

TRANSLATION

Late Qing Feminist Discourse and Nationalism

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ABSTRACT:

Chinese feminist discourse began its development embedded within late Qing period nationalist discourse in the form of proscriptions against foot-binding and advocacy for women's education. Specific rhetorical terms conflating feminist and nationalist discourse include "mothers of citizens (*guomin zhi mu*)" and "women citizens (*nü guomin*)." This paper analyzes ways in which feminism was embedded in nationalist discourse and the legitimacy this established for the women's movement. Such an inquiry uncovers the dependence of feminist discourse upon nationalist discourse, contributing to the unique development of feminism in China. This paper also looks at gender anxiety in Qiu Jin (1875-1907) in an attempt to describe how male subjectivity influenced late Qing feminist discourse.

KEYWORDS: late Qing, feminist discourse, nationalism, Qiu Jin 秋瑾

Introduction

The two discourses of feminism and nationalism have developed in a relatively harmonious manner in China. This trend deviates from that seen in Western feminist and nationalist discourse where, like oil and water, the two refuse to mix with one another. While there are critical views taken of this covalence between feminism and nationalism in China, it is important that this is not done from an essentialist position. Rather, it is rewarding to study how this covalency developed in China. Feminist discourse developed through male representations, a process which naturally precluded divergent historical paths for feminism. The women's movement gained momentum through its contribution to Chinese populism, with its critique of patriarchy being aimed at established first-world Western patriarchies. It remains to be studied how these parameters of being constantly represented by male-run cultural producers may have limited the development of feminist discourse in China.

Western feminist theory and practice provide ample reference for the Chinese women's movement. The connection stops there. China's discovery and journey of women's rights diverge from similar movements in American and Western Europe. Not only is it not a movement initiated and led by independent women, but it also tends to refrain from seeking the right to independence. From its inception, Chinese feminism took part in a more generalized search for social reform which fought for national independence. Chinese feminism has always been integral to revolutionary twentieth-century Enlightenment thinking in China. Thus, it's important to look at the relationship between

feminism and nationalism as one of part to whole, wherein one is contained and delimited by the other.

Notions of nation and gender are inscribed within power structures. There is a parallel between China's relationship to a Western-led world, including China's emotional experience of this relationship, and the relationship of women as inferior and subject to men. This reified positioning of the women's movement as a nationalist proponent is then blended with Marxist-Leninist class theory. Meanwhile, although nationalist discourse has been important for twentieth-century China, complexities between this patriarchal discourse and feminism invite us to look more closely at the late Qing women's movement in China. We will look at relationships between gender and politics, with our first inquiry examining how feminism borrowed the wings of nationalist discourse in its late Qing inception and early development.

"Mothers of Citizens" and "Women Citizens": Nationalist Political Rhetoric

Turn of the century feminist discourse found itself issuing largely through male voices in the late-Qing period.¹ Reformists held high the banner of Enlightenment, advocating consciousness of nationality, with revolutionaries inciting national as well as racial conflicts. It was in this milieu that feminism gained its first visibility, in a discourse building the modern nation state. At the end of the nineteenth-century, Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1873-1929), Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927), and others of the Enlightenment movement overturned the ancient imperial power structure. Without the "heaven" in "all under heaven (*tianxia* 天下)," they established the modern nation-state. Adopting an increasingly linear view of history, China's relationship with the world revealed itself in crisis. Late Qing novels often depict the world, globe, and nation to show that "all under heaven" was not, indeed, controlled by the Chinese emperor. China was just one nation in an eastern temperate zone of Asia, just like the small village in *Yellow Hydrangea* (*Huang xiuqiu* 黃綉球). China faced its ruin and the genocide of its people depicted in vivid images such as the submergence of land in *Flower in the Sea of Evil* (*Nie haihua* 孽海花) and shipwreck in *The Travels of Lao Can* (*Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記). As a few Western scholars have pointed out, nationalism replaced the classical political model of monarchy, in part due to its cultural conception of modernity. Although the notion of nationalism has an illusory nature, it is an illusion shared by nations the world over.² Thus, China transformed from a semi-colony into a sovereign nation-state. Parallels exist between nationalist narratives of the citizen as subject and feminist theory advocating for saving

1. Scholars such as Liu He argue against this statement (Wang and Chen 15). We argue here that female voices can only represent male subjectivity within male dominated discourse and power structures. Alternative voices could never represent mainstream public opinion; therefore, they are hard-pressed to act upon power structures. This was the case with the late Qing feminist movement. We seek to describe how the expression of women's voices was thus limited.

2. Benedict Anderson defined a nation as an imagined community, believing that the nation was a cultural artificiality constructed through the imagination, i.e., a political community enjoying limited sovereignty in nature.

the country and Chinese people.

Late Qing nationalists called for a sovereign nation-state. “A nation is accumulated by people, and there would be no nation without its people,” and, “a citizen is a person who regards their nation as belonging them.”³ Fierce critique put forward by Liang Qichao during the Hundred Days’ Reform of 1898 attacked Chinese people for their lack of consciousness when it came to constituting the new modern nation, labeling them as having slave consciousness with no national subjectivity and labelling these negative qualities as feminine traits. Liang’s New Citizen theory called for the birth of citizens. He believed that the fall of China was due at least in part to a dearth of masculine heroic spirit among the Chinese people. He depicted the physical and spiritual states of Chinese men with adjectives such as “lethargic,” “overcast,” and “slender,” calling for a young and masculine China which would rid itself of its oppressors with its heroic spirit (Liang, *Collected Works* 6:29). Men took up martial arts, and revolutionaries resorted to violence. Women were then moved up on the Enlightenment agenda as “mothers of citizens” who deserved not to have their feet bound, but to have schools built for them.

Liang Qichao stated that, “There are two main parts to managing world affairs. First, bring order to people’s hearts, and second, teach them skills. Both start with women. Teaching women, therefore, is fundamental to the prosperity of a nation.” “Thus, we see that in nations such as the U.S., a highly educated female population contributes to a nation’s power. Nations such as UK, France, Germany, and Japan prosper less, which is in line with their relatively uneducated female population. Nations that don’t educate their women lack in intellectual development. India, Middle Eastern nations, and Turkey are examples of this” (Liang, *Collected Works* 1:40-41, 43). Replacing family with nation reinforced the model of women as nurturers of the nation-state. Nationalist rhetoric played a key role in the rapid spread of support for banning foot-binding, as well as in setting up schools for women at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1904, Jin Songcen (金松岑, 1874-1947) wrote the forward for the first issue of *Women’s World* (*Nüzi shijie* 女子世界). Jin had formerly published *Women’s Bell* (*Nüjie Zhong* 女界鐘), a manifesto which proposed equal rights for men and women by emphasizing responsibilities of women as “mothers of citizens”:

Women are mothers of citizens. There is no doubt that to establish a new China, we need a new kind of woman. If we want to make China strong, we must first strengthen women. To civilize China, we must first civilize women. The salvation of China will follow the salvation of its women.

In that same year, Ying Lianzhi (英斂之, 1867-1926), editor-in-chief of

3. Originally published in the 30th volume (October 15th, 1899) of the *Journal of Pure Righteousness* (*Qingyi bao* 清議報) (Liang 1:56).

Ta Kung Pao (*Da gongbao* 大公報), wrote a preface for the collected poetic works of Lü Bicheng (呂碧城, 1883-1943) and her sisters. In this preface, he speaks of women's independence as well as equality between men and women in terms of nation-building:

I say independence is the basis of equal rights and the basis of national strength. Strength will preserve the nation and protect our sovereignty as citizens from being slaves to foreign powers (10).

Women followed their enlightened fathers and brothers in a declaration of national independence: "As the mothers of citizens, women have a responsibility to propagate and improve the nation" (Xia, *Late Qing* 92).⁴ A newly formed "Common Love Society (*Gong'ai hui* 共愛會)" aimed to "rescue two hundred million women, recovering their original rights and imbuing them with national thoughts, fulfilling their duty as female citizens" (Xia, *Late Qing* 47)⁵ Women were shamed into saving the nation:

Women give birth to the nation. Our nation perished two hundred and sixty years ago, but what is shameful is that everyone sits around calmly and doesn't marvel at this. Where are those who are truly citizens? It pains me that our country's women cannot raise them (...) Therefore, it is not necessary to resent foreigners for the perishing of the nation. One need only blame ourselves, the four hundred million descendants of the Yellow Emperor. If the Yellow Emperor's descendants are sufficiently reliable, we can only blame women for their inability to give birth to citizens (Hou 4).

Late Qing Enlightenment discourse was cultivated through media representations. Broadcasts and headlines reiterated certain concepts and talking points. Various articles and textual narratives reproduced these representations in a concerted effort to shape social and public discourse.⁶ Benedict Andersen has spoken of this as a modern material condition needed for nationalism to overtake imperialism and religious authoritarianism.⁷ The women's movement contributed to these efforts.

Late-Qing nationalism is complex. Its adversaries were Western powers, while there was also a social division in China between Han and Manchu ethnicities. Nationalist reform worked along two main trajectories. The first was the self-strengthening campaign of the Chinese nation, and the second was an internal racial revolution to expel the Manchu and restore governance

4. Originally published as "The Significance of Promoting Women's Education (*Xingnuxue yi* 興女學義)" in *Ta Kung Pao*, Feb. 26th, 1906.

5. Originally published as "Constitution of the Common Love Union for Women Students Studying in Japan (*Riben liuxuesheng nüzi gong'ai hui zhangcheng* 日本留學生女子共愛會章程)," in *Zhejiang Trends* (*Zhejiang chao* 浙江潮), vol. 3.

6. Public opinion influenced official discourse. For example, the late Qing *Memorial Establishing a Constitution for Women's Normal Schools* in 1907 contains the idea that "Women's education is the foundation of the education of the country's citizens."

7. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson views the creation of printing technology and press agencies as a precondition of breaking down a united imperial ideology.

to the Han people. On both trajectories, women were there to strengthen the nation as mothers of citizens.

According to Chen Dongyuan, the custom of binding women's feet began in the early Northern Song. It gained in popularity throughout the Yuan and Ming. In the Qing, Kangxi and Qianlong forbade Manchurian women from binding their feet. The custom grew popular among Han women, and small feet were idolized (125-128, 232-233). In addition to the male fetishization of small bound feet, Qing nationalism created male pride for men whose wives had bound feet. Han scholar officials saw this as a symbol of the refusal to surrender to Manchu imperialism, a moral compensation for maintaining the dignity of the Han people. Women's bodies were the mortgage for men's sense of national integrity. In the Daoguang reign period (1831-1851), Li Ruzhen (李汝珍, 1763-1830) wrote *Flowers in the Mirror* (*Jinghua yuan* 鏡花緣), sharply satirizing the absurd cruelty of foot-binding. Feng Guifen (馮桂芬, 1809-1874) also provided critique in *Xiaobin Cottage Rebellion* (*Xiaobin lu kangyi* 校邠廬抗議). In the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao advocated for rational equality of men and women.⁸ They did so by recalling the compassion and proper etiquette of Chinese sages. These discourses were convincing, but they failed to reach the public. Nationalism gained traction with the technological advent of machine printing and press agencies, which served as tools of disseminating nationalism as a means to Enlightenment. One the eve of the Hundred Days' Reform, Kang Youwei wrote in his memorial to the Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875-1908):

These days all nations are communicating and exchanging political ideologies, unlike the days of old when borders were closed and insulating. Once again, as when we were riddled with opium addiction, China is mocked as an uncivilized nation by foreigners who take photos of our run-down housing and poor beggars on the streets. Among the objects of ridicule, the most mocked are the bound feet of women (65).

Liang Qichao also said that the corrupt custom of binding women's feet, "departs from the regulations of the sages internally and offers us up to the derision of other nations externally, manifestly causes cruel suffering and secretly bequeaths harm to our race" (Liang, *Collected Works* 1:44). Departing from the rites, departing from humanity, departing from the regulations of the sages—in seeking grounds for this argument in the orthodox tradition of Confucianism, it was hard to avoid suspicion of cherry-picking the classics to justify one's own standpoint. Only the global scope of the "derision of other nations" was a fresh argument and truly pricked the self-esteem of the literati elite.

An article that came out in 1904, under the name "Liu Ruiping, Lady of

8. See Kang Youwei's *Book of the Great Fellowship* (*Datong shu* 大通書) and Tan Sitong's (譚嗣同, 1865-1898) *Study of Benevolence* (*Renxue* 仁學). In his *Modern Chinese Arguments for Women's Rights: Nation, Translation, and Gender Politics*, the Taiwanese scholar Liu Renpeng discusses how Kang, Liang, and Tan advocated feminism through the application of Confucianism.

the Fragrant Hills (*Xiangshan liu ruiping* 香山劉瑞平),” also points to this mockery of foreign nations:

I read in a newspaper report that there was “a Fujian customs official named Ying who represented the goods of his province at the Pan-American Exposition.⁹ Among the exhibits Ying brought along were three women, depicting the vulgar customs of Fujian. One was a married woman with bound feet; one, a barefoot virgin; and one, a newly-married bride. They were displayed in the Ethnology Building in order to humiliate Chinese people.” How terrible! For a long time now, the national strength of China has fallen below the passing mark, and Chinese women have been ethnological exhibits for a long time as well. This is the second time that women with bound feet have been put on display as exhibits. Previously, the Osaka Exposition put women with bound feet on display. This is now the second instance. Are the women of China not worthy of respect? Are they not of great value? (250)

It’s interesting to note that foot-binding and the suffering it caused women was not as influential as the shame of a tarnished national image. In the more than one hundred years of feminism in China, only when the issues women face can be re-spun as talking points for nationalist discourse do they become acceptable. However, with the intervention of mainstream political will and power, nationalism was able to step up the pace of achievements in the women’s movement.

Jin Songcen’s *Women’s Bell* first advocated for women’s rights to education, arguing for equal rights between men and women. This line of argumentation deviated from the values of nationalism, and Jin was heralded as the most influential figure in the Chinese women’s movement (Hou).¹⁰ Readers had difficulty, however, following the argument for equal rights between men and women, glossing over this part and harkening enthusiastically to arguments for women to join in the nationalist movement for independence, nationhood, and sovereignty.¹¹ Is this a case of overlooking or of misunderstanding? Perhaps neither. The first part of the text clearly followed John Stuart Mill’s use of the liberal theory of human rights to justify women’s rights.¹² In the second part, however, and especially in the conclusion, the proportion of nationalist ideas increased, gradually leading to the conclusion that, on the basis of liberty and equality, upholding the rights of women was a goal of a nationalist revolutionary government: “Creating new citizens by loving freedom, respecting equal rights, and uniting men and women is the starting

9. Translator’s Note: Held in Buffalo, New York, in 1901.

10. As is pointed out by many scholars, late Qing feminists didn’t understand the male subjectivity of Rousseau’s theory of human rights. Rousseau’s disgust towards women was left unexamined by late Qing feminists.

11. This can be seen in the response of readers to *Women’s Bell*. Chen Dongyuan said that *Women’s Bell* was a manifesto which incited women to further the cause of revolution (328).

12. *Women’s Bell* mentioned John Stuart Mill and Spencer several times. *Women’s Bell* was influenced by both, borrowing narrative approaches from Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, which analyzed the problem of inequality between men and women by detecting its root in the social system of a male-dominated society.

point, and the formation of a new government will be the outcome” (Jin 82). This effectively replaced the theory of free and equal rights for all human beings with the theory and rhetoric of nationalism. Although Liang Qichao and Jin Songcen differed from each other in terms of political opinions (constitutionalism versus republicanism, respectively) and modes of expression (Liang depended more on Confucian discourses while Jin applied Western human rights theory), they were completely consistent in their understanding of women’s influence upon the prosperity of the country’s people. The role of women as “female citizens” came to replace their role as “mothers of citizens,” elevating the position of women in the late Qing.

Incendiary remarks in Jin Songcen’s *Women’s Bell* included, “Men and women comprise equal halves of the number of national citizens,” “women are as responsible as men for saving the country,” and “the rise and fall of China falls on the shoulders not only of men, but women as well” (4, 5, 37). It seemed that once one talked about shared responsibility, then shared rights would naturally follow. Chinese women could obtain equal rights by acknowledging equal responsibility. However, equality did not affect substantial changes in gender relationships in China, remaining confined to the political right to improve oneself, then one’s family, then one’s country, and at last, the world. Women were able, however, to move out of a space of nameless anonymity to gain name and awareness for women, who could now share in the profits of a newly developed nation-state. The meta-narrative of nationalism was the only legal and acceptable path allowed for women’s advancement in a patriarchal society. While serving as head instructor of the Beiyang Women’s Public School (*Beiyang nüzi gongxue* 北洋女子公學), Lü Bicheng (呂碧城, 1883-1943), inadvertently exposed tensions at the heart of the women’s education debate in a piece advocating women’s education and refuting mistaken points of view:

These days, we see the news that women’s schools and rights are being advocated for, along with the news that women are breaking away from the rules of their husbands. There are those who are stupid, absurd, and shallow, who frown and say that women are growing dissolute, casting off their husband’s control, even competing for the same rights as their husbands (135).

Indeed, the women’s movement challenged traditional Chinese culture. However, once people understood the movement as a nationalist one, then women’s advocacy grew by leaps and bounds throughout the twentieth-century. Thus, seemingly errant behaviors—such as women violating etiquette, ethics, and social norms by pursuing education and revolution or escaping marriage and running away—were granted clemency, tolerance, and the understanding of family and society, as in such cases as Qiu Jin (秋瑾, 1875-1907) and Xie Bingying (謝冰瑩, 1906-2000). It was in this manner that the nationalist movement stewarded the women’s movement.

The value of Chinese women lay in the sincerity of their ideals. On the one hand, late Qing women urged one another to “seriously study the method of being a citizen.” On the other hand, they saw the totality of the nation and country as what was important, strenuously fulfilling their role as “female citizens.”¹³ In this period, there arose a group of model female citizens including Chen Xiefen (陳擷芬, 1883-1923), Kang Tongwei (康同薇, 1878-1974), Qiu Meilü (裘梅侶, 1871-1904)—who ran newspapers—Lü Bicheng—who ran both a newspaper and a school—and also Zhang Zhujun (張竹君, 1876-1964)—who returned from overseas and practiced medicine. However, men in possession of both political and discursive power at this time managed to dispose of this type of model female citizen, in favor of more politically focused and advantageous heroines, who were willing to sacrifice their life for political revolution.

Heroines: Feminist and Nationalist Discourses Unite as One

Late Qing feminist discourse recognized Chinese and foreign talented women (*cainü* 才女) such as Ban Zhao (班昭, ca. 49-120), Chunyu Tiying (淳于堤縈, fl. Early 2nd c. BCE), Xie Daoyun (謝道韞, fl. 4th c.), Joan of Arc (ca. 1412-1431), and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), as well as female martial heroes such as Hua Mulan 花木蘭, Liang Hongyu (梁紅玉 1102-1135), Qin Liangyu (秦良玉, 1574-1648), and Madame Roland (Marie Jeanne “Manon” Roland de la Platière, 1754-1793). The beautiful Xi Shi 西施 was occasionally also on this list. The morality, talent, courage, beauty, and virtue of these women won them honor as well as a place next to men in society, serving as models for a new femininity in the early twentieth-century. There was at that time a song of encouragement sung at women’s schools:

What beautiful new citizens we female students are in the twentieth-century (...)

(...) with the lofty purpose of loving our country and saving the world.

Tiying and Mulan are filial towards their fathers, and I learn from Ban Zhao as from a role model. I dream to be Madame Roland or Joan of Arc and yearn to meet Harriet Beecher Stowe. Foreign and domestic heroines are leading the way. We must fulfil our role as women and be equal with men (A Ying, 34).

When we look closely, however, at late Qing feminist discourse, we see that role models such as the filial Chunyu Tiying, talented Xie Daoyun, and

13. Specifically, “First, that which is not dependent, shall be known as independent. Second, social morality is defined as being willing to work for the public. Third, the behavior of never engaging in behaviors that corrupt public morals is called self-government. Fourth, one should be gregarious and work with people of like minds. Fifth, freedom is realized through neither invading others nor being invaded by others. Sixth, no matter what, one should never give up that which belongs to one or that which one is entitled to. Seventh, one should devote oneself to fulfilling important tasks, and this is called duty. Apart from the above seven items, there is one more urgent and indispensable item: participation in politics. As for the responsibilities of paying taxes and levies, as well as educating children, these are all responsibilities of being a citizen.” (Xia, *Late Qing* 97).

beautiful Xi Shi all made way in the end for the teleological culmination of women's development—the heroine. Xia Xioahong in *Late Qing Literati Views on Women* (*Wan Qing wenren funüguan* 晚晴文人婦女觀) quotes two poems by Lü Yunqing (呂筠青, dates unclear) a teacher at the Civilized Women's School (*Mingnü shu* 明女塾) in Shimen, Zhejiang:

Each day I embrace anxiety and worry without due cause.
I fear I'll see the day on which the rivers and mountains are crushed.
Oh, how hard it is for beauties to take up a soldier's arms!
In vain, against the wind of fate, we read Mulan's Song.

Qin Liangyu and Liang Hongyu, heroines of whom history tells,
believed that in the army, their spirits would prevail.
How I resent in these dark times that I have no place to die;
I'd rather be wrapped in a shroud, on the battlefield left to lie.

She points out that these reveal the changing form of the models of women's rights: "From vainly imitating Hua Mulan, she moves to following the example of Liang Hongyu and Qin Liangyu. This truly reveals the transformation of late Qing women from refined and delicate to staunch and strong" (104). Late Qing femininity's adulation of being "staunch and strong" was a product of a masculine Enlightenment with its will for revolution. With the turn of the twentieth-century, there was a mounting call for the downfall of autocratic rule and construction of democracy in the political field. Amidst this cry and revolutionary spirit, advocates unearthed various domestic and foreign heroines throughout history. For instance, female citizens in *Folk Songs from the Women's Country* (*Nüguo minge* 女國民歌) are heroines with warrior mettle:

Wind, wind, wind. Our great civilization blows throughout East Asia. The spirit of independence is like a red rising sun, and freedom swells like the tide. The world of women's rights treats all fairly and all heroes with equality. Old memories of women who were merely depraved decorations are too bitter to recall.

Light, light, light. The great strong China of twentieth-century women. We enthusiastically push forward with the soul of freedom in our chest. Our spirit is iron-willed, chivalrous, and full of love and affection. Generative and majestic, rising and swelling, we are full of inspiration (All-China Women's Union 209-210).

The women in this song model a femininity which shunned powders and blush, possessing masculine traits of being bold and generous. In *Women's Bell*, Jin Songcen directly advocated that women sacrifice themselves for building a new and democratic country.

Destroy the old and build the new democracy. This is the responsibility of both men and women in China. We are called upon to utilize the knowledge we have, to think and to write down our thoughts and words on paper. Once our brains are drained, our tongues exhausted, and our sense is as wasted as our tears, we shall rise again with our blood, and thus fight fiercely our foes (64).

At this time, the revolutionary faction was modeling itself after Russian anarchic populism (the Nihilists), who assassinated autocrats and traitors in a slew of violent actions. Thus, the story of Sophia Perovskaya's assassination of the Russian Czar provided an insightful example for men possessing discursive power of how a heroic woman should act.

In 1902, *New Fiction* (*Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說) commenced publication and began serializing the novel *Heroine of Eastern Europe* (*Dong'ou nü haojie* 東歐女豪傑), based on the story of Sophia Perovskaya's assassination of the Russian Czar Alexander II in 1881. *Heroine of Eastern Europe* recounted the story of the Russian heroine Perovskaya from the vantage point of a Chinese young woman named Ming Qing 明卿. Ming Qing had been adopted by a Western missionary and received her education in the West. At the onset of this novel, a women's voice begins the narration:

Look at the history of our world, both ancient and modern, East and West, and see how all the heroes have been men. You may count some ten to twenty heroines in total. People talk of the virtues of husbands and men. Is there no place left over for anyone else? This is most unfair to women (Lady 33).

The author, who used the pseudonym "Lingnan Lady of the Feathered Robe (*Lingnan yuyi nüshi* 嶺南羽衣女士)," was actually a man.¹⁴ Therefore, the narrative voice of Ming Qing and all the other characters in *Heroine of Eastern Europe* are best viewed through the lens of male Enlightenment revolutionary thinking. This male subjectivity highly praises the girl who overthrew the most powerful and influential figure in the world (the Russian czar), while the heroine in this novel constantly writes poetry questioning who the rightful ruler of her country is, seeking the company of other passionate revolutionaries. The construction of such a figure and image helped shape the ideal for Chinese women. In the same year, Liang Qichao published his famous *Biography of Madame Roland* (*Luolan furen zhuan* 羅蘭夫人傳) in the serial *Renewing the People* (*Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報). In this text, Liang praises the famous French female revolutionary, Madame Roland, admired by men for her extraordinary beauty and talent. Madame Roland became known as a thought leader for the radical revolutionary faction and moderate Girondins due to her intelligence and courage. Liang's poetic bent saw him writing about this woman as the "mother of all people" in nineteenth-century Europe, jokingly suggesting that Napoleon and Bismarck were born of the same

14. The author, Luo Pu (羅普 1876-1949), was a member of the reformist faction of the Hundred Days' Reform movement and student of Kang Youwei.

mother. Liang advocated for a warrior spirit in women but stopped short of advocating revolution. His pacifist views can be seen in the *Biography of Madame Roland* in, “Oh, freedom, freedom! Here under heaven, how many crimes have borrowed your name to gain currency!”¹⁵ In spite of this, his use of European female revolutionaries to inspire Chinese women was, nevertheless, in accord with the methods of the early twentieth century revolutionary faction.

Upon the publication of *Heroine of Eastern Europe*, many poems responding to the Lady of the Feathered Robe appeared in revolutionary periodicals such as *Awakening the People* (*Jue min* 覺民), *Jiangsu* 江蘇, *Citizens Newspaper* (*Guomin bao* 國民報) and *Citizens Daily* (*Guomin riri bao* 國民日日報). Male Enlightenment thinkers went so far as to oppose the attitude of male dominance, using terms like “great men (*da zhangfu* 大丈夫)” and “heroes (*yingxiong* 英雄)” to criticize the tradition of patriarchy in the world.

For generations, the world honored historical figures who were great men rather than great women (*danüzi* 大女子). There were heroes rather than heroines (*yingci* 英雌), and this was a short-sighted and judgmental blemish on our history (Hero 135-136).

In a country with a long history of patriarchal domination, only men with the power of discourse could make these challenges. It was men who constructed these heroines as role models, urging women to mold their own feminine subjectivity accordingly. Men declared they wanted to marry women like the revolutionary Sophia, and women shaped and molded themselves according to the representations of Sophia put forward by men (Xia, *Late Qing* 112). Men adored Madame Roland’s spirit of sacrifice, and women sought opportunities to sacrifice themselves. Hence, we have Qiu Jin facing death without a flinch (Xia, *Late Qing* 108). I am not suggesting that Qiu Jin did what she did just to satisfy men, but it’s worth arguing whether Qiu Jin would exist in an era that didn’t valorize women’s sacrifice to violent revolution.

The Problem of Female Subjectivity, Construction, and Narrative

Late Qing Reform texts on women’s rights were imbued with intense nationalism. The *Song of Female Citizens* (*Nü guomin ge* 女國民歌) is a good example of this trend, where we see women’s rights conflated with nationalist and Party rhetoric.

Hatred, hatred, hatred! The Chinese nation is forever fallen in disgrace. The whole world over we see nothing worse than hypocritical men serving the court whilst calling for reform. Only women are sincere and righteous, able to act without relying upon others.

Strength, strength, strength! Siblings and sisters, together we are full of

15. In *Interpreting of Revolution* (*Shige* 釋革), Liang Qichao advocates for revolution in China; however he translated revolution as *biange* 變革 (transformative change) and reform as *gaige* 改革 (reform).

high spirits, recovering the traditions of old as easily as rolling a log. Don't think we are boasting. Enemies will be driven out of China. While we hear songs of men's surrender, women never will never surrender. The beauty of the Yangzi River and Kunlun Mountains will increase in splendor.

Lofty, lofty, lofty! The work of great twentieth-century scholars is like a light breeze and a clear moon. The officials Qu Yuan (屈原, 340-278 BCE) and Song Yu (宋玉, 298-263 BCE) can be looked at relative to Wang and Tao, their spirit and verse are left at Hangao Mountain. Look at the Northern tribal chieftains, let alone new American and European thinking. Burn incense, and sweep the floor, use the Classics as your pillow, keep your house in order, and brandish the sword in military strategies (All-China 209-210).

We see in this song not so much a feminist message as a nationalist one. The "hypocritical men serving the court" were meant to signify Han officials who served the Manchurian Qing government while "calling for reform." Rhetoric suggesting that while men surrender, women never will seems to be far-fetched, as does the consideration of new American and European intellectual trends as a guarantor for China's recovery of the new Han nation-state.

The novel *Marriage of Freedom* (*Ziyou jiehun* 自由結婚) was published in 1903 under the penname "Jewish Immigrant Wan Guhen 萬古恨, translated by the Chinese lady, Freedom Flower 自由花." This text resonates ideologically with the *Song of Female Citizens*. Huang Huo 黃禍 and Guan Guan 關關 are a pair of lovers living in a nation called "Patriotism," governed by a group of foreign pirates. All the citizens are enslaved by the foreigners. Huang Huo and Guan Guan set out to avenge their nation against three enemies: foreign government, foreigners, and Han slaves who serve foreigners. The novel's title includes the word "marriage," but it emphasizes heroes and says little about romance between young men and women. Even in regard to gender differences and marriage, it preaches abstract principles that resemble contemporary lectures on women's rights and marriage. The main female character takes widows preserving their chastity as a principle guiding her behavior. The details of her call for women to "preserve their chastity" for their nation are worth examining:

I used to think it was meaningless for a woman to preserve her chastity after her husband's death. Now I see how well this custom reflects strong love and aspiration, unlike the changeability and shamelessness of men. If we can love our country in this way, driving foreign suitors away and restoring our nation, then there is nothing we can't do. Every sister is pure and chaste. If one can be this faithful to a single man, then one can do the same for our country. ...

What a pity that we women possess such a pure and chaste nature, that we

can only devote ourselves to one person! Being penny-wise and pound-foolish, persisting in ignorance, this is regrettable (Wan Li ch. 14).

Preservation of chastity for one's nation and linking the nation's reputation with that of its women failed to consider the experience of women upon which these expectations were placed. This is a similar logic to that which demanded women bind their feet to demonstrate subservience to their husbands. The metaphor of preserving chastity inadvertently exposed the fact that nationalist discourse as a patriarchal one, representing women as secondary in a patriarchal nation-state. Women's liberation amounted to abandonment of one's family for another patriarchal order. Nationalism was a male-centered discourse constructed by men. Integration of feminism into revolution and formation of a new nation-state reflected Enlightenment discourse while at the same time foregrounding discourse developing amongst independent women who advocated for and even took part in nationalist revolution.

Qiu Jin serves as a perfect example. In 1903, she left her family for Japan, never to return. Qiu Jin's identity was based in what amounts to a relinquishing of her female subjectivity, which she exchanged for a male subjectivity. She did this in order to accomplish her life's mission. Qiu Jin's straightforward nature, open mind, and strong ambition met with social realities which she sought to overcome in a way seldom seen in women. In her complaints about marriage in early works, expressions such as, "no one understands me in my home" and "pitifully few people share my tastes and aspirations" (104), as well as "take pity on Xie Daoyun and never marry Bao Canjun (鮑參軍, given name 鮑照, ca. 416-466)" (98), we sense a need to participate in social change in extraordinary ways. Patriarchal societies see few women of this kind. In *Qiu Jin and Xie Daoyun* (*Qiu Jin yu Xie Daoyun* 秋瑾與謝道韞), Xia Xiaohong states that if "Qiu Jin had never left Xiangtan, she would have been known forever as a talented beauty by future generations" (Xia, "Qiu Jin" 91). Here, I must add another dimension to our discussion of Qiu Jin—that of gender anxiety. In those unsettled times of agitating for revolution, she was doomed to live as no other talented and beautiful woman had lived before.

We see constant anguish and regret as regards her sexual identity in Qiu Jin's poetry. In these early stages of feminism in China, women such as Xie Daoyun and Hua Mulan from throughout Chinese history represented the cause. Qiu Jin was unsatisfied, pitying even these figures in saying that no matter how delicate and fragrant Daoyun had been, she was always only a woman, and no matter how courageous and heroic Mulan had been, she was never a man (Qiu 113). It has been suggested that Qiu Jin's loneliness while living in Hunan (c.1896-1902) was caused by a lack of spiritual resonance in her new marriage. What we see in her literary works, however, is a sadness and lack of companionship even outside of her marriage. There are lines like, "If

there had been no Ziqi, who would have understood Boya?¹⁶ (113),¹⁶ “There is no one at home to understand me, the more people there are around me, the lonelier I feel” (103), and “What a pity no one has the same inclinations as I do; this is sad to think of” (104). Even after moving to Beijing in 1903, where she came to know Wu Zhiying (吴芝瑛, 1867-1933) and made friends with other famous reformists, her loneliness did not fade. We see, rather, that it intensified, as in, “Who will continue my singing of ‘White Snow?’ I am ashamed to imitate ‘Warm Spring,’” and “What use is it to lament my lack of understanding companionship? If only I encountered one bosom friend, I could die happy (103).” If one looks closely, one notices that Qiu Jin’s desire for a bosom friend is not a desire for female, but for male companionship. Indeed, Qiu Jin had a number of women friends, such as Wu Zhiying, Xu Zihua (徐自华, 1873-1935), Lü Bicheng, and her student Xu Xiaoshu (徐小淑, 1875-1907). Qiu had much in common with these women, with whom she shared close sympathy. Although she shared close relationships with outstanding women whose intelligence and education were on a par with their male contemporaries, each and all were prevented from any power of social discourse. Despite active participation in the sphere of women, Qiu Jin felt constantly deprived of that which she really sought for in life. What she wanted was to exchange her gender for that of a man, and to enter society with no constraints, as men do. She encouraged her female friends to stop wearing women’s dress and to enter the world of men, even dressing as men do, “I would that you traded your dresses for swords.”¹⁷

“Physically, I cannot be a man; Spiritually, I am stronger than a man” (Qiu 279). We see gender anxiety throughout Qiu Jin’s work. She would complain, “Do not say there have been no heroines, the sword hanging on the wall voices its discontent nightly” (333). At times, she would express outrage at inequality between the sexes, “In this dusty and chaotic world, how many outstanding men are there? You will find excellence only among women” (324). In order for women to shine in this patriarchal milieu, they had to emerge from the sphere of women. Qiu Jin authored a poem responding to her protégé Xu Xiaoshu, praising her by comparing her to talented women like Xie Daoyun and Ban Zhao. She criticized Xu, however, for conforming to expectations that women be devoted to family and love (212). Qiu Jin wished that Xu and her sisters would abandon their way of life as talented beauties, adopting instead the masculine way and becoming heroines who were the match of any man:

I receive an austere letter out of the blue,
 every word as handsome as a flower.
 Fresh and beautiful like the poems of Xie Daoyun,
 simple and concise as Ban Zhao.

16. Translator’s Note: Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期 and Yu Boya 俞伯牙 are legendary figures from the Spring and Autumn period (770-476) who are regarded as paragons of friendship. In the quoted text, Boya’s name is written 伯亞.
 17. “To My Friend,” a letter written by Qiu Jin to her good friend Xu Qichen in the autumn of 1906.

What a pity I do not possess the courage of Qin and Nie,
 shadowed by the beauty of your magnificent lines in “Warm Spring.”
 I would that you become a mighty heroine,
 do not waste your life and energy reciting poems (192).¹⁸

In the extraordinarily strict Confucian family ethics of early twentieth-century China, if women wanted to abandon their responsibilities as mothers and wives, their only choice was to devote themselves to the revolution. Thus, Qiu Jin chose the life of a revolutionary for lack of other choices. As an individual, Qiu Jin’s gender anxiety can be seen as a kind of Freudian castration complex. On a social level, however, this anxiety can be attributed to a clear lack of options available to women in a patriarchal society.

We see Qiu Jin hunger for a role in society to gain some affirmation from her male contemporaries. We see in such patriarchal structures that in order to gain approval women are forced into the public sphere, where they are doomed to fail, as the public sphere is an exclusively male sphere. Qiu Jin’s sense of loneliness would most likely have been resolved if she could have gained the affirmation she sought. This is the deepest psychological reason for Qiu Jin’s choice to study abroad in Japan, whereupon she set upon the road of revolution. Her deliberate imitation of men in both dress and behavior saw her wearing men’s clothes, practicing martial arts, and drinking, all of which reveal her sense of emancipation from a lifetime of oppression. However, her anti-gender behaviors were well received by men, and her authority amongst male revolutionaries came to be established in just this way—and it was this that Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881-1936) took exception to. He always had reservations about sacrificing one’s life for the revolution and was even less content with the idea of encouraging others to sacrifice themselves—particularly in the case of women. He sarcastically observed that Qiu Jin had been applauded to death by her (male) comrades.¹⁹ Lu Xun’s sharp critique reflected his reservations about violent revolution, as well as his dissatisfaction with the male desires and power within that had shaped the “heroine.” There was an interesting contrast between Lu Xun’s way of referring to Qiu Jin as, “Qiu Jin, the girl from my hometown (*bi tongxiang Qiu Jin guniang* 敝同鄉秋瑾姑娘),” and late Qing revolutionary discourse’s references to her by de-feminizing tropes, such as “Heroine of Jianhu Lake (*Jianhu nüxia* 鑒湖女俠).”

Of course, Qiu Jin was, in the end, a woman. Although she developed a masculine persona to take part in the revolution, she engaged with women of

18. Guo Changhai notes “Warm Spring (*Yangchun* 陽春)’ is ‘Warm Spring, White Snow (*Yangchun baixue* 陽春白雪),’ a poem by Xu Xiaoshu, who compared Qiu Jin to ancient women warriors like Qin Liangyu and Nie Yinniang 聂隱娘. Thus, Qiu Jin modestly said, ‘What a pity I do not possess the heroic manner of Qin and Nie’ (Qiu 192).

19. In a 1927 letter from Lu Xun to Li Xiaofeng (李小峰, 1897-1971), editor of the *Tattler* (*Yusi*, 語絲) Lu Xun expresses his sense of helplessness and self-mockery at being promoted as a revolutionary in Guangdong, “After the clapping throughout the great hall, it was settled that I was now a warrior. After the applause, the audience left, so from whom should I resign? I had to pull myself together to walk into rooms in the name of a warrior. Then, I thought of Qiu Jin, the girl from my hometown. She was murdered by just such clapping. Would I die on the battlefield, too?” (3: 446).

the feminist Enlightenment in ways that restored her original femininity. She started the *Women's Times of China* (*Zhongguo nübao* 中國女報) in Shanghai in 1906. It reached print by early 1907, and in volumes one and two, she wrote an article for each, one in classical Chinese and the other in vernacular, each of which presented unique gender characteristics. Her editor's forward to volume one was written in classical style, while "To My Sisters (*Jinggao zimeimen* 警告姊妹們)" of volume two was in vernacular. In the editorial forward we read:

In the sphere of women today we see a sliver of light for the first time in four thousand years' darkness. However, the journey is still long, what shall we do? I've heard that things start as tiny details and develop well into the future. If we do not set forth in the right direction, tiny differences in the beginning will lead to giant mistakes in the future. We have the lessons of our forefathers before us, and we witness the tough experiences of Chinese students during the last decade. When Western schools were still not popular and imperial exams occupied the mainstream, those who abandoned classical Confucianism and learned foreign languages were called new juvenile. Right principles were not taught, nor was truth clarified. There was no purpose or meaning in the pursuit of learning foreign languages, thus most clever students became translators or businessmen. What a pity! In the following ten years, this trend has subsided, and such thinking has faded. However, it is seen that many students are seeking a shortcut through learning in Japan and trying to reform the imperial examination system with Western education...

Such a mad tendency mustn't penetrate the world of women. What I dare to say is that the future of the world of Chinese women need not go through these two phases. It was disturbing for women to see the entire nation still unsober once morning had arrived, going back to sleep in the light of the rising sun, as the hearts of our people are so weak, that while one side was strong, the other side fell. If no encouragement or correction is provided, such aimless development will eventually lead the country into darkness and ruin. Thus, the power to guide public opinion, along with the responsibility of supervising national citizens should be shouldered by this newspaper (373).

The elegant authoritativeness of classical Chinese made it the ideal form of asexual discourse. The excerpt above displays rationality and concision, demonstrating an authoritative discourse. Potential readers were male intellectuals engaged in thinking about and discoursing on the state of the nation. Qiu Jin adopted a male voice to speak about limits of the late Qing Enlightenment movement, while at the same time raising concerns about the women's movement. Her narrative took on an asexual component adopted usually by men. Meanwhile, "To My Sisters" was written in vernacular for volume two.

The audiences of vernacular texts tended to be female. Qiu Jin commences her narrative with an intimate and amiable tone used among women, “My dearest sisters (...),” followed by other similar utterances:

Ah! Two hundred million men have entered a new and civilized world, while we two hundred million women are still surrounded by darkness and drowning in hell with no hope of escape. Our feet are so small and hair so smooth. We wear all kinds of ornaments and various textures of clothing. Our faces are powdered; our fingernails painted. Throughout our lives, all we have known is to depend on men for what we wear and eat. Our voices must flatter them as our hearts endure in silent anger. Tears stream down our faces constantly, as our lives are spent pleasing men. We have been prisoners and slaves throughout our lives. Sisters, have any of you enjoyed freedom or happiness in your life? Noble and wealthy women are splendid, surrounded and served by many servants while outside of the home, but who knows the sufferings they endure within households dominated by their husbands? (377-378)

Qiu Jin addresses her fellow women in a language of understanding and sympathy. She does not hide her female identity, which is so apparent as to imbue the entire text with strong emotions. Qiu Jin’s strummed lyrical text,²⁰ *Jingwei’s Stone* (*Jingwei shi* 精卫石) is also narrated in this manner. Strummed lyrical texts constituted a subgenre of folk literature, using popular and easy to understand language, with women as intended audience. In this unfinished text, the gently sincere language used by Qiu Jin presents the image of a female narrator who deeply sympathizes with the lives and predicaments of women. The aim of the text was to arouse women to the cause of revolution, an essentially male movement. Thus, the femininity of the narrative voice fails to ring true, appearing rhetorical. As Liu Na has commented, Qiu Jin’s life and words “are an echo of the spirit of her era.”

Qiu Jin was persecuted for her part in the revolution but after her death was honored by the public for her role in promoting women’s rights.²¹ We see how other outstanding feminists of her time, such as Chen Xiefen (陳撷芬, 1883-1923), Lü Bicheng, He Zhen (何震, 1884-1920), and Tang Qunying (唐群英, 1871-1937) were relatively marginalized in comparison with Qiu Jin, who has maintained a much stronger reputation through today.

Chen Xiefen and these others were firm in their refusal to conform to male expectations and remained on guard against patriarchal ideology within the discourse on women’s rights. While approving of democracy, they resolutely maintained the need for women’s independence. Chen once wrote that if

20. Translator’s Note: “Strummed lyrical texts (*tanci* 彈詞)” were a form of musical storytelling originating in Suzhou.

21. After Qiu Jin’s execution, newspapers and journals were in an uproar. The public view emphasized that she was a feminist, wrongly accused for her promotion of women’s rights. People called for the government to punish the killers. Because of the predominance of such views, two officials who dealt with this case were dismissed or demoted (Xia, *Late Qing*).

women did not have independent hearts and minds, then education for the uplifting of women “will, I fear, become nothing more than women’s education for the benefit of men,” and women’s rights “will remain nothing more than women’s rights for the benefit of men. It is not certain that they will set women free.” The essentials of women’s rights were “Nothing less than independence!” and “What is independence? Casting off oppression and fighting against that which thwarts us is not enough. What is critical is that we accept neither the support nor the interference of men” (All-China 245). This was an extraordinary conception of women’s rights, and to this day, it has not yet come to fruition. He Zhen was directly opposed to the thought of using women as tools to liberate the nation, arguing that the goal of the women’s rights movement was equality of the sexes (He 959-968). These women opposed not only the mutual enemies of the male and female citizens of China—a culture of despotism and foreign imperialism—but also opposed their own comrades vis-à-vis the need for equal rights.²² The conflict of the sexes could not be avoided any longer.

From the beginning of the Republican Period (1911-1949), Tang Qunying and other feminists insisted on the right of women to vote, but after the marginalization of the movement for women’s suffrage,²³ we can see that, in the context of the overwhelming strength of modern Chinese nationalism, the space for the independent development of feminism was correspondingly limited. What was called “harmony” was, in fact, often a form of one-sided compromise.

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22. As in the women’s suffrage movement.

23. The Communist Party, which most actively developed women’s liberation, rejected the women’s suffrage movement from its inception. Within the Communist camp, the consensus became that women’s suffrage was just a struggle for government power between women and feudal, male government officials.

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