were honored not only in their own villages but also at a Border Regionwide meeting for labor heroes and model workers held in Yan'an each year after the harvest. At the meeting Mao Zedong or some other high party official praised these men and women, filling them with the enthusiasm they needed to return home and lead their neighbors in increasing production. At a November 1943 reception Mao reminded heroes of their obligations. "I hope when you get back [to their counties and units]... you will lead the people, lead the masses and work harder, and first of all get the masses organized on a voluntary basis into co-operatives, get them even better organized and in even greater numbers."⁴⁵

The articles in the *JFRB* on labor heroines and model workers from 1943 on shared certain common elements differing from articles on women published between 1937 and 1941. In labor heroine articles women achieved liberation through their own hard work, and not through the efforts of a women's association. The diminished role of the women's association in post-1942 articles was consistent with government officials' attempts at that time to reduce the strength and independence of local women's associations. Dissatisfied with the course taken by the associations before zhengfeng, they wanted local governments to keep women's affairs under closer supervision.

Furthermore, in the post-1942 articles the difficulties women had to overcome were attributed to environmental factors—land lost because of fighting or seized for payment of debts; death or disability of the male head of the household—rather than oppressive treatment. Few articles focused on the cruelties women experienced at the hands of their

⁴⁵ Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong], "Get Organized," vol. 3, p. 160.

⁴⁶ Delia Davin disagrees that women's associations lost their power in the mid-1940s. She believes that they played a significant role, particularly in managing the textile work. She points out that women's congresses were set up in every district in the mid-forties and through these, women were organized to take part in land reform. It is true that in the spring of 1945 an All Liberated Areas' Women's Federation was formed to handle the concerns of women, but I agree with Schran and the Crooks that women's associations as originally defined in the late 1930s were no longer as important as they had been. The Crooks correctly point out that because local women's associations included women from all classes, their work was limited to production and did not include the social objectives that would lead to complete emancipation. See Davin, "Women in the Liberated Areas," pp. 79–81; Schran, p. 69; Crook, p. 101.

husbands or other family members. If a family was being cruel to a woman, she apparently overcame it without too much opposition; more frequently, her family was advancing at the same time she was. Although the women written about were working to liberate themselves and their families from the traditional system as well as from poverty, in view of the party's efforts to maintain family unity at that time, the former received more emphasis than the latter.

One example of a labor heroine working with her progressive family in advanced production is the article "Model woman Han Fengling," which appeared in the *JFRB* on April 27, 1943. According to the article, Han Fengling was afraid to attend the women's association meetings when the women's group was first formed in her village. Even after Eighth Route Army soldiers arrived and began to hold study meetings, she was reluctant to attend, although she complained bitterly to her friends, "We women must be liberated!" Finally, the members of the government work team convinced her to go the study meetings in spite of her shyness. From the first meeting she attended, Han Fengling became one of the hardest working and most studious of the women. Soon the other women rewarded her by making her head of the women's association.

In 1939 Han Fengling's village was almost washed away by a flood; shortly thereafter the Japanese raided it, burning the houses and taking away the food. Many villagers fled; those left began to die of starvation when winter came. When government cadres arrived to assist the village, they called upon Han Fengling, as head of the women's association, to help them reclaim the lost land. She was willing to work with the cadres even though she feared people would laugh at her because she was only nineteen. Along with her young husband, she began to work hard to open new land and plant it with melons.

For her excellent work the village women's association elected her to represent them at the Border Region's Fourth Annual Women's Meeting. The slogan of the meeting was "Begin spinning and weaving, and women's production." Han Fengling took this to heart; when she returned to her village, she organized the village women into a production unit. All day long she worked in the fields, and in the evenings she spun. "Don't stop spinning just because it gets dark," she told the village women; "come to my place and we'll work by lamp."

When the government raised the slogan "Women raise pigs, raise chickens," Han Fengling went to the village women and encouraged them to raise chickens and pigs. By the next year each home had two or three pigs. Satisfied with this progress, Han turned her attention to chickens. Here she met with opposition because the villagers were unwilling to sell

their valuable chickens to a cooperative effort. Undaunted, she decided that members of the cooperative should hatch their own, so under her supervision they bought 500,000 eggs to hatch. Although life was still difficult, the villagers agreed that the lot of each family had improved substantially because of the efforts of Han Fengling.⁴⁶

An interesting postscript to this article showed what a husband was doing while his liberated wife participated in production. Under the subtitle "Creating the model new family," the article discussed the activities of Han Fengling's husband. He, too, was very busy in village affairs and had served as the village head for the previous three years. At home he treated his wife equally and asked her advice about everything. As for Han Fengling, she assisted her husband in both his agricultural and his village work. Commenting on him, she said, "In the home and village he wants to better things. He is a village leader and a motivating force."⁴⁷

Another type of article described labor heroines who were the sole support of their families. These were often widows or women with sickly husbands who worked in the fields to provide food for their families. It was not surprising that almost all agricultural heroines were the sole support of their families; only desperate circumstances would drive most women of the Border Region to work in the fields prior to 1945 or 1946, when the government encouraged them to help during the busy seasons. To keep themselves and their families alive these heroines had to work harder and longer than people who had several family members sharing the work.

One heroine who supported both her sickly husband and her child was Ren Yunni. In 1943 this fifty-four-year-old woman, who had supported her family for thirty-five years, was awarded 100 yuan by the government for outstanding work. In May 1941 she and her family had become ill. When she recovered, Ren Yunni went out to the mountains to cut grass and dig herbs. She used the herbs to nurse her sick family, but she exchanged the grass for rice; within half a month she cut enough grass to maintain her husband, her ten-year-old daughter, and herself. At the time the article was written, she was farming sixteen mou of land (five of her own and eleven that she rented). In addition, she picked up manure on the road each day to use as fertilizer for her fields. When the

⁴⁶ "Funü yingxiong Han Fengling" [Woman heroine Han Fengling], *JFRB* (April 27, 1943). There is no mention of where women got the capital for investment. Like the articles cited in the last chapter, this one may not be based entirely on fact.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

villagers failed to ask her help in reclaiming nearby land because they thought she was too busy, Ren found out where they were working and joined them.⁴⁸

The most publicized labor heroine was a woman named Liu Guiying. At least two long articles on her work appeared in the *JFRB*. The example presented here is from another article about her excerpted from the *JFRB* and published in a short book, *Women of Yan'an*. In addition, her name comes up again and again in articles generally concerned with production.

A fifty-year-old native of Suide xian, Liu was the organizer of a woman's spinning and weaving group in her village. Her service to this group and to the women of her village in general was so outstanding that they elected her to represent them at the Border Region's Labor Hero Representative Assembly. Although she was middle-aged, her work was equal to that of any younger person, and she became famous throughout Yan'an for it.

Widow Liu had not always lived a good life. At fourteen she had married into the Xue family, which already had seven members. Together they worked seventy mou of land, which produced only about seventy *shi* (a *shi* is 133 pounds) of grain a year. In 1936 the family suffered a terrible loss when Liu Guiying's husband died; alone and helpless, Widow Liu was left to support the family by washing clothes. Gradually, she spent more and more of her time spinning and weaving. Because she spun good quality yarn, her cloth was very fine and often sold for as much as five yuan per jin. Her village had no organized spinning and weaving group, so she went to work to organize one. Using the profits from their work, the women bought more yarn, and soon the entire village was profiting from the efforts of its women.

Village government officials saw what Liu Guiying had done and decided to send her out to other neighborhoods to organize women in production. Under their sponsorship, Liu Guiying traveled from place to place, always asking the same questions: "Will you have enough to eat? Will you have enough to drink? What are the prospects?" She then answered: "The prospects are not good. From spinning comes yarn, from profits come money; then you can have enough to eat and drink."

⁴⁸ "Funü laodong yingxiong Ren Yunni" [Woman labor heroine Ren Yunni], *JFRB* (July 2, 1943). Another example of a woman supporting a sick husband is "Liu Juying," *JFRB* (May 9, 1943). For examples of other agricultural heroines see "Gulin Ma Xuean di qi shoujiang" [In Gulin the wife of Ma Xuean received an award], *JFRB* (April 22, 1943); "Nülaodong yingxiong Zhang Qiulin" [Woman labor heroine Zhang Qiulin], *JFRB* (December 3, 1944).

Everyone who saw her was impressed by the example she set; one by one, women took up spinning and weaving. In one village seven women came forth the first day, five the next day, and nine the third. Soon almost all the women in the area participated. When Widow Liu organized the women, she broke them into small groups and chose a leader for each. She personally worked with the groups' leaders, training them in the most efficient spinning methods.

In Liu Guiying's village alone there were more than three hundred spinners. Together they spun 1,700 jin of cloth, with Widow Liu's group of sixty-seven women producing 430 jin. The total income of the village women was sixty shi of grain, with Liu's group earning fifteen shi. The village elected her "Labor Heroine" and gave her a loom and two jin of cloth. All the villagers were very proud of Liu Guiying, saying, "If it were not for Old Mother Liu, we would not have spinning and weaving."⁴⁹

Articles describing the work of model women workers and labor heroines who were party members, either natives of the region or those who had come to Yan'an from other parts of China, did not appear until the last months of 1943. The timing of their appearance indicates that by the end of 1943 cadres were in better standing with party and government than they had been prior to the Rectification Movement and that the party now believed them to be good models.

One such woman was Li Fenglian, a model worker from the Border Region's bedding and clothing factory. Her life story appeared in the January 29, 1944, edition of the *JFRB*. Li Fenglian came from a large family who could not support her; they sold her at age three to a comparatively wealthy family some distance from her home. This family, also unable to support her, arranged a marriage when she was thirteen. Her husband's family was very cruel to her; and her husband, who was in her opinion a simpleton, offered her no help against them.

In 1935 the Red Army came to her village. When she heard that women could join, she ran away from home and followed the army.

⁴⁹ *Yan'an di nüxing* [Women of Yan'an] (n.p., 1944?), pp. 125–129. For other articles on Liu Guiying see "Liu laopo cuzhi fufang" [Old Mother Liu organizes women's spinning], *JFRB* (January 20, 1945); and "Fangzhi nüyingxiong Liu Guiying zenyang fazhan fufang?" [How did the woman spinning and weaving heroine Liu Guiying expand women's spinning?], *JFRB* (January 9, 1944). Another popular widow labor heroine was Guo Fengying; see "Funü nongye laodong yingxiong Guo Fengying" [Woman agricultural labor heroine Guo Fengying], *JFRB* (January 6, 1944); and "Guo Fengying donglao shiernian zhong-zhuangjia tong nanzi yiyang" [Guo Fengying worked as hard as a man for the past twelve years], *JFRB* (April 22, 1943).

Within a few months she left the army and went to work in a bedding and clothing factory. She worked very hard, and in her spare time began to learn to read. In little more than a year she could read more than three hundred characters. During the first half of 1937 she married one of her co-workers, also a revolutionary. Li Fenglian and her husband left the bedding and clothing factory shortly after they married and went to work in the central printing factory. New Factory workers there usually spent about a year and a half as apprentices, but Li learned quickly and within half that time became a full-time worker. In 1938 she joined the party, serving as a leader for a small women's group. Her outstanding work was recognized in 1940 when she was elected a model woman at the March 8 (Women's Day) celebration.

Li Fenglian and another comrade returned to the bedding and clothing factory in January 1942 to investigate conditions there. (No mention was made about what conditions they were sent to investigate.) Between 1942 and 1944 Li produced more goods than any of the other two hundred laborers in the factory. As a labor heroine and outstanding worker she received many monetary awards, but her greatest honor came in the winter of 1943, when she was elected the chairwoman of the Border Region Labor Hero Representative Assembly.⁵⁰

Although the government expected heroines to provide standards of work, links between the leadership and the masses, and inspirations for cadres, few heroines played all these roles. Yet no matter what they did personally, their hard work and perseverance established the standards of excellence for all women. Whether it was farming, spinning and weaving, or working in a factory, they set the pace for others to follow. Of course, other factors such as mass organizations, cadre and peer pressure, and general enthusiasm for the government's new production program also accounted for the increased number of women in production, but these should not detract from the enormous propaganda value of heroines.

Although good citizens and respected members of the community, most heroines were not activists. They served primarily as role models. Except for some like Liu Guiying and Li Fenglian, heroines were individualistic and self-reliant women who approved of the new government but did little to promote the revolution. They worked to support their families or for personal gain and rarely played the organizing

⁵⁰ "Nü gonglaodong yingxiong Li Fenglian" [Woman labor heroine Li Fenglian], *JFRB* (January 29, 1944). For an example of a nonnative outstanding party worker see "Nü dangyuan Chen Min tongzhi" [Woman party worker comrade Chen Min], *JFRB* (December 28, 1943).

or middleman roles the government expected of them. They were most often women working in their own self-interest—ones fortunate enough to be rewarded for doing the “right” things, albeit for the “wrong” reasons.

How successful were cadres in getting women to join production? Because figures vary, it is difficult to tell. No exact figures were found for the number of women in the Border Region between 1941 and 1944, when figures for the number of spinners and weavers were available. Nevertheless, because the population did not vary much during the Yan'an period, it is reasonable safe to use the population figures for 1946, which are available. In 1946 there were 1,595,065 people in the Border Region; 750,704 of them were women. There was no breakdown according to age, but we can assume that approximately two-thirds—500,470 women—were of an age to take part in some kind of textile work.⁵¹

It is estimated that about 153,000 women were spinning and from 40,000 to 60,500 (figures vary greatly) women were weaving in cottage industry throughout the Yan'an area in 1944.⁵² Disregarding the discrepancies in figures and the fact that some women both spun and wove and therefore may have been counted twice, no more than 210,000 women, at most, worked in textiles in 1944. Considering the importance that the government placed on the spinning and weaving movement, this is not as many as might be expected. These women textile workers accounted for less than one-half the cloth produced in the Border Region in 1943, with no later figures given. The other half was produced by some 2,400 people who worked in textile factories.⁵³

Official figures reveal that the Border Region had not reached autarky in its textile output by the mid-1940s. Nevertheless, Peter Schran has shown that the amount of goods produced between 1943 and 1945 was nearly enough for the area's needs. The discrepancy between the potential output (8 jin/year/person) and the claimed output for 1943 (6 jin/year/person) may be accounted for in goods that people produced for their own consumption not counted in official figures.⁵⁴ (See tables 3 and 4).

⁵¹ Zhongguo kexue yuan lishi yanjiu suo disan suo, ed., *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu canyi hui wenxian huiji*, p. 379. See appendixes 1 and 2 for breakdown of population according to sub-region and xian.

⁵² Zhongguo xiandai shi ziliao congkan, *Kang-Ri zhanzheng... gaikuang*, p. 17; Schran, p. 106; Luo, p. 8.

⁵³ Hsü, p. 93; Schran, p. 146.

⁵⁴ Schran, p. 156.

Table 3
Women in Home Weaving in the Border Region

Year	Weavers	Looms	Bolts
1938	5,000	4,500	5,625
1939	8,000	6,850	8,750
1940	10,000	10,000	12,500
1941	13,000	11,875	14,500
1942	13,500	12,000	14,158
1943	41,450	24,547	45,700
1944	60,548*	23,093*	114,497*

*Luo, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu minjian fangzhiye*, p. 8. Hsü gives no explanation why the bolt figure went down between 1941 and 1942. Luo's 1942 figures coincide with Hsü's and Schran's, but his 1943 figures differ, with 39,038 women weaving on 19,283 looms producing 35,451 bolts of cloth. I question Luo's bolt figures for 1944, which are unusually high.

COMPILED FROM: Hsü, *Survey of the Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia Border Region*, p. 93, and Schran, *Guerrilla Economy*, p. 146.

Table 4
Women in Home Spinning in the Border Region

Year	Spinners	Wheels	Yarn (in jin)
1941	74,000		
1942	75,000	68,000	
1943	133,457	120,255	835,849.9
1944	152,643	145,683	1,660,203

COMPILED FROM: Luo, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu minjian fangzhiye*, p. 8; and Schran, *Guerrilla Economy*, p. 106. Schran's figures vary slightly for 1943 when he claims 137,600 women were spinning.

At the very most 42 percent of the region's women took part in textile work. Although there is no way to tell how many were involved actively, given the amount of goods produced at home it is safe to assume that of the 42 percent only a few worked intensively at spinning and weaving. Evidence indicates that textile work occupied very little of most women's time. Household chores and child care were undoubtedly major reasons for the lack of full-scale participation, but problems within the production movement itself were also important. One of the most serious

problems was that cadres had done a good job of spreading the word about the need to produce by the end of 1943, but they had not yet organized all women to produce. In many areas of the Border Region, such as the subregion of Sanbian, only a few women spun and wove.⁵⁵ Table 5 breaks down the number of women in the textile movement in 1944 according to subregion and shows the unevenness of participation (see Table 5).

Table 5
Women in Spinning and Weaving
in Four Border Region Subregions, 1944
(excluding Suide)

	Yan'an	Guanzhong	Longdong	Sanbian
Women*	194,541	59,655	124,872	97,007
Spinners	20,948	13,693	11,871	3,245
Wheels	19,407	15,301	11,513	3,201
Yarn (in jin)	194,306	56,683	32,238	12,110
Weavers	4,559	2,249	3,013	129
Looms	3,226	2,460	3,032	50
Bolts	9,256	3,720.5	2,718	33.5

*1946 population figures. See Zhongguo kexue yuan lishi yanjiu suo disan suo, ed., *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu canyi hui wenxian huiji*, p. 379.

SOURCE: Luo, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu minjian fangzhiye*, p. 15.

Even within a single qu women were often unevenly involved. The advanced cooperative on Nan qu provides a good example. In 1943 Labor Heroine Li Guotai prepared a report on spinning in Nan qu, which cited the number of spinners in the different villages of the qu: two villages had a total of more than 400 women spinning; one village had 150; three villages had a total of more than 300; and four villages had a total of only 80. (No population figures were given for the villages.) The entire qu had less than one-half its female population, about 1,000 women, spinning.⁵⁶ The qu around Baoan showed a similar uneven distribution in its textile workers. One qu had 90 women spinning; three qu had 10 women in each qu spinning; and three qu had so few women spinning that they did not even give a figure.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Luo, p. 16.

⁵⁶ "Yan'an Nanqu fa fufang di jingyan," *JFRB* (March 28, 1943).

⁵⁷ "Zhidan fufang zhujian fazhan" [Baoan women gradually increase spinning], *JFRB* (June 2, 1943).

In addition, the government had to solve some logistical problems because textile work continued to be done primarily at home. Supply and distribution systems were underdeveloped, severely hampering output and delivery. Women often had trouble obtaining the materials they needed and frequently went for long periods without anything to do. This was not just a problem in remote areas; it occurred in Yan'an xian and in other areas where cotton was produced. Furthermore, if poor families could not afford to make the initial investment in materials, their women could not work. In some areas cooperatives loaned money to families or gave them materials, but many places still lacked cooperatives. Finally, much of what was produced in the home was not sent on to factories to be woven or made into clothes. In one village near Suide, for example, women wove 737.5 jin and sold only 45.5 jin, or 5 percent, to factories. They sold only 1.3 percent of their yarn. The remaining cloth and yarn was used to make clothes for their families.⁵⁸

Figures for yarn and cloth production in the three xian directly east of the city of Yan'an provide a good example of the problems cited above (see Table 6). In 1944 this area had 15,000 mou of land planted with cotton (more than one-third of the land planted with cotton in the Border Region), which produced 1,500,000 jin of cotton (one-half of the cotton produced in the Border Region). Despite the availability of materials, the area contained only 11 percent of the Border Region spinners and 21 percent of the weavers, and produced less than 25 percent of the Border Region's textiles.

The lack of preexisting networks for supply and distribution was one cause of these problems, but the lack of leadership from above was just as important. No government organization existed in Yan'an to coordinate the textile work of women. Because cadres promoted spinning but often did not promote weaving, women in a village frequently did not know how to weave their own cloth or could not find anyone in the village to weave for them. Areas that were well organized to spin and weave were often far away from places where cotton was grown.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Border Region had a critical shortage of equipment and of personnel qualified to teach women advanced skills.⁶⁰ There was no indication by 1944 or early 1945 that the government was taking any steps to correct the

⁵⁸ Luo, pp. 10–12; “Yan'an fangfu zengzhi erqian ren” [Yan'an spinning women increase to 2,000], *JFRB* (March 21, 1943); “Funfu hezuoshe yewu fazhan” [Women's cooperatives must expand], *JFRB* (June 8, 1943).

⁵⁹ Luo, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Esherick, p. 187.

Table 6
Textile Production in Three Xian
East of Yan'an, 1944

	Yanchuan	Yanchang	Gulin	Total	Percent Entire Border Region
Spinners	12,731	10,590	3,832	27,153	11
Wheels	11,363	5,909	3,118	20,629	13
Yarn (in jin)	272,048	83,060	56,546	413,654	25
Weavers	7,045	3,716	2,066	12,827	21
Looms	5,367	1,716	1,536	6,619	28
Bolts	358,040	76,202	84,725	318,967	22

SOURCE: Luo, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu minjian fangzhiye*, pp. 12-13.

situation; it was not until late 1945 that the party looked in earnest for solutions.

From 1942 to 1945 the closest policy makers in Yan'an came to carrying out policy according to Marxist theory and their own theoretical statements was to emphasize production. Engels had written that the emancipation of women would be impossible until the time when they were taking part in production on a large, social scale.⁶¹ In a similar vein Lenin wrote, "To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialized and for women to participate in common productive labor."⁶² These ideas were echoed in the February 1943 Central Committee statement on women: "[The new direction for women] is production, something at which [they] can and should be particularly good. Their part in production is as important a struggle as that of the soldiers at the front."⁶³

Yet policy at this time differed from the Marxist line. According to Engels and Lenin, participation in production would lead to social equality; the 1943 statement, however, made no allusion to such equality. It focused not on the long-term, and vague, goal of equality with men but rather on the more immediate and attainable short-term goal of a better life. "If women produce a lot and are thrifty, their families will have a

⁶¹ Engels, p. 148.

⁶² Lenin, "The Tasks of the Working Women's Movement in the Soviet Republic," *Works*, p. 43.

⁶³ "Zhongguo zhongyang guanyu ge Kang-Ri genjudi muqian funü gongzuo fazhen di jue ding." See note 22 above.

higher standard of living.” Productive work would also provide women with the “material conditions they need to overthrow feudal oppression.”⁶⁴ Although self-sufficiency was the goal, the major incentive offered to women for engaging in production was the promise of an improved standard of living for themselves and their families. It was to their benefit to produce.

This offer of a better life may be interpreted as part of the socialist dictum “to each according to his work,” but more likely in this period of New Democracy when capitalism continued to be seen as an acceptable economic system it was capitalistic in nature. Whatever the philosophical basis, policy makers stressed two ideas: the harder one worked, the more money one made; the better quality goods one produced, the more money one made. Added to this were concepts of monetary incentives and reinvesting profits, both frequently cited by party leaders.

Policy between 1942 and 1945 also differed from standard Marxist theory in emphasizing the importance of the family unit. Rather than weakening as it was supposed to according to Marxist theory, the family remained strong in the early 1940s, and women played an active part in keeping it so.⁶⁵ Party and government officials made every effort to keep families together because they were still the cornerstone of economic policy; as a result divorces became increasingly difficult to get.

Creating a place in the family system for the “new Yan’an woman” was a difficult task. Party officials faced the double problems of finding a compatible combination of the maternal and productive roles of women in the family while at the same time relating these roles to the overall goals of society. To tackle the first, the government initiated a campaign in late 1942 to reemphasize the role of women as wives and mothers. Although some of the articles written during the campaign highlighted the role of wife and mother in a familial context, the majority emphasized this role in a social context. One example is an article written in 1942 that asked What can a good wife and mother be compared with? According to the article, the responsibilities of a good wife and mother were the same as those any individual had to himself and to the masses. Although it was important for women to be good wives and mothers, they should not return to their traditional roles.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ After visiting Yan’an, Zhao Chaogou, an editor of the Nanking paper *Xinmin bao*, commented that party officials had come to understand the rural environment of North Shaanxi well enough to know that if they destroyed the family, they would destroy production. Writing at that same time Gunther Stein said, “The attitude of the Communists toward the family is positive.” See Zhao Chaogou, *Yan’an yi yue*, p. 171; Stein, p. 247.

⁶⁶ *Yan’an di nǚxing*, p. 16.

Another example was the article "On being a good wife and mother," written by Zhou Enlai, which appeared in the November 20, 1942, issue of the *JFRB*: "Women after they are liberated should still be good wives and mothers just as men should be good husbands and fathers. Here I emphasize a mother's duty not out of a selfish interest, but out of a mutual interest in the whole society. A mother is indispensable in any family and is the most honorable job. Because of this, the Chinese should place primary importance on the mother's role in the family."⁶⁷ What Zhou meant by "good wife and mother" was a woman who participated in society's work without ignoring her family. He said he was not advocating that women assume a double burden of housework and production, but, rather, that women consider raising children and maintaining family unity as part of their contribution to a better society.⁶⁸

Several later articles expressed this same idea. One was a letter to the editor in the April 6, 1945, issue of the *JFRB*, which stated that before 1942 women worked primarily to promote their own economic independence. What they wanted most was to inherit property, protect their right to vote, and participate in the government. In making these demands, women did not consider their responsibilities to their families nor the restrictions of livelihood in the areas where they lived. In the exuberance of their freedom, women wanted only to destroy the old system and assert their newfound power. But after 1942, according to the letter, women became the advanced producers in the family. In this new position they realized that their personal demands and the demands of their families were the same. Therefore, many women used their influence as wives and mothers to encourage the members of their families to participate in rent reduction campaigns and production, knowing that the benefits derived by the entire family in these efforts would benefit them also.⁶⁹

The party made an enormous demand on peasant women when it asked them to continue in their roles as wives and mothers and, at the

⁶⁷ Zhou Enlai, "Lun 'xianqi liang mu' yu mu zhi" [On a 'good wife and good mother' or a mother's responsibilities], *JFRB* (November 20, 1942).

⁶⁸ The emphasis on the role of "good wives and mothers" in building socialism at that time can be compared to a similar campaign in the Soviet Union during the late 1930s. After an era of postcard divorce, the party realized the continued importance of the family in child rearing and maintaining social stability. It revised its policy of urging all women to work. Women who chose to remain at home and care for their children were not looked down upon. See Lewis A. Coser, in *The Family: Its Structure and Functions*, ed. Rose Laub Coser, pp. 539–540.

⁶⁹ "Xiangxin" [Letters], *JFRB* (April 6, 1945).

same time, take on new roles in production. If women were to succeed in both their domestic and productive roles, they had to rely heavily on assistance from their families. This assumed that other family members not only accepted them as equals but also realized that for women to fulfill their economic roles, housework had to be divided equally among family members. There is no evidence, even up to 1947, that the majority of the people in the Border Region accepted this idea. As will be seen in the discussion on marriage and divorce, the persistence of traditional practices and beliefs was a constant problem for party leaders.

Although changing people's attitudes was the most difficult problem party leaders faced, other ongoing problems needed to be solved as well. Education was among the most pressing. As discussed in the last chapter, educating women was harder than educating men because most women lived such secluded lives that they often lacked essential knowledge of the world around them. Moreover, even in the mid-1940s people still considered education a luxury that could not be wasted on females.

Up to the time of zhengfeng, education suffered from the same problems of elitism that affected other spheres. Border Region officials did not understand the needs of the people nor what they wanted in terms of education; moreover, they afforded people little opportunity to speak and act for themselves. The Senior Cadre Conference reviewed Yan'an's educational system in late 1942 and early 1943 and drew up new guidelines for primary, secondary, and social (part-time and adult) education that conformed to the mass line. These guidelines directed teachers "to provide the student with a method for examining and transforming material reality." Students spent less time in class and more time in productive labor, with teachers grading them both on attitude and on actual performance. The emphasis was on combining theory and practice, and courses focused on simple literacy, arithmetic, and other practical subjects. As it did elsewhere, the government decentralized education, allowing villages to run their own schools—and giving them most of the financial burden.⁷⁰

Most peasants wanted to learn to read because literacy was the key to social mobility, and the new orientation toward practical education induced many of them to participate in part-time schools, winter schools, and half-day schools.⁷¹ Beyond these, cadres established study groups for

⁷⁰ Quote is from Seybolt, p. 660. Seybolt, pp. 655, 661–662; Lindsay, pp. 38, 41; Harrison, p. 320.

⁷¹ "Suide Wang Jiaping jihua xiaomie wenmang tichang fu jiao qi zi jiao mu" [Wang Jiaping of Suide plans to eliminate illiteracy and suggests husbands teach wives and sons teach mothers], *JFRB* (September 4, 1944).

women, taught them characters while they spun, and even posted characters on different implements used in the house so that women would learn to read as they did housework. They formed reading classes where women learned to read things of interest to them, such as folk tales.⁷² The lengths to which the government went to educate women is well illustrated in an article that appeared in the *JFRB* in January 1945 describing education for women in one northern qu. More than 90 percent of the women in the area (about forty) took part in the program, taught by a teacher from Yan'an University, to learn characters. To include all the women who wanted to learn to read, the teacher had to employ five different teaching methods. The teacher met with ten women every morning after breakfast to study and work together, another seven women in the afternoon, and in the evening five more. These three different periods, each about three hours long, were necessary because women were not on the same levels. The other seventeen students were taught through other methods. Five women who lived near the home of the director of the literacy association met with the director or by themselves once a day. The teacher personally went to the homes of five young mothers who could not leave their babies as well as to individuals living in solitary neighborhoods. Six families in the area had members who knew how to read, so after the teacher had investigated their levels of literacy, these people taught other family members to read.⁷³

Party officials worked to integrate education with the ideas of family unity and the creation of a new society, party goals at that time. Cadres made women feel it was their patriotic duty to learn to read. One article in the *JFRB* argued that universal education was essential if the Border Region was to grow and prosper. Education helped women run the home better and gave them the skills they needed to gain economic independence. Moreover, education prepared women to take part in every activity on an equal basis with men. The article concluded by arguing that discrimination against women was not in the interest of the nation or women.⁷⁴

Another short article written a few months later praised the women of Wu village for having learned to read simple books. With this education, the article maintained, women helped increase production,

⁷² "Funü zhiziban" [Women's reading classes], *JFRB* (July 25, 1945).

⁷³ "Yong wuzhong banfa jiao funü zhizi" [Using five kinds of methods to teach women characters], *JFRB* (January 9, 1945).

⁷⁴ "Nüzi yingshou shemma jiaoyu" [What kind of education should a woman receive?], *JFRB* (January 6, 1942).

worked more effectively in the resistance movement, and fostered better relations with other family members. Furthermore, they had become capable of solving the problems of everyday life. As a result, they had averted many family quarrels, thereby earning the respect of other villagers.⁷⁵

The second problem that plagued party officials was that of child care. Although a large number of women worked at home and could watch their children, or had some older member of the family at home to care for the children, a substantial number of women had no place to send their children while they worked.⁷⁶ Therefore, the output of these women was affected. They frequently had to give up their productive work to return to being full-time mothers. Before zhengfeng, no regionwide movement existed to establish nurseries or day care centers, although some village women's associations had started their own. With the stress on mass mobilization during the Rectification Movement, the demand for such facilities increased. In his 1942 article on women, Zhou Enlai pointed out the need for nurseries to aid working mothers.⁷⁷

Government officials agreed that the Border Region needed more child-care facilities and began to create more. But since they wanted young women working in production, not at home tending babies, they put their real emphasis on the more serious problem of controlling the area's birth rate. Officials knew that widespread distribution of contraceptives was too expensive and sophisticated for most of the Border Region, even they did distribute some birth control information in scattered areas.⁷⁸ Therefore, they undertook a campaign to ask men and women to wait longer than the minimum ages (twenty for men and eighteen for women) before marrying,⁷⁹ reasoning that the child-bearing years of those who waited until their mid-twenties to marry would be reduced, and young people would have more time to devote to production.

Reevaluation of Policy in Late 1945

By 1945 the standard of living in the Border Region had risen significantly as the area developed economically and approached self-

⁷⁵ "Wuxiang di nongcun xinnüxing" [Modern women of Wu village], *JFRB* (March 10, 1943).

⁷⁶ Zhao, *Yan'an yi yue*, pp. 167–168.

⁷⁷ See note 67 above.

⁷⁸ "Da wen" [Questions and answers], *JFRB* (June 14, 1942).

⁷⁹ Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu, *Kang-Ri genjudi zhengce tiaoli huiji*, pp. 135–136.

sufficiency. In a typical village the number of poor peasant households decreased from 32 percent to 12 percent while rich and middle peasant households increased from 68 percent to 88 percent. Wages were higher than ever before; for a ten-hour work day, a man received a pound and a half of rice and two pounds of meat per month. A combination of good weather, more land under cultivation, and better farming methods led to more food being produced over a larger portion of the Border Region. In addition, people were now able to produce many of the goods they formerly imported. Gunther Stein reported that in 1943 almost 70 percent of the imports in the area were raw cotton, yarn, and cloth. By 1944, although much less was brought in the people were, in his opinion, better clothed.⁸⁰

Because of these advances, the need for women to engage in production was no longer as essential to the Border Region's survival; nevertheless, organizing women to spin and weave continued to be the central focus of policy. By late 1945 and early 1946 many articles in the *JFRB*, cognizant of the changed circumstances, called for a revision of policy. The most revealing was a lengthy one entitled "Why did Yan'an women stop weaving for awhile?" that appeared on March 17, 1945. It stated that the number of looms and women engaged in weaving in Yan'an had increased significantly from 1943 to the spring of 1944, but that during the summer and fall many women stopped weaving. Why did this happen? The most widely accepted explanation was that cadres pushed women to expand their production too quickly, even when women had asked cadres to formulate a work plan before such a move was made. Cadres, however, provided no such plans. Another reason cited was that cadres had paid inadequate attention to training women to repair looms when they broke down. In addition, they had pressed women into production without first giving them any instructions on how to weave, so the products these women produced often were unusable. Finally, women who did weave enough to have a surplus for sale did not feel they were getting a high enough price for their goods.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Stein, p. 185; Chao, pp. 63–64; Jerome Ch'en, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution*, p. 207; Esherick, p. 183; Van Slyke, p. 147. The amount of cultivated land increased from 11,742,082 mou in 1940 to 13,387,213 mou in 1943, producing 1,840,000 piculs of foodstuffs. In 1943 the Border Region had a surplus of 220,000 piculs. Grain production increased from 1,100,000 piculs in 1937 to 2,000,000 piculs in 1944. See "Annual Report for the Shen-Gan-Ning Border Region Government for the Year 1943," p. 112; Chao, p. 61.

⁸¹ "Yan'an fangfu weishemma youxie tingdun le?" [Why did the spinning of Yan'an women stop for a while?], *JFRB* (March 17, 1945). Another explanation given for the decline in textile production during the fall and summer not given in the article was that women left their spinning wheels and looms temporarily to help with the harvest. This may have been the case for a few women, but there is no evidence that the government mobilized

The problems outlined here were common throughout the Border Region; many had existed from the outset of the Great Production Drive, but the party had done nothing to correct them. All that was important to cadres, according to a March 9, 1946, editorial, was encouraging women to produce.⁸² However, by 1946 most women had accepted their responsibility to produce; what they wanted was help in solving their immediate problems. Yet cadres were no better trained to implement programs to help women expand production or improve their skills than they had been in 1943.

Furthermore, because the area had almost reached self-sufficiency, women were working primarily to raise the family's standard of living rather than toward the overall goal of making the Border Region economically independent. In many places women contributed a significant amount to the family's income with the profits from their textile work. A village near Suide reported in 1944 that twenty-four out of forty-nine spinning and weaving households sold some of their products and only six households of the forty-nine did not produce enough to supply their individual needs. In another nearby village the profits from textiles represented 51.21 percent of the income among middle income peasant families, while agriculture accounted for only 48.79 percent.⁸³

By 1946 party leaders recognized that if their policy of women working in production was to remain viable, they had to reorganize and expand the production movement. That meant training people to help solve production problems, teaching women new skills, improving technology, and getting textile work out of the home. The government could not do these things, however, because it lacked the technical base for advancing production in these ways. The economy of the Border Region had not expanded at the same pace as the production needs of the more advanced women textile workers. Consequently, a policy of organizing women for production was no longer as appropriate as it had been, and party leaders had to shift the emphasis in their policy for women. Further, as the anti-Japanese war wound down the party's priorities were changing, with officials paying increased attention to the party's role in postwar China.

women to help in the fields on a large scale until the following year. As stated earlier, women in this part of China traditionally did not work in agriculture except in unusual circumstances, and in 1945 it did not appear that they were working in the fields in large numbers.

⁸² "Guanji bianqu fuyun di zhengque fangzhen" [Clearing the exact direction of the Border Region's women's movement], *JFRB* (March 9, 1946).

⁸³ Luo, p. 10. I found no other figures that high.

It was time to reevaluate policy to meet new needs. Between 1942 and 1945 policy had been directed toward moving women from a stage of segregation, in which they focused on their special problems, to a stage of partial integration, in which they played a constructive and stabilizing role in the family. Now policy makers were redefining policy to move women to a higher stage, one fully incorporating them into the work of establishing a new government for China. The leadership prepared for the change not only because it was necessary to revise policy to reflect reality but also because the more progressive women were ready to move forward.

V

“Build a Peaceful and Democratic China” (March 1946–March 1947)

As victory over the Japanese drew near in the spring and summer of 1945, party leaders turned their attention from the problems of resistance to the impending conflict between contending Chinese forces. Shifting their emphasis from fighting the Japanese in a coalition with the Guomindang to fighting the Guomindang for control of China, Communist party leaders worked to consolidate their organization and to secure areas under their control in anticipation of a civil war. This meant strengthening the foundation for the future takeover of China by broadening their political base. It also meant adapting policy concerning women to conform to the new situation.

When the anti-Japanese war ended, the United Front ideology that had dominated, if only in name, Communist party policy up to this point became a revolutionary ideology as party leaders began to prepare for the inevitable war. Yet, because neither the Communist party nor the Guomindang was ready to fight a full-scale war in late 1945, the two sides agreed to convene a Political Consultative Conference to organize a national coalition government to rule a democratic China. Mao Zedong expressed his willingness to participate in a government composed of all “democratic” parties in his April 1945 speech, “On Coalition Government.” Without this prerequisite, Mao argued, it would be “impossible to make any genuine changes in the Kuomintang [Guomindang] area, and therefore in the country as a whole.”¹ He promised that, although the Communist party’s ultimate goal was the formation of a socialist and eventually communist state, at that time it sought only the moderate programs of New Democracy. This meant forming a provisional government to be followed by a free election for a

¹ Mao, “On Coalition Government,” *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 238. For an analysis of the entire essay see Harrison, pp. 362–364.

national assembly to establish a formal coalition government.

No one really believed that such an arrangement would work. Even though the ideas outlined in "On Coalition Government" ostensibly became the basis for policy during the final year in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, party leaders readied themselves for war. That came in June 1946, when fighting broke out and the final struggle for power began. Two months later the base areas mobilized for war.² Part of the preparation for the conflict with the Guomindang was a purge of the party to remove those elements who were considered not totally committed to the revolution. To this end the leadership rewrote the party's constitution, concentrating power in its top levels, and initiated a second rectification campaign similar to that of zhengfeng to make cadres at all levels more effective. This campaign differed from the earlier one by encouraging everyone to participate by criticizing errant cadres.³

Revising Policy for Women

Prompted by the economic crisis of 1942, party leaders had revised policy for women. In the spring of 1946 with an even more serious crisis threatening their survival, party leaders again changed course. This revision and the stage following it are in some ways the weakest link of our study; in other ways the most interesting. The weakness stems from a lack of available information. Yet this absence of material suggests that party leaders believed women to be such an integral part of society that their problems no longer merited special attention.

Moreover, this third stage does not fit into the mold we have thus far created. But that weakness, too, indicates that policy makers believed there had been progress made in raising the status of women. Until 1945 policy had been dominated by goals that were far from radical: cooperation to win the war against the Japanese or to survive an economic crisis. Now the goals were revolutionary, not in ways associated with the Yan'an period but with events that took place in China in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Even the vocabulary was different between March 1946 and March 1947. Terms that had lain dormant since 1937 reemerged: "feudalism," "class," "mass struggle," and most importantly, "revolution." If policy had worked as it should have up to this point then the horizons of the most advanced women had expanded beyond simply producing for the family; they were ready to turn their attention from

² See Harrison, pp. 390-393.

³ Ibid., pp. 400-403.

problems of personal survival to those political, economic, and social problems facing not only the region but the entire nation. They were ready to join in the fight to transform China.

When policy makers made the deliberate decisions to reevaluate policy for women to meet new goals, they sought the advice of village women who had been active in party-sponsored programs. This had never happened before; change had come from above without consultation. This is not to say that women, even at the highest levels, now were involved in the decision-making process or deemed capable of determining the best route for their own advancement. They were not, but in 1946 they were listened to and their ideas reflected in policy.

Party leaders asked these women to prepare for Women's Day 1946 by reexamining their movement in terms of their own work and the type of help they received from cadres. They solicited suggestions about what the women thought the future goals of the movement should be.⁴ A list of the topics proposed as slogans for the Women's Day celebration appeared in the *JFRB* on March 3, 1946. Reflecting the principal concerns of these women, the first four slogans called, in a general way, for a peaceful solution to China's postwar problems and committed women to help solve them. The list then focused on social issues: the demand for the guarantee of equal rights in the economy, government, society, and education; more public education; eradication of "feudal" attitudes toward women; relief for refugee women with children and for orphans; special consideration for women working in factories; and expansion of programs for prenatal care and education. The women also committed themselves to help in campaigns to reduce rents and interest and in the work of raising the standard of living among peasant women. Finally and most importantly, they encouraged all women to take part in "various kinds of mass struggle."

Buried deep within the list, item number fifteen called for all women in liberated areas to "positively participate in production," while at the same time establishing "warm and peaceful homes" so that their families could work together to achieve larger social goals.⁵ The specific goals of the 1942-1945 period were now just among many goals for women. When the drive for economic autarky no longer dominated Border Region life, production lost its central place in policy for women.

⁴ "Bianqu fulianhui deng choubai jinian san bajie" [Border Region women's associations and others prepare for the March 8 celebration], *JFRB* (February 18, 1946).

⁵ "Fabu jinian sanbajie kouhao" [Bulletin with slogans commemorating March 8 celebration], *JFRB* (March 3, 1946).

On March 8, 1946, the Central Committee announced its revised policy in a lengthy editorial in the *JFRB*. It reflected the demands of the women who had given advice while at the same time following the guidelines set down in "On Coalition Government." Noting that this was the first Women's Day celebration since the defeat of Japan, the editorial commended women for their contribution to the war effort and applauded them for now joining in building democracy. It went on to point out that the Political Consultative Conference had been working to bring peace and democracy to China since the war's end, but it had met with difficulties. If the conference was to be successful, everyone had to help; because women made up half the population they could not divorce their own revolutionary struggle from that of the whole country. They had to liberate themselves first, then stand up and mobilize to realize peace, democracy, and national unity.

For women in the Guomintang-held areas the struggle was even more urgent, according to the editorial. Although the Political Consultative Conference had proclaimed political freedom and equal rights for women throughout China, these ideals had not been put into practice. Therefore, the primary responsibility of women in those areas was to become aware of their own problems first and then unite with other groups to demand governmental reforms that would relieve overburdened peasants. The editorial further claimed that because women of areas already liberated were more advanced than women elsewhere, all their work should be directed toward achieving national goals. This meant becoming actively involved in mass struggles such as the campaign to reduce rent and interest. The editorial asked these women to look beyond their own localities and come to the aid of other areas by demanding aid for orphans, refugees, and other victims of the war, and by pressuring the Guomintang government to provide productive and educational opportunities for women.⁶ By including a message to women in Guomintang-held areas in the Women's Day editorial, party leaders showed that they now considered policy applicable to the whole nation, not just areas under their immediate control.

Both the 1942 and 1946 policy revisions expanded the role of women in society. The 1942 change moved women out of the consciousness-raising stage and into one of partial integration. In that stage cadres urged women to leave their separate women's groups and take part in productive work that would directly benefit the family and

⁶ "Zhongguo funü jinhoudi renwu" [The future tasks of China's women], *JFRB* (March 8, 1946).

indirectly contribute to the Border Region's goal of self-sufficiency. Cadres had urged women to see their roles as wives and mothers as benefiting not just the family but all of society. The 1946 revision furthered this idea as policy makers sought to integrate women fully into society by asking them to join larger heterosexual groups working to solve the problems not only of the Border Region but of the nation as well. Production, although important, was just one way to solve those problems.

In the new stage, according to the revised plan, women would build upon gains they had previously made to involve themselves in affairs of greater scope than their individual concerns. This was to be a period of consolidation, with society adjusting to the advancements of women and women learning to play new social roles. They were to participate in bringing about fundamental social change.

The new direction was clear throughout the March 8 edition of the newspaper. Not one of the articles on women dealt with productive work for their own or their family's benefit. Instead, articles covered a wide spectrum of concerns: the progress of the women's movement in China and the U.S.S.R., continuation of traditional marriage customs, care for dependent children, and the role of women in elections. No matter what the subject was, however, the dominant theme of all these articles was creating a democracy in China.

The next day's edition continued to clarify and define the new policy. Its editorial stated: "During the war, the direction of the women's movement was quite clearly production. Everyone worked to raise the level of production. What is the direction of the women's movement in this period of peace and democracy? We are still organizing production, but we have expanded the productive base to include culture and hygiene." Before women could broaden their own movement, the editorial argued, they had to help secure peace in China. Then, they could accomplish their long-term goals of expanding production, promoting better health habits, raising women's educational levels, eradicating superstition, maintaining stability within the household, and studying politics. Nobody expected women to achieve these ambitious goals alone; now that they were a full part of society their liberation was everyone's responsibility.⁷

⁷ "Guanji bianqu fuyun di zhengque fangzhen," *JFRB* (March 9, 1946).

Policy in Practice

Those few *JFRB* articles concerned specifically with women during the last year of its publication focused primarily on the new direction in tones reminiscent of the 1937–1941 period. With the exception of those on production, most articles were nebulous exhortations for women to contribute to “building a democratic China” without telling them specifically how they could do it. What is interesting about production is that while it continued to be the most popular topic, the work itself—whether textile or agricultural—did not carry as much weight as it had before. The more important theme was people working together toward common goals. The Women’s Day issue, for example, carried an article describing the efforts of various women to build a democratic China. their occupations dramatized the new emphasis. Only one engaged in production; the rest were service workers—an elementary school teacher, a spinning heroine, a relief worker, and a nurse.⁸

Reports on production during the Great Production Drive stressed personal gain, but those in 1946 and 1947 emphasized women working jointly with men to benefit the entire village. Topics common between 1942 and 1945 received little attention in the later period. For example, there was only one reference to labor heroines, an this in an article on three Suide women. It was clear, however, that these three heroines were not working individually but alongside their families and fellow villagers. In one case a woman and her fifteen-year-old son plowed eight mou; in another the heroine and her family divided up the work (this family was named a model family, the only one mentioned as receiving such an honor); and in the third an old women, her daughter, and other family members worked together to clothe and feed the family.⁹ Only one article discussed profits women made from spinning and weaving, and this was one concerning women in a backward area of Gansu. In a style identical to that of reports three years earlier, it described how women in Yishi village produced enough textiles to solve their clothing problems and buy a cow.¹⁰ This article is significant because the Yishi women clearly were in the stage of producing for themselves. No matter what the official policy

⁸ “Tamen canjia ge fangmian jianshe” [They are participating in various aspects of construction], *JFRB* (March 8, 1946).

⁹ “Xin nü dao” [New women’s road], *JFRB* (September 19, 1946).

¹⁰ “Yanxian Gansu Yishi fufang huoli jie jue chuanyi you mai liangguniu” [Gansu Yanxian Yishi women solve the clothing problem and buy a milk cow], *JFRB* (July 4, 1946).

at the time was, cadres apparently advanced women only as fast as local conditions permitted.

The remainder of the production articles emphasized the group aspect of work, forcing figures for individual achievement to second place. In reports on textiles, for example, the names of outstanding workers were rarely mentioned. If statistics were cited at all, they appeared only after figures for total production in the area were given. One October 1946 article on Yanchuan claimed that 80 percent of the more than 10,000 women spun and wove enough to supply the 60,000 people of the xian. In that month alone, the women had spun more than 62,000 jin of yarn and had woven more than 100,000 zhang of cloth.¹¹

In the final year of its publication, the *JFRB* devoted more space than ever before to women working in agriculture. Like those on textile work, these articles stressed participation in larger groups. Two reports during the fall harvest in the Yan'an area described how women helped men in the fields and, in some villages, even competed with them.¹² A third article criticized women who did not help plow land for winter wheat and gave as an example of outstanding work the more than 500 women of Yanchang who joined with men to plow 118,000 mou.¹³

A July 1946 article commended women who joined men in Baoan xian to weed the fields. In one village fifty-five women participated in weeding and helped organize work teams so the weeding could be done more efficiently. Altogether the organizers were able to form thirty-one teams composed of 71 percent of the villagers.¹⁴ Most likely these teams were single-sex groups. Men may have accepted women in their families working where other men were present, but it is doubtful that many would have tolerated their wives and daughters working with these men on a small work team.

Although they make for dry reading, these agriculture articles are among the most significant found in the *JFRB* during its six and a half years of publication. Women in this part of China had not worked in the

¹¹ "Yanchuan funü bu shiwanzhang" [Yanchuan women weave 100,000 zhang of cloth], *JFRB* (October 24, 1946). The population estimates in the article are low. Actual population figures show Yanchuan had 35,288 women out of a total population of 73,670.

¹² "Yanshu qiushou mang" [Yan'an area busy with fall harvest], *JFRB* (October 2, 1946); "Yanshu nan nü jing shouge" [Yan'an area men and women compete to gather in the harvest], *JFRB* (October 15, 1946).

¹³ "Dapi funü mian canjia zhongmai" [Criticizing women for not participating in plowing wheat], *JFRB* (October 1, 1946).

¹⁴ "Zhidan funü jiji canjia chucuo" [Baoan women positively participate in weeding], *JFRB* (July 4, 1946).

fields traditionally. That was man's work and, furthermore, required that women leave the confines of the home and associate with men, often nonfamily members—a practice virtually unheard of in the backward and tradition-bound Northwest. Asking women to leave their home textile work to do fieldwork represented a symbolic step forward on the road to sexual equality. How many women actually participated in agriculture is another question and one, because of a lack of figures, impossible to answer.

The call for women to leave their homes also signaled a change in how officials viewed the problems of women. Women's liberation now was the responsibility of both men and women. Party and government leaders criticized cadres who persisted in establishing separate women's groups in villages and told them to expand existing peasant associations to include women. Those women's associations already in operation were instructed to add programs for child care and political study to their existing programs for production.¹⁵

Party leaders stressed involving women in such broadly based social groups at least in part because class once again mattered. The United Front mobilization and those during the campaign for self-sufficiency in the Border Region depended upon all classes working together to achieve stated goals. Consequently, a person's class was not as important, and women were grouped as a sex rather than a class. But now the enemy was Chinese, and it was necessary to eliminate potential collaborators in the base areas by reviving class struggle as a key part of life in the Border Region. Participating in agriculture was one way of asking women to take a stand by joining other members of their class in work.

To confirm their alliance with the peasants and eliminate possible threats to the revolution, the leadership in 1946 and 1947 carried out a radical land reform to solidify Communist party control over village life in the base area. The land reform successfully completed the destruction of the traditional political power structure, which had survived in various forms up to that time. From then on a new power structure, loyal to the party and supported by the majority of peasants, existed in the villages.¹⁶

The land policy in 1942 had not been as effective as it should have been because it became a mass movement in which reducing rent and interest was a goal separate from reducing exploitation by landlords. In spite of the ambiguity, rudimentary land reform sprang up in some areas

¹⁵ "Fazhan funü di yundong" [Expand the women's movement], *JFRB* (July 24, 1946).

¹⁶ Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China*, pp. 244, 308; Martin King Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China*, p. 136.

as peasants in the liberated areas initiated their own brand of land reform by taking control of their rented lands, regardless of the owner's revolutionary status.¹⁷

Party leaders responded to peasant action by issuing on May 4, 1946, a "Directive on Liquidation, Rent Reduction, and Land Problems," which recognized what had been going on in practice since the end of the anti-Japanese war. although the document recognized the right to own land privately, it promised "land to the tiller" and officially called for land reform rather than just rent reduction. Even after this directive, however, the government still compensated landlords for land seized. Outright confiscation of land didn't occur until the Outline Agrarian Law of October 1947.

Women were expected to join with other "exploited" people to settle scores with landlords and along with men received a share of land. But land reform was not a panacea for women since few actually controlled their own land. Instead, land remained in the hands of the husband or father. Wives and daughters did have to agree to the sale of their share, but most found it difficult to withhold consent under family pressure. The symbolic importance of land ownership cannot be overestimated, but in practice it meant little to most women. Even if they were brave enough to take their full share and leave the family, few had sufficient agricultural skills to support themselves from farming. Prominent party women such as Deng Yingchao called upon the government to provide training for women, but little was done to help them.

The real blow to women came during the "speak bitterness" sessions that were a major part of the land reform campaigns. At these sessions cadres encouraged women to tell their tales of oppression under the feudal system, but they stopped women when they targeted males in their own families. Because poor peasant males were the vanguard of the revolution in the countryside, attacks on them constituted aid to the class enemy.¹⁸ As a result, many women did not actively take part in the process of land reform despite the fact that it was part of the party's program to involve them in village affairs. The redistribution of land itself, however, did appear to bring more women than ever before out to work in the fields. While not one of the stated goals of land reform, this consequence had a great impact on women.

¹⁷ Pepper, p. 274; Harrison, p. 408.

¹⁸ Norma Diamond, "Collectivization, Kinship, and Status of Women in Rural China," p. 26.

The new emphasis on class, working in groups, and revolution did not mean that matters of particular concern to women were ignored during the last year the Central Committee was in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. Child care, for example, remained an urgent problem, especially with women leaving the home to work in the fields. By 1946 some areas were beginning to develop local programs to help solve the problem. In one village, women set up their own facilities in preparation for the busy season. When the planting or harvesting seasons arrived, several women stayed in the village to prepare food and watch the children while the rest went out to work in the fields.¹⁹ The resourcefulness of one village should not be mistaken for a general trend. For most women the decision to work outside the home brought no relief from the double burden of housework and child care. Consequently, many chose to remain at home.

Another ongoing concern for women was education. None of the articles in 1946 and 1947 indicated whether the government was any more successful in educating people than it had been earlier. In fact, the tone of *JFRB* articles on women were almost identical to those found from 1941 on and focused on individual cases rather than success in the Border Region as a whole. A May 1946 article was almost identical to the January 1945 article cited in the last chapter describing how a teacher integrated work and study in a village so well that within one month women had spun six jin of yarn apiece and learned 100 characters. The teacher found that by working and studying together, the students learned more.²⁰

The most interesting article on education discussed the Border Region's Women's Professional School, which opened in November 1945. It was unusual not only because the concept of a "professional" school was a new one but also because its emphasis was not on the school but on what was perceived as the more important issue: the lack of students because child care facilities were inadequate. The little information about the school failed to define what was meant by "professional," saying only that the school's goals were to teach the sixty day students to think to teach, and to promote good hygiene. Students spent 70 percent of their class time studying ways to aid production, 10 percent studying politics and culture, 10 percent studying first aid, and 10 percent studying skills

¹⁹ "Zhongzhaosuo di mama bian gongdui" [Mothers of Zhongzhaosuo become a work team], *JFRB* (March 8, 1946).

²⁰ "Zhizi fangzhi xiangpei he" [Pairing learning characters and weaving], *JFRB* (May 24, 1946).

for production. From the course load and goals, it seems likely that the women were training to be cadres or teachers.²¹

By the end of 1946 the Border Region had mobilized for war. In tones similar to those of the late 1930s, the government called upon women to join the war effort. This plea for action differed from that of the United Front; at that time party officials directed women to participate in the resistance movement without specifying how they were to do it. In contrast, when the civil war began, there was little doubt what the role of women was to be. A November 8, 1946, *JFRB* article entitled "Sitting down to discuss women's wartime work" listed their responsibilities for the war: improve spinning and weaving to guarantee that each family had enough clothing, give moral support to men away fighting, encourage their husbands and sons to join the army, and promote good health habits among women.²² An editorial a week later repeated those duties and added working in agriculture to the list of responsibilities.²³ In addition, women were to supply the army with goods it needed. For example, eight women in a village near Suide made fifty-seven pairs of shoes in two days. In a neighboring village fifty women worked from dawn to dusk to make quilts for the army; when they returned home, each made an article of clothing within twenty-four hours to send along with the quilts.²⁴

Party leaders wanted women to respond to the war crises by expanding their movement to incorporate it. The list of women's wartime responsibilities is important when compared to what women had been asked to do during the United Front. The burdens placed on women were indeed heavy, but their number and diversity give clear evidence that the leadership believed women to be integrated well enough into society to make substantial contributions to the war effort. The comparison indicates a qualitative change in policy concerning women in the decade between 1937 and 1947 as officials expressed confidence that women could take part in meeting this new crisis on a higher level than before.

²¹ "Bianqu funü zhiye xuexiao" [Border Region's women's professional school], *JFRB* (March 8, 1946).

²² "Zuotan zhanshi funü gongzuo," *JFRB* (November 8, 1946).

²³ "Jiefangqu funü dangqian di renwu" [Present tasks facing women in the liberated areas], *JFRB* (November 15, 1946).

²⁴ "Bianqu funü ganzuo junxie" [Border Region women rush to make army shoes], *JFRB* (November 29, 1946).

VI

Evaluation of the Status of Women

Policy for women of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region changed dramatically during the decade between 1937 and 1947. Because of internal and external events, and ideological evolution, new policies were formed and old policies revised. In charting the course of policy development it is difficult to distinguish between the intended goals of policy and the consequences. There was often a fine line between what government and party leaders wanted to occur and what actually happened. It is difficult to assess to what extent the needs of the group most affected by policy mattered. In other words, there is no reliable way to determine what concrete changes took place in the status of women and to what degree these changes were a result of deliberate policy decisions.

Records of the period, particularly the *JFRB*, examined all aspects of policy: details, problems, methods of implementation, instructions to cadres, and reactions of women. Yet none of these materials gave consistent figures on a year-to-year or area-to-area basis; such data would be necessary to analyze actual change. Several reasons accounted for the lack of information: poor communication facilities, entrenched traditionalism, and the absence of trained personnel and time on the part of Border Region officials to keep these kinds of records. Nevertheless, drawing conclusions about policy for women demands a realistic view of change in the Yan'an era. Fortunately, three important indicators that can be used to hypothesize about change remain available. They are women in leadership positions, the party's success or failure in involving women in elections and government work, and the continuation of traditional customs.

Women in Leadership Positions

Writing about the women's movement in China in the 1960s, Phyllis Andors observes that "unless policies aimed specifically at the creation of participatory opportunities for the most backward, unskilled, and oppressed segments of the population—a category in which the overwhelming majority of women belonged—were developed, social decision-making positions would be only tokenism."¹ Andors' point is well taken, but evidence indicates that during the Yan'an era, while the party worked hard at developing such opportunities for women, few, if any, women held policy-making positions. An informal survey of women known to be in the upper echelons of the party and active in the communist movement from its beginning shows that none of them played a major role in formulating policy. Cai Chang, for example, the only woman to serve as a full member of the Central Committee, the chief of the Women's Work Department of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, and chairman of the Preparatory Committee for China's Liberated Areas' Women's Federation, was the most important woman in the Border Region and in the best position to play a policy-making role. Although she sometimes acted as spokeswoman, there is no proof that she had any part in developing policy.²

Likewise, other important women failed to figure in policy development. Kang Kejing, wife of army commander Zhu De and an important revolutionary in her own right, spent the war years working as one of the chiefs of the political department of the Eighth Route Army headquarters and doing first-aid work at the front lines. She did not appear to work with women until 1949, when she became chairwoman of the Child Welfare Department of the All-China women's Democratic Women's Federation.³

Another women, Liu Jianxian, headed the Department of Women Workers in Shanghai and in the Jiangxi Soviet during the early 1930s; she held that same position in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, where she also directed the Department of National Mines and Factories. Yet she, too, appeared to play no role in policy formation.⁴ The same is true of Deng Yingchao. Although Deng was a frequent spokeswoman for policy

¹ Andors, p. 118.

² Helen Foster Snow, *The Chinese Communists*, p. 324.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 211–212.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

in the late forties and early fifties, she was not active in women's affairs in Yan'an until 1945. At that time she became vice-chairwoman of the Preparatory Committee for China's Liberated Areas' Women's Federation but, again, there is no evidence that this was a policy-making position. Deng spent most of the war years in Chongqing with her husband Zhou Enlai as a Communist party representative to the Nationalist government.⁵

The final example is Liu Jianzhen, whom journalist Nym Wales called the chief of the Soviet Women's Department in a 1937 interview. However, it remains unclear whether she actually held that post. Her whereabouts for most of the anti-Japanese war are not recorded; but that she did leave the Border Region seems certain because when the war ended, she was secretary of the Party Committee in Changting xian, Fujian province.⁶

If women did not hold policy-making positions, what about their role in lower levels of the party? Most women party members from the Border Region worked directly with women, organizing and leading them at the village and qu level. Because people responded better to leadership by their own kind, party leaders relied heavily on local people to work with the masses. I found no figures for the number of cadres, either men or women, at this level, but apparently the number of women was not large. Jane Price, in her study of women and leadership in the communist movement at this time, suggests two reasons why there were not many women leaders: one was sexism, as Ding Ling charged in her March 9, 1942, article; the other was revolutionary realism. Price believes that women cadres did not fare much worse than peasants or workers in achieving responsible positions in the communist movement. She points out that women were most valuable in organizing and leading other women so, therefore, they were used almost exclusively in direct mass work.⁷

Schools for training women leaders did exist, however: Kangda, North Shaanxi Public School, and Yan'an University all had facilities for training women. Between 1939 and 1941 there was even a Women's University, which had as its principal Wang Ming, a former member of the Twenty-eight Bolsheviks.

The purpose of the Women's University was to train female cadres to lead mobilization work involving women. It intended to draw its

⁵ Donald W. Klein and Anne B. Clark, *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism, 1921-1965*, pp. 840-841.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 482-483.

⁷ Price, "Women and Leadership," p. 22.

students from workers, peasants, anti-Japanese activists, and women from military-political training schools behind Japanese lines, but the majority of women enrolled were non-Communist intellectuals freshly arrived from outside the base areas and preparing to face the reality of revolutionary work in the backward countryside. They were usually unmarried and ranged in age from fourteen to forty-one.

On the basis of examinations, students studied in one of six general classes, one high-level research class, or one "special" class. The research class trained "theoretical" cadres, from among university-trained women or those with previous training in Communist party institutions. These women later led war work or political work in enemy areas, taught, did medical work or propaganda work, or organized cooperatives.⁸ Special classes taught basic literacy skills to women with some previous experience in the women's movement. Each type of class had its own curriculum, but all students studied the history of social evolution, political economy, Marxism-Leninism, philosophy, problems of the Chinese revolution, problems of the Chinese Communist party, Three People's Principles, women's movement, military education, and health education. There were elective courses in vocational education, shorthand, news reporting, music, library science, dramatics, literature, bookkeeping, English, Japanese, and accounting.

Very little time was allotted to the special problems of women or the women's movement. Price argues that this was because the university tried to tie women's problems to general revolutionary goals in accordance with the party's position on women at that time. In his address at the school's opening, Wang Ming asked his students to "remain steadfast wives, good mothers and filial daughters." In making this plea, Price believes, Wang Ming sought to maximize support for the party among the conservative peasants. She stresses that this accommodation pervaded all aspects of university life as school officials attempted to "acclimate independent-minded women intellectuals to conditions in the base areas and to convert their feminism into Marxism."⁹ When the Women's University closed in 1941, Yan'an University took over many of its functions; but it, too, paid little attention to training women to lead women. Of the total enrollment of 1,302 students in 1944, only 74 were female.¹⁰

⁸ Jane L. Price, *Cadres, Commanders and Commissars*, p. 152.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152. Discussion of Women's University, pp. 151-153.

¹⁰ Price, "Women and Leadership," p. 21.

Participation in Elections and Government

Although women may not have held high-level leadership positions in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, they did take an active interest in local politics. Cadres had little difficulty in getting women to vote in Border Region elections. In the elections of 1945, for example, an estimated 70 percent of Border Region women voted, with the percentage going as high as 83 percent in Zichang and 72 percent in Baoan.¹¹ As in the 1941 election, many men resented women voting, but women defied them and went to the polls. Convincing women to vote was an essential part of making them aware that the government considered them equal to men and gave them equal rights. Consequently, cadres actively worked to educate them about the electoral process and to encourage women to run for office.¹²

To emphasize the importance of women in government, the Shaan-Gan-Ning Regional Assembly passed a law guaranteeing women 25 percent of the seats in the People's Representative Assembly at each level and suggested that all levels of government employ as many women as possible. After the land reform of 1947, the government raised the number of positions reserved for women in village representative assemblies to 30 percent of the total membership.¹³ Although these ratios are not high, they are still superior to the percentage of women representatives in all levels of government in the United States today.

Continuation of Traditional Customs

The third and, perhaps, most important, indicator showing the lack of significant change was the continuation of traditional customs. While headway may have been made in the other areas, Border Region officials were unsuccessful in eliminating arranged marriages and footbinding even though they devoted much time to these problems. As late as March 1946, according to a *JFRB* article, the continuation of traditional marriage practices and women's failure to understand divorce were two of the three

¹¹ "Funü can xuan yongyue Zhidan wancheng sanji xuan ju" [Women's election enthusiasm, Baoan completes three levels of elections], *JFRB* (February 6, 1949); Ho, p. 236.

¹² For an example of a woman who successfully ran for office, see "Zhe Juying," *JFRB* (May 23, 1942).

¹³ Ho, pp. 227-228.

problems of women that remained unsolved.¹⁴ The 1948 Central Committee's resolution on women reiterated these concerns, saying that although production was still the cornerstone of the women's movement, laws and education were needed to stop footbinding, infanticide, and buying and selling marriages.¹⁵

Cadres had a very difficult time convincing families who had always bound their women's feet that their daughters would still be marriageable even if they had "big" feet. So little progress was made through persuasion that the government finally passed a law in 1942 specifically forbidding the practice. The law made it clear that the custom was to be stopped; it directed local governments to punish offenders, and instructed women's associations to educate women against footbinding.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the custom persisted. Cadres reported in November 1944 that the binding of young girls' feet continued throughout the area. In one village they discovered six young girls between six and eleven years old with newly bound feet; in another village cadres found seven girls whose feet had been bound for several years. In a third area mothers still bound their daughters' feet at age ten, and if the girls resisted, according to the cadres, the mothers beat them.¹⁷

The government's attitude toward footbinding was another interesting example of the contradiction between theory and practice. In theory government leaders abhorred the practice of footbinding and vehemently attacked it as a remnant of the feudal subordination of women. Yet they hesitated to take forceful action to stop the custom even though its eradication was essential to the liberation movement. Why officials never implemented harsher action remains unclear because very little was written about footbinding during the Yan'an period. One possible explanation for the lack of action was that it represented a potentially explosive conflict of old versus new, and a massive campaign against footbinding would have created severe social disruption at a time when the government could not afford it. Cadres appeared to have dealt with the matter on an individual basis. At no time did the government carry out as vigorous a campaign against footbinding as it did to get

¹⁴ "Cun zaiyu Yanshi funü zhong di jige wenti" [Several problems that exist among women in Yan'an city], *JFRB* (March 9, 1946). Reforming backward women and getting them into production was the third problem.

¹⁵ Quanguo minzhu funü lianhehui xuanchuan jiaoyubu, "Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu muqian jiefangqu nongcun funü gongzuo di jueding," *Zhongguo funü yundong di zhongyao wenjian*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ "Zuchan zhijin" [Footbinding prohibited], *JFRB* (August 17, 1942).

¹⁷ "Xiangxin" [Letters], *JFRB* (November 2, 1944).

women into production, or to vote, or to acquaint them with the marriage law.

One 1944 publication illustrated how the government chose to deal with the problem. It began by pointing out that footbinding continued in all the subregions of the Border Region except Suide. (No reason was given for the success of the campaign in Suide.) The document proceeded to condemn the practice as not only dangerous but also a source of indescribable misery for women. Even the most robust women became weak and sickly when they had their feet bound, with many suffering irreparable damage to their health. It also pointed out that footbinding was one of the reasons why the death rate among young girls in the Border Region was high and health standards in the villages low.¹⁸

Because the practice was so dangerous, border Region officials directed cadres and village leaders to stress the illegality of the custom and to remind parents that anyone caught binding their daughters' feet would be punished. They also urged them to advise women to unbind their feet. However, in doing this, local leaders were to caution women that unwrapping their feet would be painful and they might have difficulty walking. Women considering such action were encouraged to go to the local health service to have it done. To assist cadres and village leaders in trying to stop footbinding, the government asked the various propaganda units of the Border Region to do whatever they could to spread the word. It instructed newspapers to publish articles on the evils of footbinding, dance troupes to perform skits depicting its miseries, and schools to teach about the dangers of the custom from the lowest grades to adult education classes.¹⁹ Despite the clear course charted by the government, its efforts apparently did not make much headway; in a November 1945 newspaper article peasant women criticized the government for not taking a stronger stand against the practice.²⁰

The second ongoing problem facing the Border Region government was that of traditional marriage practices. Although families might

¹⁸ Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu bangongting [Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region government office], *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu canyihui changzhuhui di shii ci zhengfu weiyuanhui diwu ci lianxi hui jue ding ji youguan jingji wenhua jianshe di zhongyao tian* [The decisions and important proposals of the joint session of the eleventh meeting of the Standing Committee of the Assembly and the fifth meeting of the Government Council of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region concerning economic, culture, reconstruction and other matters], (Yan'an, 1944), pp. 89-90.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

²⁰ "Funümen zai xiang xuan zhong hen huoyue" [Women very lively in xiang elections], *JFRB* (November 14, 1945).

eventually accept their wives and daughters as equals because of their economic contributions, very few were willing to allow their children to choose their own spouses. Judging from the large number of articles appearing on the topic in the *JFRB* from 1942 on, traditional marriages continued to be common. One man, for example, wrote to a question-and-answer column in the June 2, 1942, issue to ask where he could obtain an inexpensive wife. He complained that he was too poor to afford a good wife or concubine who in his neighborhood cost at least 1,000 yuan. The only girls cheap enough for him to buy were seven-year-olds. In the same column another citizen wrote that the marriage market was as strong as ever in his district with the going price for girls about 10,000 yuan. Many of the poorer peasants found this high price irresistible and sold their daughters.²¹ Even as late as Women's Day 1946, examples of parents selling their daughters for marriage appeared in the newspaper. One headline on that subject announced "One example of Yan'an leaders' opposition to buying marriages; father and mother's insatiable desire for wealth; daughter angry as marriage approaches." According to the article, the father of a sixteen-year-old girl arranged a marriage for her without her consent and received a very large sum of money and a bolt of cloth as a bride price.²²

No one reason prevented the government from reforming marriage practices; rather, several interrelated problems stymied attempts at reform. Most importantly, the traditional social system still existed in most areas. There had not been sufficient change in the economy to warrant reform in society. Furthermore, there were never enough cadres to work with the large number of peasants still deeply rooted in a complex traditional system. Cadres who worked on the marriage problem had a difficult time making peasants, especially women, understand the concept of freedom. That they were free to marry whomever they pleased or were able to obtain divorces with good reason was incomprehensible to most peasants. They had enough difficulty understanding why males and females should be equal.²³

²¹ "Yi di shu" [Letters], *JFRB* (June 2, 1942).

²² "Yanxian lingdao fandui maimai hunyin yilie" [Yanxian leaders oppose buying and selling marriages], *JFRB* (March 8, 1946). According to Gunther Stein, betrothing one's children was not illegal at that time; forcing one's child into marriage, however, was. See Stein, pp. 249–250. For an example of the persistence of traditional marriage customs see "Qingjian di hunyin xisuo" [Marriage customs of Qingjian], *JFRB* (November 3, 1942).

²³ See "Shijian lihun an" [Ten divorce cases], *JFRB* (July 27, 1945). The article is an extensive study on divorce in Xiaoyaizui village in Suide subregion. This is the best article on divorce found and appears to be typical of the Border Region. It is the source from which all material for the discussion of divorce was taken.

In addition, party officials face the ongoing and perplexing problem of how to keep their own cadres from following traditional customs and breaking the marriage law. Cadres could not set examples for the rest of the people when they continued to practice old customs. One letter to the newspaper reported that a cadres in the sender's village paid a very high price for a fifteen-year-old girl to marry, while another cadre in the same village sold her fourteen-year-old daughter for an early marriage. The response to the latter observed that conditions narrated in the article were universal in the Border Region, where cadres not only ignored the marriage law, but where peasants still consulted *yinyang* correlates to determine the auspicious marriage day, arranged marriages, and betrothed young children. It called for an immediate investigation of the matter.²⁴

Government leaders did not ignore these transgressions; they initiated countermeasures as early as 1942. One measure employed was to publish examples of traditional marriages and point out their bad aspects, as illustrated in an article about a Mizhi peasant named Zhou Shoutang, who spent so much money on a wedding that he had to mortgage his land. This particular article pointed out that the costs of weddings had skyrocketed and, as a result, when one member of the family married, the entire family suffered, to say nothing of the new husband and wife. New-style weddings, the article argued, were less expensive and therefore more sensible. If a new daughter-in-law did not cause financial hardships for the son's family, tensions within the family relaxed and the young couple were freer.²⁵

In the same vein, *JFRB* editors also published examples of progressives who married by free choice in simple ceremonies that did away with the elaborate trappings of the traditional ceremony. One article described a young peasant couple who married on a battlefield in a simple ceremony with a few friends present.²⁶ Another article in February 1945 detailed the new-style marriage ceremony, similar to the old except that it focused on the couple themselves.²⁷ Although these articles and others like them indicated that progress was being made in eliminating traditional

²⁴ "Xiangxin" [Letters], *JFRB* (November 2, 1944).

²⁵ "Mizhi bufen difang shixing hunsang jieyue" [People practice economical weddings and funerals at Mizhi], *JFRB* (April 23, 1945).

²⁶ "Zhandi qingnian di hunli" [The marriage ceremony of young people on a battlefield], *JFRB* (January 25, 1942).

²⁷ "Sanjia qunzhong caiyong xinshi hunti" [Three families adopt new-style marriages], *JFRB* (February 19, 1945). See also "Mizhi kaihui jue ding hunsang jieyue juti banfa" [Decision of the Mizhi government meeting on ways to save money in weddings and funerals], *JFRB* (July 7, 1945).

marriage customs, they fail to mention that most progressive people found it difficult to practice new-style marriages because there were few opportunities to meet and develop relationships with members of the opposite sex. Society had not been transformed sufficiently to produce an atmosphere where males and females could freely socialize and work together.

In addition to publishing examples of the good and bad points of marriage styles, government officials also initiated campaigns to tell people about the benefits of new-style marriages. Cadres would hold meetings where they encouraged peasants, especially women, to talk about their own unpleasant marriages and those of their family or friends, and then, while the audience was in a sympathetic mood, cadres would tell them about the marriage law and the new practices to persuade them to disregard old customs.²⁸ The government had only superficial success because while the peasants generally accepted the logic of the new system, they were unwilling to apply it to their own lives.

Despite these countermeasures, traditional customs continued, finally forcing the Border Region government to pass a harsher marriage law. The revised law, which appeared on March 20, 1944, contained one article not found in any of the previous marriage regulations. Article fourteen of the 1944 law stated: "Whoever disobeys the regulation of marriage and divorce must be reported to the legal and administrative organization of that area. That organization, then, must investigate the truth to determine the facts and correct the matter. If the transgression involves breaking the law, then it is a penal case and is to be disposed of like other criminal cases."²⁹ None of the other marriage regulations had contained this threat of punishment, and its inclusion in the revised laws shows clearly that officials considered the marriage problem to be serious.

Educating the people in the area of freedom of divorce did not present as many problems to government officials as did educating them in the idea of free-choice marriages. On the whole, people were more receptive to the idea of divorce, but a number of problems did exist. As in marriages, the primary problem was making peasants understand that they had the freedom to divorce and that men and women shared this freedom equally. Another problem was convincing peasant families, who

²⁸ "Cong qishiliu ge funü jiehun nianling shouqi" [Investigation of the marriage ages of 76 women], *JFRB* (February 1, 1942); "Feichu maimai hunyin" [Abolishing buying and selling marriages], *JFRB* (February 9, 1942).

²⁹ Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengfu, *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu zhengce tiaoli huiji xubian*, p. 161.

looked upon divorce as shameful and tried to suppress any marital difficulties within their families, to bring their problems out in the open so that people could help solve them.

Even in the mid-to-late 1940s families still refused to admit marital discord or to allow their members to obtain divorces; and because elders continued to dominate individual members in most families at that time, their disapproval stopped divorce action. Such disapproval is understandable. A family, after all, spent a considerable sum of money to purchase their son a wife, and they did not want to lose the income the wife brought in, particularly after women began to contribute to the family's livelihood through spinning and weaving. Furthermore, if the divorced wife did not remarry soon, or was unable to support herself, the husband had to support her as well as their children, who could choose with which parent they preferred to live. This additional financial burden of supporting a person whose labor no longer benefited them made the husband and his family resent the divorce all the more.

To counteract the financial loss an unsanctioned system developed in the Border Region whereby the wife paid her husband money or grain when they divorced. This practice was widespread; it occurred in eight out of ten of the divorces in Xiaoyaizui. In one case a woman wanted a divorce from her cruel husband, but he would not agree to it because she refused to give him the five piculs of grain he wanted as a settlement. Finally, they compromised on three piculs. In another case a strong and healthy seventeen-year-old girl wanted to divorce her sickly sixteen-year-old husband. The girl's family agreed to give the boy's family two piculs, five *tou* (a *tou* equals forty pounds) of grain in return for the divorce.

Peasants did obtain divorces in spite of the social stigma attached to them. Among the seventy-eight families in Xiaoyaizui, for example, there were ten divorces initiated by women. The most common grounds for women to seek divorce was mental and physical cruelty; even in 1945 it was not unusual to find husbands or their families beating and cursing wives, starving them, or overworking them. While not as common as cruelty toward women, another cause of divorce cited by both men and women was a backward or unliberated mate.

Unlike the more freely granted divorces of the United Front period, government officials during this time granted a divorce only after the couple had tried to reconcile their differences. During the period of reconciliation authorities relied heavily upon friends and neighbors to act as mediators and on social pressure to force the couple to settle their differences. One example of social pressure, given in the article "Ten divorce cases," was the story of a nineteen-year-old girl who wanted to

divorce her twenty-year-old husband after only a few months of marriage because she said she did not love him. Before the village authorities could act upon the request, the young couple's neighbors appeared and demanded that the request be denied. Their spokesman pointed out that the couple had not given each other a chance and that the girl had gone into the marriage with the idea that if things did not go her way she would get a divorce. They asked the authorities to postpone action until the couple had more time together. The neighbors promised to act as mediators in the couples' quarrels and to work to help them develop a good husband-wife relationship.³⁰

The above illustration reflects the prevalent attitude toward divorce in the mid-1940s, an attitude that continues today. Although the government recognized people's right to divorce, it saw divorce as a last resort, to be undertaken only after other possibilities were exhausted. It wanted couples to talk differences through and encouraged mediation by third parties to solve marital disputes. The social disruption caused by easy divorces during the United Front years and the continued dependence on the family as the basic economic unit had made Border Region officials cautious in granting divorces.

By 1947, although the majority of women in the Border Region were not yet equal to men, the seeds of change had been sown. Although peasant women did not occupy positions in the top levels of the party or government, they were active in lower-level government, which was the level that affected them most directly. Although they were still victimized by feudal customs, they were aware that the government forbade arranged marriage and footbinding and that they could turn to the authorities for help. More importantly, by organizing them and pushing them into group action with each other and with men, Border Region officials forced women who had led solitary lives into contact with other people.

³⁰ See note 23 above.

VII

Conclusion

To succeed, policy for women during the Yan'an period had to achieve four goals. It had to fit the ideological guidelines governing the period, appeal to both men and women, work within the context of local traditions and customs, and raise the status of women while moving society toward socialism. Policy did achieve these goals, although not as fully as the leadership had hoped. That did not mean that policy failed or disappointed officials. The tension between theory and practice forced repeated revisions to reflect changes in ideology and the specific needs of the Border Region. Leaders saw no alternative but to implement policy within a larger framework because women's involvement in economic and political life was essential to the area's survival.

Despite the pressure to abandon the goal of equality for women in order to meet the challenges of daily life, party and government leaders remained committed to bettering the lives of women. Over the short term, roles for women varied; but policy between 1937 and 1947 continually sought to move women out of the confines of their traditional lives and incorporate them in larger groups with broader concerns (see Table 7).

A review of the stages in policy development illustrates this point. Between 1937 and 1941 cadres organized women into women's associations, separating their problems from the general problems of society. This stage of segregation sought to make women aware of their plight; but while the practice of encouraging women to attack people who had oppressed them or to obtain divorces was an essential step in awakening them to the need for change, it did not give women an opportunity to play social roles that would justify a rise in their status. In fact, cadres generated more resentment than support as women charged them with deliberately inciting family quarrels by promoting divorce. When party leaders recognized that their program for emancipating women conflicted with the larger goals of resistance and establishing control of the region, they began to search for a more workable policy.

Table 7
Patterns in Policy for Yan'an Women,
1937-1947

	1937-1941	1942-1945	1946-1947
Emphasis	Segregation	Partial integration	Full integration
Primary concerns	Individual	Family	Society
Economic role	Traditional/undefined war-related work	Organized home/small group production	Agricultural work in larger groups
Social role	Individual awareness	Working within the family	Working within society
Articles in <i>JFRB</i>	Special women's page	Separate articles/last page	Articles throughout paper

That came in the stage of partial integration, 1942–1945, when the call went out for women to participate in productive work to make the Border Region self-sufficient. Under the new economic policy the family more than ever was the crucial unit, and women could no longer be allowed to divide it. They had to play a positive and constructive role to insure its stability and, indirectly, the Border Region's survival. Furthermore, the emphasis on women in production was a direct response to the dire economic situation facing the Border Region in the early 1940s. Everyone had to make a contribution if the area was going to survive the Guomindang blockade. Women were no exception.

The demise of the economic crisis in late 1945 and the prospect of civil war caused party theoreticians to revise policy once more. In the stage of full integration, 1946–1947, policy worked to incorporate women into society. Personal survival was not the theme; solution of national problems was. Here for the first time we see a significant number of women in agriculture—an activity that required women to work with men and an important symbolic step forward. The stress on agriculture also revived the question of class, which had lain dormant during the war years.

The *JFRB* demonstrated this pattern in the types of articles it printed and their position in the newspaper. During the period of segregation editors placed women's articles on a special woman's page published on an alternating basis with topics such as literature, youth, and workers. Unlike the second stage, no one theme dominated articles in this period. During the stage of partial integration the separate women's page disappeared, but headlines still distinguished articles on women—usually found on page four, the last page of the paper, in 1942—from other articles. During the Great Production Drive of 1943 articles frequently appeared on page two or three with an occasional editorial on page one. The dominant theme of all articles at this time was women in production. Because the goals of women and become one with the goals of society during the third stage, the *JFRB* no longer granted them special status. Headlines rarely indicated whether or not an article concerned women, and editors set aside no special section for them. Most articles mentioned women only as part of larger groups.

The three-stage pattern of policy development can also be assessed according to the theory of policy cycles developed by G. William Skinner and Edwin A. Winckler in their 1969 article "Compliance Succession in Rural Communist China: a Cyclical Theory."¹ Skinner and Winckler

¹ The discussion here is taken from pages 433–438.

argue that between 1949 and 1968 policies passed through a series of six-phase cycles: normalcy, mobilization, high tide, deterioration, retrenchment, and demobilization. Although devised for another time under different circumstances, they can be applied to policy for women between 1937 and 1947. Certainly these are not as clear-cut during the Yan'an period and did not exhibit the extremes or rhetorical differences ascribed to the post-1949 period. Leaders of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region were still in the process of gaining mass support; legitimacy was not absolute. Moreover, the demands of survival were so great that the government until 1946 did not dare risk alienating the people or increasing class tension. Nevertheless, the similarities remain and offer clear proof that policy changes for Yan'an women fit a pattern common to the Chinese Communist party experience elsewhere. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine the six phases and their application to policy.

Phase 1—Normalcy. During this stage, according to the authors, state and party leaders set aside projects that would lead to the immediate revolutionization of society. Economic tasks and decisions are in the hands of the peasants, with cadres assuming supervisory positions. There is little communication downward and not much effort to recruit for the party or mass organizations.

With slight variation the circumstances described above fit neatly into the stage of segregation. The existence of the United Front made the leadership postpone its revolutionary programs and concentrate on winning the war against Japan. Concerned with the war and afraid of alienating any potential base of support, policy makers failed to provide a clear direction for women. Associations were left to fend for themselves. Without concrete guidelines from above, cadres often promoted actions that were inconsistent with the feelings of women in general. Although they were vaguely aware of problems, they failed to readjust policy.

Phase 2—Mobilization. This is a period of organizational expansion when ideology, persuasion, and manipulation are applied to economic ends. Collective endeavors to achieve solidarity are emphasized as everyone works to increase production. Top levels of party and government clean their own house and focus on recruiting qualified people for positions of leadership. Retrained and reeducated and under instructions to involve themselves actively with peasants, cadres urge people to new productive heights through mass campaigns. Communication between cadres and the masses is good, but the downward flow of ideology outweighs the upward flow of information about actual conditions.

The mobilization phase corresponds to the early part of the stage of partial integration (roughly 1942 to 1943). This was a "radical" phase because leaders were so intent on affirming the power of socialist thinking and achieving desired victories that they encouraged policies and procedures not realistically related to goals. The pressure of propaganda from above forced cadres to report "miracles" to superiors to mask the increased discrepancy between power and goals. Those in power resisted admitting errors in policy and did not encourage feedback, fearing what they would hear.

Skinner and Winckler placed this phenomenon at the end of the next stage, high tide; but in policy for women it was clearly in the mobilization phase. The articles by Ding Ling and by Xie Juezai, both of which were printed in the *JFRB* on March 9, 1942, were good examples of unsolicited feedback. When party leaders finally admitted that problems they had been only peripherally aware of throughout the Border Region were all too real, they undertook a rectification campaign to bring cadres back in line with reality. Part of that campaign involved opening the lines of communication between the leadership and the led. It was the era of mass-line, decentralization of the economy, and harnessing the energies of people to make the Border Region self-sufficient. It was also a time of solidarity, when the family economic unit achieved a new importance. As an integral part, women were to contribute to its solidarity; what better way than through production? Cadres organized local spinning and weaving groups. Textile cooperatives appeared in the more advanced areas and were successful enough to become the mainstay of the Border Region's cooperative movement.

Coercion was never a significant force in getting women to join production; but material rewards were, especially when used in conjunction with persuasion. The hero emulation campaigns, which were at their height in this phase, illustrated the importance of remuneration. Yet material rewards and self-interest were not restricted to this phase alone. They were a constant force throughout the Yan'an period and always the strongest argument for inducing women to join party and government programs.

Phase 3—High tide. In this phase technology is applied to short-term problems with little consideration given to problems of interdependence or coordination. People accept participation in formal organizations and work constructively toward a goal. Cadres recruit from all levels of society, and some progress in breaking down traditional habits is made. Commitment to ideological goals, not remuneration, becomes the basis for action.

High tide occurred in policy for women between 1943 and early 1944. The above analysis describes the situation in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region accurately and needs no further elaboration. The hero emulation campaign was in full swing. Cadres organized women in textile work, promising them better lives if they contributed to the family's income. Their pleas were effective: figures show an increase in the number of women producing. Nevertheless, commitment to ideological goals was not the only reason for participation; remuneration remained the principal motivating force.

Phase 4—Deterioration. The policy cycle reaches a "crisis" during this phase as organizational responsibilities and energies decline. Tension mounts between formal and informal leaders, and enthusiasm wanes among the people as they begin to doubt they can achieve organizational goals. The realization that many of the social and technological innovations made earlier were not wise results in a loss of solidarity. Misinformation makes reports moving upward increasingly meaningless.

The whole question of communication between the leadership and cadres and between cadres and the people is an interesting one. Because of the sources used here, it is as difficult to determine whether communication fits the Skinner-Winckler theory as it is to evaluate actual changes in the status of women. There is sufficient reason, however, to believe that what the authors described for the deterioration phase occurred during the end of the stage of partial integration. The March 17, 1945, *JFRB* article "Why did Yan'an women stop weaving for awhile?" proved that misinformation was not so much a problem as was no information. What reached top levels did not reveal the crucial issue. While cadres followed orders and organized women, organization was not what most women needed. Those women who were going to participate were doing so; what they wanted was better technology and help in solving production problems.

The attempts to solve short-run problems of the high tide phase failed to meet the real problems, which required a level of technical expertise not available in the Border Region. Moreover, no organization existed to coordinate work and, as a result, tension between cadres and women increased. Despite recognition of the need for change, party leaders were not yet ready. Nor were they willing to clean their own house; the rectification movement that Skinner and Winckler found in their deterioration phase did not appear in Yan'an until later.

Phase 5—Retrenchment. This phase did not exist in policy for women, although if the war with the Japanese had not ended when it did and if the crisis with the Guomindang had not reached a critical point, it

might have occurred. Retrenchment is a time of bringing organizational units to manageable size again, applying technical expertise, attempting to coordinate a fragmented economy, tightening party discipline, and containing the growing alienation among the masses. As economic performance deteriorates, the government becomes concerned with efficiency. Because of bad communication, it blames cadres for failures and realizes it must reacquaint itself with lower levels.

These characteristics existed in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region in late 1945, but the crises prevented their full evolution. Furthermore, officials were sufficiently dissatisfied with progress in all areas to undertake a second zhengfeng to weed out cadres not totally committed to the revolution. They also made a deliberate decision to revise policy for women. That decision included reopening the lines of communication, inviting women to contribute their suggestions about what direction the revised policy should take.

Phase 6—Demobilization. The organizational role of the government is minor as the cycle moves back toward normalcy. Lesser decisions are decentralized while major ones are more centralized. The leadership concentrates on long-range development of production, abandoning the hope for short-term gain. Local initiative is once again important, and there is a trend away from collective organizations toward work groups based on natural affiliations.

The stage of full integration in policy for women is similar to Skinner and Winckler's demobilization phase. The emphasis was on women working with men in groups that were not collectives but natural village or kinship affiliations. Women were no longer deliberately separated from men. Because the emphasis was on winning the civil war, there was a tendency once again to rely on local leaders. Nevertheless, society was not necessarily slipping into the indifference that characterizes the return to normalcy. Again, that difference can be attributed to the war crisis. Revolutionary ideology and class struggle reappeared as the enemy became internal rather than external.

It is obvious when examining stages in policy for women that reality dictated the implementation of policy. Certainly the conflict between theory and practice is no revelation in the history of the Chinese Communist party; it has been well documented. Nevertheless, because it has been one of the central themes of this study, it deserves reemphasis here. Throughout the decade Marxist goals were readapted to correspond to actual need. The crises facing the government required direct action, often without regard for long-term goals. One common argument in the debate about why the Communist party was successful was that

nationalism generated by the anti-Japanese war rallied people's support for the party and its programs. yet the war was not the predominant factor in determining policy for women. The Guomindang blockade, the civil war, and customs and traditions that dominated life in the region were at least as important as, if not more important than the war itself. For example, the consciousness-raising stage ended when the Guomindang imposed its blockade of the region. Women had to be moved into a more productive stage to meet the economic crisis. Similarly, the preparations for the final confrontation with the Guomindang in late 1945 and 1946 involved many women for the first time in affairs outside those of their own homes and villages.

These crises, however, were not as influential as the necessity of working within a centuries-old social system. Although peasants adjusted to new circumstances, they continued to function comfortably in traditional village and kinship authority patterns. The value system derived from these was so deeply ingrained that no sudden change in the economy could transform society completely. Therefore, changes in the superstructure became crucial. Officials could advance policy only as fast as was sustainable in a slowly changing society. The traditional system cracked between 1937 and 1947, but it never broke.

Whether the war, its economies, or the desire to change traditional lifestyles accounted for its formation, policy could succeed only if women supported it. Typically that support came from self-interest, not revolutionary zeal or nationalism. Nationalism had little impact because the Japanese threat was never imminent. Realizing this, the leadership made its appeal to women in terms of joining the transition to socialism because it would better their lives. Like the contradiction between theory and practice, the attraction of self-interest was not unique to the Yan'an period. Vivienne Shue found it a consistent and dominant theme in gaining peasant support in rural areas between 1949 and 1956.²

Nevertheless, self-interest alone was not sufficient to gain the support of the majority of women. How, then, did cadres rally them to participate in party and government programs? The answer was effective and comprehensive organization. This, too, presented problems. Joining a women's association proved difficult for women who lived secluded lives. Compounding that difficulty was men's resistance to their women's belonging to groups that had the potential to destroy male authority. Moreover, women's heavy domestic burdens discouraged them from joining groups that could not improve their lives immediately. Cadres had

² Vivienne Shue, *Peasant China in Transition*, p. 5.

better luck in involving women in government programs after 1942, when formal associations took second place to informal groups centered on such activities as production or education.

Women generated little enthusiasm for participation among themselves. Apart from the work of some activists, most support evolved under the direction of local cadres. That the search for equality was never a grass-roots movement should not be seen as an indictment of either policy or women. Self-motivation could occur only when women accepted the need for change. That acceptance came slowly, especially in an area where the day-to-day demands of living were so great.

The process of gathering support and integrating women into the work of society—essential ingredients in the quest for equality—was a slow and arduous one. Given the demands of life in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region it could not be achieved in the short time the Communist party controlled the area. There was no revolutionary transformation for women during the Yan'an era. Nevertheless, equality was a consistent and pervasive goal no matter how often it was subordinated to other needs. What advances were made during the decade took place subtly and within the context of larger social and economic goals. Although women did not achieve equality during the Yan'an period, their lives were touched by change, and they experienced the hope that something better lay ahead.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Population of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, 1946

Subregion	Men	Women	Total
Yan'an	215,046	194,541	409,587
Suide	288,656	268,797	557,453
Guanzhong	71,858	59,655	131,513
Longdong	150,900	124,872	275,772
Sanbian	111,362	97,007	208,369
Yan'an city	6,539	5,832	12,371
Total	844,361	750,704	1,595,065

SOURCE: Zhongguo kexue yuan lishi yanjiu suo disan suo, ed., *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu canyi hui wenxian huiji*, p. 379.

Appendix 2

Division of Districts According to Population, 1946

Class A (more than 100,100)	Men	Women	Total
Suide	77,164	70,086	147,250
Zizhou	57,315	55,493	112,808
Jia	53,404	48,979	102,383

Class B (50-100,000)

Mizhi	48,033	44,477	92,510
Yanchuan	38,382	35,288	73,670
Zichang	36,362	33,179	69,541
Yan'an	34,690	29,475	64,165
Qingjian	32,398	31,499	63,897
Qingyang	33,125	29,918	63,043
Jingbian	30,052	28,280	58,332
Quzi	29,769	26,445	56,214
Zhenyuan	33,165	21,744	54,909
Ansai	27,989	24,394	52,383

Division of Districts According to Population, 1946 (*Continued*)

Class C (30-50,000)

Dingbian	24,429	21,388	45,817
Heshui	24,115	20,171	44,286
Chishui	22,498	20,988	43,486
Fuxian	19,722	22,368	42,090
Anbian	20,676	19,770	40,446
Wubao	20,342	18,263	38,605
Wuqi	21,595	14,914	36,509
Yanchang	18,673	16,120	34,793
Xinning	18,019	15,496	33,515
Huachi	18,321	15,169	33,490
Baoan	17,293	15,401	32,694

Class D (fewer than 20,000)

Chunyao	16,744	13,096	29,840
Yanchi	14,610	12,655	27,265
Huan	12,405	11,425	23,830
Gulin	12,602	10,527	23,129
Xinzheng	12,662	8,770	21,432
Ganquan	8,698	7,224	15,922

SOURCE: Zhongguo kexue yuan lishi yanjiu suo disan suo, ed., *Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu canyi hui wenxian huiji*, p. 196.

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