

ETHNOCENTRISM IN  
SOCIALIST-FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT THEORY:  
THE CASE OF CHINA

by  
Sandra Nichols ©

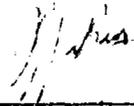
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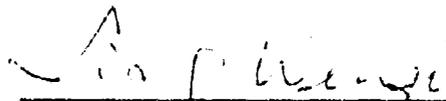
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Ethnocentrism in Socialist-feminist Development Theory: The Case of China**

Sandra Nichols

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The hypothesis to be tested is that the socialist-feminist theory of development is ethnocentric in the specific case of China. Ethnocentrism is defined as the mistaken assumption that one's worldview is shared by people in other societies. The thesis points out that ethnocentrism is a concern in feminist development studies because development entails values and beliefs about how a society ought to change. The thesis argues that it is important to analyze ethnocentric connotations of socialist-feminist development literature in the case of women in China who experience little cultural similarity or interaction with western feminists. The thesis explores the subject under three general headings - issues of sexuality, political issues and socio-economic issues. The thesis concludes that socialist-feminist development theory is ethnocentric in the case of China. First, by failing to make an adequate theoretical distinction between the universal and the specific, the theory wrongfully assumes that certain key concepts are universally applicable. Secondly, the important class/gender debate highlights theoretical weaknesses concerning the relationship between socialism and feminism, which is especially relevant in the case of China. Thirdly, the extent of differences between Chinese and western societies lies at the heart of ethno-centric tendencies in socialist-feminist development theory to make a priori assumptions about the lives of women in China.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter, Wendy  
and to my fiance, Thomas.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of the significant criticisms of development theory has come from the feminist development theorists, researchers and activists. This criticism has been based on the evidence of the differential impact of development on women and men, and has stressed the underlying causes of the continued subordination of women in relation to men, in spite of ( or because of) development. Although there exists a large body of criticism, a rigorous feminist theory of development has not yet emerged, for several reasons. First, it is a young theory, generally thought to have begun in 1970. Second, the theoretical and research work of feminists tends to be inter-disciplinary, requiring eclecticism and flexibility, qualities which make it difficult to build a theory. Third, much of the analysis in the emerging feminist theory of development has been undertaken as criticism, which is by nature destructive rather than constructive. The positive forces of theory building have been slow to come. Fourth, because feminist theory stresses historical and cultural specificity, much of the research has been concerned with documenting the actual situation of women's lives in order to create a rich body of information on which to base a theory.

Because a feminist theory of development is a theory in the making, there is plenty of room for constructive

criticism. It is with this objective in mind that our analysis is presented. The socialist-feminist theory of development is the focus of analysis because we are dealing with a socialist country, China. The Chinese government states that the principal basis of economic reforms is that the country intends to establish "a socialist market economy". (China Daily, April 27, 1993) We have not focused on Marxist-feminism even though the Chinese Communist Party adheres to Marxist-Leninist ideology. Although a longer explanation for this decision is not possible here due to lack of space, two points can be made. First, we accept as valid the socialist-feminist criticism that Marxist-feminism is not an adequate analytic framework for understanding the role of patriarchy and unequal relations of power between women and men. Second, socialism in China is generally thought to have diverged from Marxist orthodoxy after the first Five Year Plan and especially with the mass mobilization of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. (Gray and White:1982;Nee and Stark:1989) Furthermore most of the feminist analysis of the lives of women in China since 1949 falls into the socialist rather than the Marxist stream. An adequate body of socialist-feminist literature exists in the way of text books and research articles based on primary and secondary socialist-feminist research, other academic research in the fields of economics, anthropology, and sociology, historical texts,

translated classical and contemporary literature, and English editions of popular press.

In most of the socialist-feminist analyses of the socialist revolution in China, the common concern is to account for the perceived failure of the socialist revolution in China to liberate women. In her early work, Feminism and Socialism in China, Croll (1978a) argues that the feminist revolution has not been completed. She blames the government's mistaken assumption that women's concerns and over-all socialist concerns are harmonious and interdependent, arguing that the consequence of this assumption is that women's concerns repeatedly have been subordinated to over-all socialist concerns. Another researcher, Stacey (1983) focuses on the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese peasant family to develop her theory that the private patriarchy of the traditional peasant family has been transformed into the public patriarchy of the CCP. In the process of transformation, the early radical feminist goals of the May Fourth Movement were compromised because the CCP collaborated with the (male) peasants in order to win their support. Wolf's (1985) hypothesis is that the women's movement in China was "postponed" since it was consistently subordinated to the over-all socialist revolution.

The over-riding focus in the socialist-feminist literature on the subordination of the women's revolution to

the socialist revolution is, on the whole, negative, and has the effect of denying the successes and belittling the achievements that have been made by Chinese women. What accounts for this dominant trend in socialist-feminist literature on China to adopt a negative interpretation of the changes that have occurred in the lives of Chinese women under the leadership of the CCP? There are several possible answers to this question. In a recent sociological study of contemporary urban China, Whyte and Parish (1984) note and are critical of a similar negative view of the lives of women in China. They argue that research which stresses the importance of government policy in assessing the lives of women has ignored the basic institutional changes that "have prepared the ground for social forms that are at least closer to sexual equality". (Whyte and Parish:1984:226) The authors point out that these changes have been occurring in socialist and capitalist countries alike. Certainly much of the socialist-feminist literature could be criticized on this basis: by stressing the impact of government policy on women, socialist-feminist research downplays the over-all positive direction of social change for women. (see, for example, Croll:1985;Molyneux in Young:1981;Saunders:1983)

Another possible explanation for the emphasis on the "unfinished" liberation of Chinese women (see Andors:1983) is the lack of research data to document the conditions of women's lives in China. In connection with this point, Wolf

(1985) has described some of the difficulties with doing social science research in China. Because the volume of research data is relatively small, socialist-feminist researchers are very strongly influenced by early researchers such as Croll who has criticized the subordination of the women's revolution to the socialist revolution, which is also a central issue in socialist-feminist theory as well. This subject is understandably a topic for analysis in the case of China. The question remains why has it become the dominant concern? There is an important unresolved debate in the socialist-feminist literature on the theoretical relationship between class and gender. (See Chapter Four) Although the debate is not resolved, it is generally held that the concept of an interdependent and "harmonious" relationship between socialism and feminism, which the Chinese government has adopted, is unacceptable from a feminist perspective. Socialist-feminists argue for a perspective which gives prime importance to gender issues, although there is no agreement as to the theoretical or empirical basis for this viewpoint.

This brings us to a third possible explanation for the negative emphasis in socialist-feminist literature on China, and that is the implicit belief among socialist-feminists that socialism has failed to liberate women in spite of the "socialist promise" to create a society in which women and men would be equal. Whyte and Parish question the use of

this assumption as the basis for research and analysis in China because, after all, no society has yet achieved equality. (Whyte and Parish:ibid:225) If the standard being used is total equality, they argue, this may be unfair and unrealistic. When the role of women in China is compared with that of women in other contemporary societies, "the position of women in urban China looks quite favorable" and "Chinese urban women may be doing marginally better than some of their socialist sisters..." (ibid) To summarize, an emphasis on policy precludes an appreciation of the positive direction of change in institutions, the class/gender debate in socialist-feminist theory entails a rejection of the deeply-held view in China that the feminist revolution and the socialist revolution are integrated, and the implicit belief in the promise of the socialist revolution to liberate women is not a reasonable basis for research. Given these difficulties, one wonders whether socialist-feminist theory is an appropriate or adequate tool for analyzing the lives of Chinese women.

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that there is a significant history of Chinese women distancing themselves from western feminist ideas. (See Li:1992) This position is not merely a result of the xenophobia or of the closed-door isolation in this century. Rather, it is a consequence of perceived differences between Chinese feminism and western feminism - differences which go very deep and reflect the

vast differences between Chinese society and western societies.<sup>1</sup> The extent of differences between western societies and Chinese societies cannot be explored in this thesis since it is a very complex topic. One helpful analysis is by Gunatilleke (1986), who points out the importance in China and India of the highly-evolved network of reciprocity and non-material values which govern social relationships. In contrast, western Modernization is regarded as hedonistic and consumerist. Another interesting perspective on the subject of differences is provided by Ling's (1990) study of women writers of Chinese ancestry, especially those who have attempted to bridge the gap between east and west - such as Han Suyin, Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston and the Eaton sisters.

Broadly speaking, western feminism is a theory which analyzes and explains the causes and dynamics of women's oppression, experienced by class, race, ethnic origin and nationality as well as gender, and promotes the construction of a just and equitable society. The origins of western feminism are generally traced to the liberal philosophy of the 1700s. Chinese feminism may have originated in the 16th. Century with the writings of Lu Kun, as Handlin (in Wolf and Witke:1975) argues. The philosophical background of Chinese feminism is not liberalism, but rather the concept of the

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<sup>1</sup> the term "western" is used throughout this thesis to refer to Europe, Europeanized North America and Australasia.

complementarity between women and men in the original "humanistic" Confucianism, around 500 B.C. Rankin (in Wolf and Witke:1975) finds that Chinese feminism in the 18th. and 19th. Centuries was strongly identified with Chinese nationalism. Li (1992) and Ono (1989) also analyze these periods of Chinese feminism. These differing philosophical backgrounds have created two very different feminisms, one that stresses the rights of the individual and the importance of the self, and one that is more concerned with the harmonious functioning of society as a whole.

The assumption underlying this thesis is that because of vast differences between Chinese feminism and western feminism, the socialist-feminist theory of development may not be an appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing the lives of women in China. Specifically, the hypothesis to be argued is that the socialist-feminist theory of development is ethnocentric when it is applied to China. The argument depends on a thorough understanding of the central concepts and ideas of feminist development theories, a specific historical and politico-cultural context and a review of socialist-feminist literature on China.

### 1.1 SCOPE AND PLAN OF THESIS

In Chapter Two a theoretical framework is developed which provides the basis for the argument in Chapter Five that socialist-feminist theory is ethnocentric when it is

applied to China. Ethnocentrism is defined as the mistaken assumption that one's way of viewing the world is shared by people in other societies. The important problem of ethnocentrism in development studies is briefly discussed, with particular reference to Blomstrom and Hettne (1984) and Hettne (1990) who argue that Modernization is eurocentric and has been imposed on developing countries. Following this, Maguire's (1984) analysis of the concept of a paradigm is used to illustrate the kind of power that a worldview (such as Modernization) has in determining how we see the world, what questions are deemed suitable for research and what the expected answers to those questions are. It is argued that the feminist paradigm in western social sciences must be particularly sensitive to the criticism of ethnocentrism because the main purpose of an "alternative" paradigm such as feminism is to challenge existing injustices and inequities. Since 1975, the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women, ethnocentrism has been an important concern in feminist development theory. A discussion of this subject underlines the importance of a social and historical context for development theory. The various branches of feminist development theory are reviewed, because the socialist-feminist perspective, which is the focus of the thesis, cannot be understood in isolation from the other branches of feminist development theory.

Chapter Three sets out a historical context for

understanding the lives of women in China, and for testing the hypothesis that socialist-feminist theory of development is ethnocentric when applied to China. A historical context is an essential part of the thesis for several reasons. First, the history of women in rural China is not well known in the west, and so this chapter is a necessary background to understanding the rest of the thesis. Moreover, a certain stereotype of Chinese women as submissive and secluded can be challenged by the reinterpretation of history which is suggested in this chapter. Second, a central theme in the thesis is differences between China and the west. Historical analysis is an essential source for understanding the source, extent and nature of those differences. Third, in socialist-feminist literature on China, a basic assumption is made about the ambivalence or indifference of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) towards women. Does historical evidence support or challenge this assumption? In this chapter, the experiences of Chinese rural women since 1949 are described in great detail since the socialist-feminist literature focuses on this period and because the twists and turns of government policies and programs are complicated to follow. This chapter suggests that social and cultural values as well as economic circumstances have dictated that feminist concerns are experienced and expressed much differently in China than they are in the west. The implications of this fact are studied in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four is a review of the literature. Part A focuses on socialist-feminist literature in general, and also in relation to women in China. The theorists included in Part A are Pat Maguire, Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen, Gita Sen and Caren Grown, and Kate Young. As well, two articles in Kate Young's volume, Of Marriage and the Market, by Maxine Molyneux and Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson are also discussed. What are the central concerns of the socialist-feminist theory of development as outlined in Part A of Chapter Four? One of the most important concerns is the theoretical relationship between class and gender. A brief summary of this unresolved debate is given. A second important concern is unequal gender relations of power. Two aspects of this concern are the system of patriarchy (the institutional domination of women by men entailing beliefs about the superiority of men and the inferiority of women), and the need for women to organize to break down patriarchal structures. Another major issue is social production in that the problems of the double burden and the gender division of labour complicate the role of women in the paid labour force. The role of the family, marriage and sexuality in perpetuating the subordination of women are also central concerns. It is interesting to compare the voices of women from developing countries with those of women from western, developed countries. In the former, patriarchy, sexuality and family issues seem to have a lower priority and gender

issues in general have less dominance over other social problems.

Maguire (1987) provides many useful insights. She argues that the problem with the liberal feminist Women in Development (WID) perspective is the theory of social change from which the perspective has emerged: the equilibrium theory, entailing beliefs about the inherent rationality, goodness and growth tendencies of societies. Maguire demonstrates how a paradigm or world-view is a lens through which we see the world. Following this idea of Maguire, Chapter Four analyzes the socialist-feminist theory of development in order to understand how it functions as a lens through which the lives of women in China are understood and explained. The hypothesis is that some of the assumptions and beliefs entailed in the theory are ethnocentric in relation to Chinese women, because of important and profound differences between Chinese and western societies.

Part B reviews the work of socialist-feminist theorists who have researched women in China's development process. Of the three researchers discussed here, Croll is the most prolific. Over a period of about 15 years, her research has focused on government policies and programs in rural China. Croll's central argument is that the government's assumption that policies which are good for China are also good for women is one of the causes of the limited success of the

socialist revolution for women. For Croll, the difficulty with the government's position is the underlying belief that although the socialist and women's revolutions are integrated, when conflicts arise between them, then class issues must have priority over gender issues.

Stacey's (1983) single-text research is a theoretical study of the position of women in China's socialist revolution. As a socialist-feminist, Stacey admits to being disillusioned with the Chinese socialist revolution because of what she takes to be its failure to liberate women. In order to explain this failure, Stacey explores the interconnections between feminism, the peasant family and peasant revolution in China. She develops the argument that because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) needed the support of the peasants for the socialist revolution, earlier radical feminist concerns were compromised to the extent that patriarchy was further strengthened rather than weakened. Stacey argues that the traditional private patriarchy of the Chinese peasant family was transformed into the contemporary public patriarchy of the CCP leadership.

Wolf's (1985) work combines the analysis of empirical data with a firm socialist-feminist theoretical framework. Her hypothesis is that the women's movement in China consistently has been subordinated to the socialist revolution. Wolf's evidence suggests that the changes in women's lives have been in the direction of improvement on

many levels, which makes it difficult to understand her conclusion that the feminist revolution has been postponed. For example, she discovers that rural/urban differences and generational differences are often more important than gender differences in defining the lives of women in China.

Chapter Five is an interpretation based on the previous chapters. Its purpose is to argue that socialist-feminist theory of development is ethnocentric when applied to China. The chapter is divided into three sections: issues of sexuality, political issues and socio-economic issues. Although the sexual oppression and emancipation of women is a central concern in socialist-feminist theory, it is less significant in Chinese feminism. Because the experiences and understanding of sexuality are culturally-determined, it is ethnocentric to apply the concepts and principles of socialist-feminist theory in relation to sexuality to China where issues of sexuality have vastly different social meaning.

The three themes in the discussion of political issues are power, authority and social change. It is suggested that the socialist revolution in China in relation to these three themes cannot be adequately or accurately explained by the socialist-feminist theory of development. The explanations which are given in the literature imply ethnocentric assumptions about Chinese society.

Finally, assumptions in socialist-feminist theory about family reform, household-based agricultural production and

the material conditions of women's lives are the topics discussed in the section on socio-economic issues. The treatment of these subjects in socialist-feminist analysis reveals a tendency to view the role of women in the family and productive activity in universalistic terms and to minimize the importance of material conditions in the lives of women and their families.

Chapter Six provides three conclusions which are derived from the main arguments. The first conclusion is that one of the significant weaknesses of the socialist-feminist development theory is the failure to distinguish between the universal and the specific. This results in ethnocentric assumptions about the universality of concepts such as the antagonistic relationship between women and men. Like Sen and Grown (1987), we maintain that the only universal assumption that can be made is the subordination of women to men. Political agendas to dismantle the gender hierarchy must be culturally specific. The second conclusion is that socialist-feminist development theory is ethnocentric in that it is tilted towards gender subordination in relation to other oppressions such as those based on class or race. In a country such as China where improved living conditions for everyone is an important development goal, this conclusion is particularly significant. The third and final conclusion is that vast differences, historical and contemporary, between Chinese society and western societies

have combined with China's closed-door policy to create a situation in which western scholars continue to find China a somewhat alien society to understand. This has serious implications for the problem of ethnocentrism in socialist-feminist development theory and the social sciences in general.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter a theoretical framework is developed, linking the concept of ethnocentrism, development theory and feminist development theory in order to establish a basis for the argument that socialist-feminist development theory is ethnocentric in the case of China.

Ethnocentrism is the assumption that one's way of viewing the world is shared by people from other societies; that one's concepts and values have the same meaning in other societies; and that one's worldview sets the standard by which to judge other people. Of course, these are mistaken assumptions. One's worldview is not necessarily applicable to other cultures. One's concepts and values very likely have different meanings in other societies. There is no single standard by which to judge people.

The central reason why ethnocentrism is a concern in development theory is that development is a normative concept, entailing certain value-beliefs about ends and means. (Charlton:1984:10-11) So, theories about development, such as Modernization, always contain a normative component in the sense that underlying value beliefs can be inferred. For example, entailed in Modernization Theory are value beliefs about economic growth as the means to development, about

industrialization as a goal, and about change as linear, gradual and predictable. These value beliefs are not necessarily shared by all societies. To impose a theory of development which may be ethnocentric can be seen as a form of cultural colonialism. (see Hettne:1990:65,75-81;Maquire:1984:51; Rogers:1980:37)

The authors of Development Theory in Transition, for example, stress the important contribution of the Latin American Dependency Theory to the criticisms of the (eurocentric) mainstream development theory "...thus creating the basis for the emergence of a more relevant theory of development." (Blomstrom and Hettne:1984:5) A development theory such as Dependency Theory is relevant to Latin America because it emerged in local discussions about development and is based on specific Latin American experiences and explanations of underdevelopment.

Although ethnocentrism can be a problem in development theory, it can also be a problem on another level - that of the paradigm or worldview in which the theory is encompassed. A paradigm sums up conventional ideas, in a body of knowledge such as development, about what are the meaningful questions for research and how to go about answering those questions. In fact, a paradigm determines the kinds of questions that are asked about a problem and the form of investigation which would provide answers. A paradigm will even suggest particular methods for testing the theories

which result from research. (see Maguire:1987:14)

A paradigm is a very powerful category of thought - it explains our world to us and guides our actions. One fact which makes a paradigm powerful is that the assumptions and beliefs which are contained are often accepted implicitly and unknowingly.

A paradigm has another kind of power. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a paradigm is that it can become the traditional viewpoint or the dominant body of knowledge. It then governs scholarly research in a field and has the ability to explain a certain set of phenomena. But it is not merely an intellectual tool. It also serves a political function in the sense that those who hold political or intellectual power adopt it as correct. (Blomstrom and Hettne:1984:2-4)

This has serious implications for the field of development, and for the topic of this thesis, which is ethnocentrism in socialist-feminist theory of development. Although the socialist-feminist theory of development does not have the status of a paradigm, as Modernization Theory does, we do speak of a feminist paradigm in the social sciences in general. In some industrialized countries feminist scholarly work takes place within a legitimate academic field of research and has the capacity, if still somewhat limited, to explain gender oppression and the emancipation of women.

The feminist paradigm does not meet the general criterion of being a dominant or traditional viewpoint, however, and is not accepted by those who hold most of the intellectual or political power. For this reason the feminist paradigm belongs to the category of alternative paradigms which assume a critical stance towards the dominant paradigm. The function of alternative paradigms is to challenge injustices and inequities in society, to envision a more just and equitable distribution of the world's resources, and to develop strategies for radical personal and social transformation towards that end. (see Maguire:19-84:20,21,25,33)

As an alternative paradigm, then, feminism is accountable not to the centers of intellectual and political power, but to the marginalized and oppressed people of the world. Thus, feminism must respond to the needs and interests of people, especially women, across national and regional boundaries. Feminist theories must be particularly sensitive to the dangers of ethnocentrism.

### **2.1 ETHNOCENTRISM AND DEVELOPMENT**

The issue of ethnocentrism in feminist theory of development entered the international stage quite dramatically at the U.N. Conference on Women to celebrate International Women's Year in 1975, held in Mexico City. The theme of the conference was "Equality, Development and Peace". Many women

from developing countries as well as activists from industrialized nations who were not officially invited to the conference organized a parallel meeting, the Forum. The explicit agenda of the Forum stressed the issue of who can legitimately speak for women, and challenged the "women's rights" focus of the conference on the grounds that this was the concern of women from industrialized countries only. (Moser:1989:1811) Forum members argued that such a focus overlooked the class struggle of many women around the world and the overwhelming problem of poverty. (Maguire:1984; Parpart:1992:9)

The alternative stance of the Forum, advocating a broader range of topics and speakers, permitted much debate about women's various experiences of oppression. Women from industrialized countries were criticized for imposing their views (Moser:1989:1811) but complained in turn that women from developing countries ignored important issues of sexuality and gender relations of power. (Maguire:1984:15,16)

The debates centered on priorities for action as well as different experiences of oppression. Some Forum members advocated that women should organize around the need for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) designed to create more equitable relations between North and South, benefiting women as well as men. Others suggested that women should struggle against patriarchy as the central concern, while simultaneously demanding a NIEO. (Maguire:1984)

The disagreements were not resolved. (Some of them are discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.) However, the recognition of differences had an impact on the implicit assumption of the universality of theory. How could there be one theory of the role of women in development if there were so many different answers to the question - What do women want? Many women felt that in significant ways the ideas of the prevailing theory of women and development did not fit all circumstances. Nevertheless, some of the most important contributions to feminist theory of development came out of the liberal perspective, which is where the feminist critique of development begins.

## **2.2 THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT THEORY**

**1. Boserup and Modernization:** In 1970, Ester Boserup's book, Woman's Role In Economic Development, introduced the novel idea into the field of development that women and men were affected differently by the process of development, usually to the detriment of women. In her analysis of previously published data from censuses, other official statistics and surveys, Boserup documented the urban and rural patterns of changes in the gender division of labour with economic and social development.

Although some of the common "patterns" which Boserup studied have to do with the process of urbanization (especially patterns of rural to urban migration and women's employment and education experiences), our discussion is

limited to her study of rural areas. Boserup identified three common patterns in rural areas of developing countries, especially in Africa and Asia. First, the level of women's participation in farm work varied according to farming system. In the system of shifting cultivation, using the hoe, in sparsely populated areas, women did 50-80 percent of the field work. In the extensive plough cultivation system in sparsely populated areas they did relatively little, and in intensive plough cultivation of irrigated land in densely populated areas both women and men did a lot of work in order to subsist on a small plot of land. Boserup also looked at customs of polygamy, bride price, dowry and female infanticide and found a correlation between these customs and the role of women. (Boserup:1970:16-35,47-49)

Second, Boserup found that under European colonial rule, village women experienced a loss of status in several ways. Because village men were favoured by the colonial administrators, which Boserup attributes to their male chauvinism, women lost status and land use rights and men dominated the mechanization process. As a result the productivity and income gaps between women and men increased. (ibid:53-61)

Third, several interesting patterns emerged in the relationship between social class, ethnic group and gender. For example, in some poor areas of India, Boserup maintains that social prejudice against women working outside the home

was one cause of the region's poverty. She argues that opportunities existed for the intensification and expansion of agricultural production through the employment of women in fieldwork. Boserup also showed that women subsidized the labour costs of plantation production in several ways, and that their employment in mining, construction and transportation industries, as low-skilled and poorly-paid manual workers, reduced labour costs in those industries. (ibid:73-80)

Boserup's work also drew attention to the fact that even when women were major agricultural producers, which was especially true in Africa, their work was understated or not recognized in statistics or development policies and plans. (ibid:29,54-55)

Boserup's pathbreaking work has been appreciated by feminist development theorists. In 1981 Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen summed up Boserup's contribution. First, Boserup demonstrated that not only was gender a basic factor in the division of labour, but also the division of labour was not universal or "natural" but variable and changeable. Also, her work revealed the fundamental importance of women in agriculture, especially in Africa. Second, Boserup analyzed a variety of factors affecting the gender division of labour. Third, Boserup pointed out the negative effects on women of colonialism and capital penetration. Fourth, her work demonstrated the undervaluation of women's work. Final-

ly, Boserup's work inspired feminist development scholars to carry out further empirical and theoretical work. (Beneria and Sen:1981:279-281)

Rathgeber states that "...Boserup's work was remarkable in that it was based on analysis of data and evidence which had long been available to social scientists and development planners, but she was the first to systematically use gender as an (sic) variable in her analysis." (Rathgeber:1989:2)

Boserup's work was firmly grounded in the modernization paradigm of development. It is important to understand this paradigm because it has been so influential in development thinking and practice - it was dominant in Boserup's time and has resurfaced recently in partnership with economic liberalism. (Levitt:1992:92)

"Modernization" refers to the process of development envisioned for the societies emerging from colonial rule after the Second World War. Conventional wisdom at the time held that inherent in the developing nations was the potential to change, gradually and predictably, from backward societies to modern ones, following the example set by the western capitalist industrialized nations. This change implied urbanization and the transfer of technology and was conceived primarily in economic terms. Capital accumulation, economic growth and industrialization were the objectives of, as well as the means to, modernization and the indicator of modernization was economic - gross national

product or annual per capita income. (see Hettne:1990; Jaquette:1982:268-269; Levitt:1992; Parpart:1992:6-8; Rathgeber:1989)

Modernization, however, is more than a theory of development. It is the dominant western view of the world, or paradigm, encompassing an interdisciplinary set of assumptions and concepts about history, sociology, economics, philosophy and political science. It is important to be clear about these assumptions and concepts because they are often implicit and because the paradigm has assumed a universality which may not be justifiable. (Charlton:1984:15-28; Rathgeber:1989:5-6)

The modernization paradigm entails assumptions about social change: that societies have a tendency at least in the long term towards development or improvement. Development, like growth, is linear and irreversible and progresses in a gradual unfolding of clearly-defined and predictable stages. For economists, this change is thought to be rational, balanced, efficient and planned. It is assumed that economic growth will result in generalized improved living standards since the benefits will "trickle down" to everyone, even though concentrated income is necessary in the beginning, as incentive for saving and investment.

Modernization implies a complete break with the past - traditional economic institutions and systems represent constraints on the process of modernization. Likewise, in

sociology and political science, assumptions are made about the backward and static nature of agrarian societies. Modernization requires functionally more specialized and structurally more differentiated social institutions, following the examples of western industrialized societies.

Politically, modernization entails constitutionalism, electoral participation and nationalism: the creation of democratic institutions and organizations for nation-building, in short, the emergence of the nation-state. The legitimacy of political leaders rests in their capacity for democratic political stability, avoiding violence and political decay.

Modernization as a paradigm or dominant theoretical framework has been a very powerful and effective tool in directing the changes that have occurred in the name of development in Third World countries. The paradigm has dominated scholarly research as well as planning activities.

**2. Liberal Feminism:** Like Boserup, the earliest feminist theorists and researchers interested in women operated from within the modernization paradigm. (Jaquette:1982:271; Rathgeber:1989:3-7) Adopting a liberal-economy framework, called Women in Development or WID, they investigated the experiences of women in the development process and discovered that the relative position of women had improved very little and in some cases had declined. (Sen and Grown:1987:23-49) Even when employment or educational oppor-

tunities were provided, women were often ignored, or discriminated against in other ways. For example, women were often the low-skilled and poorly paid industrial workers, considered to be supplementary rather than principal family wage earners. (ibid:35) In rural development, WID research revealed that agricultural technology generally benefited men and even penalized women, and that women's workload increased with the introduction of technical improvements in the agricultural sector. (ibid:30-35)

The main goal of development efforts responding to this early research was to minimize the disadvantages to women by providing legal and administrative reforms which would more effectively integrate women into the development process.

(Maguire:1984:22-23) The contribution of early feminist research and theorizing on women in development is undeniable. Case studies documented the impact of development on women: by revealing the complexities of the subject, these early case studies inspired deeper analysis. As well, statistical evidence demonstrated the importance of meeting basic needs for clean water, food security, and health care, and providing women with legal and political rights.

(Jaquette:1982:271-272;Rathgeber:1989:4-5) Nevertheless, the liberal feminist analysis was criticized by radical feminists who argued that analysis should probe more deeply into the causes and nature of gender discrimination in development. This criticism opened up the debate over goals of

development and strategies for change. (Maguire:1984:24) For example, critics pointed out that although development can be seen as a goal in itself (an assumption in the modernization paradigm), it is also a means to other goals such as food security, equity and justice in resource allocation. (Sen and Grown:1987:23)

The liberal feminists were criticized for being naive about the causes of gender discrimination, and for offering what amounted to individualistic solutions to structural problems. (Rathgeber:1989:22) Critics of WID called for more radical analysis, focusing on gender relations of power and advocating a transformation of social structures, such as the family and the gender division of labour, which perpetuate the domination of women by men. (Charlton:1984:13; Jaquette:1989:272;Rathgeber:1989:5-7) In her anthology Robin Morgan gives voice to the criticisms made by women in developing countries - that development generally had ignored women's needs and had perpetuated the exploitation of women. (Morgan:1984:18) In addition, development had encouraged urbanization which caused many problems for women, without any of the benefits trickling down. A contributor from India called development women's worst enemy. (ibid)

**3. Marxist-feminism:** One radical viewpoint, that of Marxist-feminism, following Engels earlier argument, states that the historical cause of the oppression of women by men was the ownership of private productive property, namely

domesticated animals used by men for hunting, and the subsequent need to ensure male family lines for inheritance.

(Jaquette: 1989:272-275;Maguire:1984:28-29) Marxist-feminists point out that the work women do inside and outside the home is central to local and national economies (Sen and Grown:1987:23-24) and that the process of capitalist development has had an adverse effect on the position of women. (Rathgeber:1989: 7-8) The decline in women's social status is attributed to the rise of class society in which women have become unpaid workers. The exploitation of women is further strengthened by industrial capitalism's need for unpaid family labour and a reserve army of workers.

(Maguire:1984:29) A Marxist revolution, they claim, would liberate women by abolishing private productive property and exploitative relations of production. (Rathgeber:1989:7-10)

Marxist-feminists point out that liberal feminists would integrate women into an essentially unjust development process at the bottom of gender and class hierarchies. (Sen and Grown:1987:25) They argue that the causes of gender discrimination are structural and not easily eradicated.

(Jaquette:1982:274) A Marxist-feminist theory of development stresses the need for women's participation in productive labour as the means to economic independence and emancipation, assuming that it is by women's full participation in the labour force that contradictions in the family would occur, thus creating the demand for changes in the family.

For example, the double burden of domestic work which is not shared by men would cause gender struggles and eventually result in the socialization of family functions. In addition, the contribution of women to production would help to create the material conditions for applying the principle of equal pay for equal work and eliminating the gender division of labour. (Jaquette:1982:275) However, Marxist-feminist theory has been criticized for the view that women need to be drawn into social production before they may be treated as equals, and for underestimating the importance of the family/household level of society. (Rathgeber:1989:9)

4. **Socialist-feminism:** Another radical perspective is that of the socialist-feminists who argue that women constitute an oppressed class within a system of patriarchy. They criticize the Marxist lack of attention to familial relationships and activities, and stress the need for an expansion of the Marxist-feminist theory in order to explain the empirical evidence that women in socialist countries continue to be exploited. (Molyneux in Young:1981:167) The second shift that women work in the home has not been eliminated, and the gender division of labour continues to favour men. Socialist-feminists argue that although women's participation in the labour force is a necessary condition for emancipation, it is not a sufficient condition. The remaining barrier to women's emancipation, they point out, is patriarchy, the system of male power and privilege which

operates at all levels of society and the family. (Jaquette:1982:275-279;Rathgeber:1989:10-13)

Socialist-feminists argue that Marxist-feminists have over-emphasized the importance of class, and overlooked other forms of oppression, for example those based on gender and race. (Maguire:1984:31;Sen and Grown:1987:25-26) Some socialist-feminist theorists have argued that Engels' ideas on women's subordination had the effect of depoliticizing many feminist issues in that sexist structures, practices and attitudes were to "evolve naturally" as a result of economic changes. (Johnson:1983: 221) Much of the theoretical literature of socialist-feminists is concerned with the nature of the relationship between class and gender, or between socialism and feminism. The class/gender debate is discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. It must be noted that, like Jaquette (1982) and Rathgeber (1989) we do not make a conceptual distinction between socialist-feminist theory and the gender and development or GAD perspective. Jaquette includes the GAD problem of the social construction of gender in her detailed discussion of the socialist-feminist critique of Marxist analysis of women and development. (Jaquette:1982:277-279) Rathgeber points out that GAD has its theoretical roots in socialist-feminism. She analyzes "the socialist/feminist and GAD approaches" to women and development issues together. (Rathgeber:1989:10-13)

The socialist-feminist theory of development acknowl-

edges the usefulness, although limited, of both the liberal and the Marxist viewpoints. The former's presentation of empirical evidence and statistical data helps to document the actual situation of women in developing countries, and the effect on women of the process of economic development. The latter's methodology, historical materialism, places women's lives in more accurate, specific and sympathetic cross-cultural perspective. As well, the concepts of dialectical change, alienation and revolutionary consciousness are useful for the analysis of the roles of women.

In socialist-feminist literature on development an important distinction is made between practical needs of women, which are empirically verifiable and their strategic interests, which are analytically deducible; both are seen as legitimate and necessary concerns for analysis and action. (Young:1988:5-9) Other important elements of the theory are feminist consciousness-raising, political and social awareness, and women's solidarity. The empowerment of women through their political activity in their own interest groups is a priority. (ibid:25-29) Issues of sexuality, especially the authoritarian control by men of women's sexual freedom, and sexual violence against women in the family and society are central concerns. Because the socialist-feminist theory of development is the central focus of the thesis it is discussed in great detail in Chapter Four.

**5. Female Power:** A third radical perspective, that of

the "female power" or "women's sphere" analysis pays more attention to the biological and psychological dimensions of women's subordination to men. Although not necessarily deterministic in the radical feminist sense that "biology is destiny", this analysis is primarily concerned with women's experiences as women rather than in relation to men. The argument is that women's lives must be interpreted on women's own terms and not in comparison with men, nor on terms defined by men. The women's sphere perspective holds that gender relations constitute the primary oppression in that the original hierarchy of power relations was gender-based rather than economic. (Maguire:1984:26)

This perspective maintains that women's sphere is equal to men's sphere and that the relationship is one of complementarity as well as antagonism. However, the main focus is on a separate women's sphere. The basic assumption is that women derive power, authority, control, satisfaction and advantages from their roles as women, and especially from networks and solidarity within the women's community. (Jaquette:1982:280-283)

This perspective has been criticized for denying the very real struggle between women and men, and the need for political action (Morgan:1984:233), for encouraging the anti-feminist position that male dominance over women is a myth, and for creating unnecessary boundaries around women. On the one hand, there seems to be no theoretical basis in

biology or psychology for a separate and independent women's sphere. Also, Eisenstein has pointed out that it is the social construction of differences between women and men rather than the differences per se which oppress women. (Jaquette: 1982:27-28) On the other hand, the woman-centered perspective has contributed to a greater recognition of women's roles in the family and society, for example as heads of household and as food producers and traders. As well, by encouraging a sensitive explanation of women's lives, this analysis has drawn attention to women's skills for management, nurturance and conciliation. (Jaquette: 1982:282) Rathgeber gives some examples of women-centered development research projects in Africa, although she emphasizes the Gender and Development rather than the women's sphere, perspective of the projects' goals. (Rathgeber: 1989:22-24)

It has also been argued that a "women's sphere" perspective allows for explanations of women's apparent resistance to changes meant to liberate them. Such resistance can be seen as rational and risk-minimizing, given that women gain power and satisfaction from the existing situation, no matter how oppressive it may be in some terms. (Young: 1988:10)

These four distinctive feminist perspectives on development cannot be easily ascribed to individual scholars, or applied rigidly. There tends to be much overlap of ideas,

and even disagreement about fundamental concepts. (Maguire: 1984:25) For example, Marxist- and socialist-feminists agree on the need for action-based strategies for radical social change; but socialist-feminists cannot reach consensus among themselves on the meaning and use of the concept of patriarchy. (Brydon and Chant:1989:7) As well, some of the ideas in one perspective may be modified or extended or accepted with qualification by researchers working in different theoretical frameworks. For example, although one might disagree with the liberal feminists that the problem of development for women is their lack of integration into the modernization process, nevertheless the importance of non-discriminatory legislation and access to education is widely acknowledged in less conservative perspectives as enabling measures. (Young:1988:26)

In spite of grey areas, the distinctions are useful as frameworks for studying the concepts and arguments involved, in order to construct theories about women and development, and to organize programs for action. As well, arguments and discussion can free our thinking from the dominance of the modernization paradigm, as we reach a deeper understanding of basic assumptions and concepts. Maguire has pointed out that our explanation of the causes of oppression will determine our solutions and strategies for change. (Maguire:1984: 21) Although our study of ethnocentrism is primarily concerned with socialist-feminist development theory, a com-

parative analysis with related perspectives provides a more complete understanding of the socialist-feminist viewpoint.

**6. The DAWN Perspective:** Although western feminists were the authors of most of the hypotheses and debates, a recent socialist-feminist discourse has emerged from Third World scholars and activists, based on their own experiences. One group of women has organized a project called Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era (DAWN). (Sf and Grown:1987) Although the range of concerns is familiar (the gender division of labour, the double burden, practical needs and strategic interests, gender relations of power, the devaluation of women and consciousness-raising) it is nevertheless a distinctly Third World perspective in many ways. First of all, feminism is linked very strongly with poverty (although not by an orthodox Marxist analysis), in that the struggle against gender oppression cannot be separated from the struggle against other forms of oppression. The goal of feminism is a society free from all systems of domination and oppression. (ibid:23-49) Secondly, their analysis is based on their direct experience of colonialism and underdevelopment as well as contemporary systemic crises in the social, political and economic fabric of their lives. Specifically these crises are the production and distribution of food , water and fuel availability, international debt, militarization, and increased opposition to women's emancipation. Their struggle, all too often, is

one of survival for their families and communities. (ibid: 50-77) Thirdly, unlike the perspectives of liberal, Marxist and socialist feminism, which are firmly grounded in political ideology, this analysis advocates political pluralism and stresses the empowerment of all people to define their own needs. (ibid:78-96)

Such a perspective can be criticized for being too vague, for avoiding rather than solving theoretical problems, or for disregarding explanation altogether. However, the DAWN collective argues that a flexible outlook is needed in order to acknowledge the several oppressions of gender, class, race, nationality and religion. In agreement, Morgan refers to the "truly existential tactical dilemma" that women face in that there are no "maps or models" for the deep and all-encompassing revolution which we envision and invent as we go along. (Morgan:1984:26) The DAWN collective claims that their eclectic analysis can form the basis of an emerging political movement. This movement redefines the concept of power (self-empowerment rather than power over others); and the goals of development. (Sen and Grown:1987:79-82)

Some theoretical support for the eclectic approach of the DAWN viewpoint can be found in postmodern feminism. The postmodern feminism discussed by Parpart (unpublished 1992) rejects hegemonic metanarratives such as modernization and Marxist analysis, along with the entire modern search for

universals. (Parpart:1992:1) A postmodern perspective requires alternative explanations of reality based on pragmatic, ad hoc, local and contextual discourse. Parpart discusses the common concerns of postmodernism and feminism and suggests that postmodernism could create a space for the expression of the voices of women from developing countries. (ibid:5) Parpart recommends the DAWN approach to women and development as an example of a more postmodern feminist analysis, because the central concern is to encourage the diverse and experienced voices of ordinary women from developing countries.

A key concept in Parpart's analysis and the DAWN perspective is that of self-empowerment. To empower one's self means to develop self-reliance and belief in one's capacity to define one's own life and to demand personal and social transformation on one's own self-defined terms. Power is defined not as the capacity to dominate others but rather as internal strength and the capacity for self-reliance as well as the ability to make choices in one's life and to influence the direction of change in society. (ibid:79-82) It is argued that the orthodox development process has to a large extent disempowered women, partly because of ethnocentric assumptions about the universal desirability of western-style Modernization. To counteract the mainstream development process, the empowerment of women along with other oppressed people involves their organizing into grass-

roots movements with international networks.

There are some similarities between the DAWN perspective and the women's sphere perspective. For example, the women's sphere perspective "asserts that there is a female culture that provides the basis for redefining the goals and restructuring the process of change". (Jaquette:1982:268) The DAWN collective concludes their analysis by proclaiming that their objective is to create a development alternative not for women alone, but for society from women's perspectives. (Sen and Grown:1987:96) In her anthology of the international women's movement, Morgan expresses a similar faith in the potential of the world's women, and the transformational power of a feminist view of international affairs which focuses on concrete realities "of priority importance to the survival and betterment of living beings." The feminist world view is a result of a shared condition experienced by all women because of the simple fact of being female. (Morgan:1984:3-4)

### CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This chapter establishes a historical context for explaining the lives of women in China, and for testing the hypothesis that socialist-feminist analysis is ethnocentric in the case of China. First, it is argued that a reinterpretation of history challenges the stereotype of the submissiveness and seclusion of Chinese women by suggesting that important forms of resistance have been overlooked or misunderstood. Second, the chapter shows how the class/gender debate has been played out in China in the past 75 years and suggests that because Chinese feminism is significantly different from western feminism, some important assumptions in socialist-feminist analysis are problematic. Finally, although socialist-feminist theory is useful for understanding some aspects of the lives of Chinese women, nevertheless, the theory can be criticized for ethnocentrism in overlooking the complexities of social relationships and institutions in China.<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1 ANCIENT HISTORY OF CHINESE WOMEN

There is a well-known stereotype of Chinese women. Submissive, incompetent, obedient and weak, they were

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2 to advocate a reinterpretation of history because the historical image of women is stereotyped is not to deny the reality underlying the stereotype. For descriptions of the historical oppression of women in China, see Croll:1978a;Davin:1976;Myrdal:1965;Stacey:1983.

inferior to men in every important way. Certain social customs - arranged marriage, footbinding, concubinage, suicide and female infanticide - reflected and perpetuated women's subservience and dependency. A woman was known as nei ren (inside person); her proper sphere of activity was the home. Classical teachings and didactic works established the rules of conduct, ideal social relationships and narrow limits to women's education and expectations. However, recent scholarly work on women's history in China has questioned this conventional interpretation. Analyzing aspects of 16th. Century Chinese thought, Joanna F. Handlin points out that the classical teachings which inform much historical research represent an upper-class ideal and that reality was much more varied, changeable and complex. Handlin also reminds us that boys and men were expected to (and did) conform to explicit social norms as much as girls and women. In addition, Handlin suggests that contemporary feminist and socialist concerns have emphasized women's historical oppression, while ignoring other important topics. (Handlin in Wolf and Witke:1975:13)

Similarly, historian Li Yu-ning feels that the accepted stereotype of Chinese women is one-dimensional, and that a reinterpretation of history is required. Li's research provides a historical analysis which more completely explains two related aspects of the lives of contemporary Chinese women - rapid acceptance of extensive change and

continuity with the past. In this regard, Li is interested in the dynamic, rather than the static, influence of Confucian ideology, the very strong historical interconnections between Chinese women and nationalism, and the ideal and real complementarity and interdependence of Chinese women and men. In addition, Li believes that although their lives were difficult, women were not necessarily oppressed. Li's viewpoint is that Chinese women actively resisted their oppression, that they were not the submissive, docile and obedient women of the stereotype, and that their oppression should not be the only focus of attention. (Li:1992:102-122)

Another challenge to the stereotype is the analysis in Potter and Potter that "although women fared badly under the traditional family system" there were two aspects of the role of women in this family system which generally have gone un-noticed in western analysis. (Potter and Potter: 1990:20) First, it was women who mediated, both symbolically and in social interaction, conflicts between and within lineage organizations. For example, when brothers feuded, women served as the social scapegoats (as quarrelsome wives) in order to preserve the illusion that family harmony existed. Second, ties between lineages, "among the most valuable ties that a family could have" were mediated by women, for example, through marriage (which was women's affair) or for business. (ibid:254) These examples underline the need to look beyond the stereotype in order to under-

stand the nuances of women's lives and to have a more complete picture of women's roles in the family and society.

The analysis of ethnocentrism in Chapter Five depends partly on a reinterpretation of the history of women in China, since the emphasis in socialist-feminist literature on the oppression of Chinese women presents a one-dimensional view of their lives. This stereotype is a barrier to a more complete understanding and explanation of the changing roles of Chinese women, especially in relation to the socialist revolution. For example, the very strong and important connection between Chinese women and nationalism, which western feminists generally underestimate, has a long and rich history - from the "women-armies" of the Shang Dynasty (1523-1028 B.C.) to the patriotic "woman-citizens" of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance. (Li:1992:106,115) In addition, a more sophisticated reading of the original ideas and concepts of Confucius reveals a deep respect for women and a fundamental equality between women and men: the male-female dualism was one of complementarity and equality of importance. (ibid:113-114) One indication of the complementarity of women and men in traditional China is suggested by the historian Bai Shouyi. He has written that as the status of the peasants improved during the land equalization programs of the 3rd. to 7th. Centuries, A.D., male and female peasants alike were given land either for rent or ownership. (Bai:1982:252-253)

Handlin's analysis of the writings of Lu Kun, a scholar-official in the 16th, Century, is a good example of how a reinterpretation of history can challenge the stereotype of Chinese women. For instance, footbinding, the cult of chastity and virginity, and rules against the remarriage of widows are commonly cited as evidence of the terrible oppression of Chinese women. Handlin suggests that the reality at the time was less oppressive for women than commonly believed, and that historians may have misunderstood the didactic purpose of the literature. She argues that the increasing freedom experienced by women provoked "idealist" literature as an attempt at social control. (Handlin in Wolf and Witke:ibid:13-38)

Poor rural women seldom have been the subjects of historical research. One of the rare sources of information in English is the book, The Death of Woman Wang (1978) by Jonathan Spence who uses historical documents and local period literature to "penetrate a little way into the world of T'an-ch'eng", a county in Shandong Province, in the late 17th. Century. Several aspects of Spence's research are interesting for understanding the lives of rural Chinese women, specifically his descriptions of rural living conditions and of customs and laws concerning marriage. In many ways, Spence's analysis is a challenge to the stereotype of Chinese peasant women (as submissive and secluded) although his is a local history and not necessarily representative of

other regions or times.

In Chapter Three, entitled "The Widow", Spence reports that county historical records included numerous biographies of chaste and loyal widows; Spence suggests that political patronage may have been a motive for a few of the biographies. Nevertheless, the ideal moral code required a high standard of conduct for widows. Spence shows how this moral standard may have worked in a more complex way to women's advantage, against the Legal Code which stated that a dead man's family would inherit his property and her dowry if a widow remarried. Thus the family of a dead man would often force the widow to remarry, in which case she could appeal to the moral code in order to resist. (Spence:1978: 59-76)

Challenging assumptions about the role of Confucianism in the oppression of Chinese women, Spence argues that on the whole, the cult of state Confucianism was alien to the country people, in spite of the fact that Confucius had been born in Shandong Province and was believed to have visited their own county administrators seeking advice. (ibid:16-18) The local people were superstitious, believing in supernatural beings (such as ghosts, fox spirits and mediums) and supernatural powers. They accepted Buddhist and Taoist priests and nuns and worshipped a variety of local gods. (ibid:15-32) The stereotype of the seclusion of Chinese women is also challenged by Spence's work. For example, regarding the people's moral life, one local magistrate

recorded the "decay of moral fiber" and complained that married and unmarried were going out-of-doors for innocent and less-innocent pleasures. (ibid:18-19) There were brothels in even the remote villages, as well as gambling houses and tea houses where women could find employment. Women also worked as nurses, watch keepers or launderers, in orphanages or homes for the poor and old, or in convents. They worked as servant girls, midwives, jail keepers, diviners, marriage go-betweens, and dentists. (ibid:122-124)

The impression one gets from reading Spence's book is that in spite of the misery, recklessness and violence of the region and the period, women were neither submissive nor secluded. Spence's research reveals women's vulnerability, but also their resistance and their solidarity. Spence discovered that in historical records and popular literature, women were respected for their intelligence, capability and resourcefulness, as well as their virtuous moral character. Further research into the lives of rural Chinese women might provide a more complete basis for challenging the stereotype of their submissiveness and seclusion.

### **3.2 MODERN HISTORY OF CHINESE WOMEN**

Mary Backus Rankin writes that although the history of Chinese women during the last dynasty, the Qing (1644-1912), has been little studied, there is some evidence "that the usually accepted dark picture needs modification" in that

reality for gentry women differed greatly from the "restrictive Confucian ideal" (Rankin: in Wolf and Witke:1975:40) of women's subordination and seclusion. In particular, the political and military activities of women, increased educational opportunities, and the social mixing of women and men represent for Rankin a continuation of the earlier reformist trend of the 16th. Century identified by Handlin above. Although women's proper sphere of influence remained the family, peasant women were not confined to their homes; many of them joined the widespread Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), a peasant movement against landlords and foreign aggressors which advocated the principle of equality between women and men. Rankin suggests that the unbound feet of the Hakka minority women in the rebellion may have influenced reformist ideas towards women among the gentry. (ibid:43)

A major change occurred for women when the leaders of the 1898 Reform Movement, which was urban and elitist, "linked the woman question to nationalism, which provided a functional justification for the employment of women outside the home and gave women themselves new goals and values." (ibid:44) For Rankin, the life of Qiu Jin, a patriotic martyr of the turn-of-the-century, embodied the three integrated themes of education, feminism and nationalism. For the historian Li Yu-ning, the long life (94 years) of He Xiang-ning reveals the interconnections between the "three main themes of modern Chinese history" - nationalism, social-

lism and feminism. (Li:1992:133) As a young girl in the 1880s, He was inspired by the Hakka women of the Taiping Rebellion to refuse to have her feet bound. Like Qiu, He was a radical student in Japan, and a member of the Revolutionary Alliance. After the Republic was declared in 1912, He became director of the new government's Women's Department and worked closely with Soong Qing-ling, the wife of Sun Yat-sen; later they both became influential leaders in the women's movement, demanding equality for women because of their revolutionary activities. Another feminist, Tseng Pao-sun, who was the first woman to receive a university degree in England, in 1916, has attributed turn-of-the-century changes in China to three instruments - modern education, modern literature on women and political revolution. (ibid: 79) To account for the rapid acceptance of change, Tseng favours a dynamic rather than a static interpretation of the history of women in China. She notes especially an earlier recorded time when upper-class women were equal with men in education and public activities and a gradual process of subordinating women to men's control, beginning about 2000 years ago and reaching a low point in the 10th. Century. (ibid:73-76) Three factors have facilitated recent changes towards equality, according to Tseng - the psychological idealization of the virtuous woman had no legal or religious basis; the Chinese mind is conciliatory and tolerant; and upper-class women were always highly educated. It is inter-

esting that Tseng believes that the psychological ideal of the virtuous woman has been the greatest obstacle for women to overcome. (ibid:79)

As in many other countries, the turn-of-the-century feminist movement in China was urban and elitist. What is significant about Qiu, He, Tseng and many other Chinese women of the time, was the integration in their lives of their strong feminist, nationalist and revolutionary beliefs. For Soong Qing-ling, feminism without a larger national or revolutionary cause was "barren feminism". (ibid:91)

Other examples of Chinese revolutionary feminists are given by the historian, Kazuko Ono, in her book Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution. In the 1911 revolution, many women joined battle, entirely unconscious, Ono believes, of being a special case as women because they "considered themselves citizens of the nation" with a duty to fight for the new republic. (Ono:1989:73-78) In the first parliament of 1912, women were denied their rights to vote and be elected, in spite of their revolutionary work. Ono maintains that the political leaders, the Guomindang, recognized that the principle of equal rights for women and men implied fundamental social transformation. It was "never only a gender question, for it was connected both to the reality of men's rights and to the essence of political and economic equality of all people." (ibid:88) The link between

feminism and revolution was made very strongly during the May Fourth Movement of 1919. It began as a student-led nationalist protest against the Treaty of Versailles which granted Japan some territorial concessions in China, but it was also an intellectual and cultural anti-tradition movement. Feminist ideas were central to this movement, and women-students were active participants. One famous leader, Deng Ying-chao, has written that the most important feminist issues were equality between women and men, opposition to arranged marriage, freedom to love, university education and employment for women, and free social intercourse between women and men. (ibid:151-152) In the 1920s urban women were very active in labour strikes. In 1922, more than 30,000 women factory workers in Shanghai, where women constituted the majority of the working class, were involved in more than 60 strikes. (Leith in Young: 1973:57)

This brief historical survey of the lives of a few feminist leaders around the turn-of-the-century illustrates that feminism and nationalism were closely integrated in pre-Communist revolutionary women's consciousness. However, it says almost nothing about the lives of rural women, who were themselves only indirectly affected by urban activities. They were, however, directly affected by the generalized confusion and chaos which prevailed during the last two dynasties, the Ming and Qing. Corruption of government officials and of the landlord class, said to be the worst on

record, (Bai:1982:418) led to widespread peasant revolt against oppressive taxation and ruthless exploitation, of which the Taiping Rebellion was the largest and most famous. The White Lotus Rebellion lasted for almost 90 years, from 1721-1804, in several provinces. In many of the rebellions, women were militant participants and leaders, often forming their own separate fighting units. (ibid:399-401,440) The long and intense period of peasant revolt took its toll on agricultural and handicraft production which had been very advanced during the early Ming Dynasty. In prosperous times, paddy rice fields had yielded two or three crops per year. Other well-developed crops were cotton, tea, mulberry, sugar cane, fruit, dye plants, oil-yielding plants, medicinal herbs, maize, sweet potato and tobacco. Handicrafts industries at that early time included spinning and weaving (using wool, silk, cotton and hemp), porcelain, paper making, printing and art work such as silk embroidery, lacquer and jade carvings and cloisonne enamel. (ibid:406-410) Sericulture was an important rural production industry for women. However, natural disasters, the peasant revolts and the aggressive colonial expansion of industrial and commercial capitalism during and after the Opium Wars (1840-42 and 1856-60) resulted in a decline in agricultural and handicrafts production, and the consequent impoverishment of peasants. (ibid:457)

There has been some research into the traditional role

of women in China's agricultural production. For example, Davin applied the results of primary research done by J.L. Buck in the early 1930s to Boserup's analytic framework of sex roles in farming. In north China and parts of south China, areas of dense population and extensive plough cultivation, women did only about 9 percent of the fieldwork. In the densely-populated south and southwest where the land was irrigated and intensively cultivated, and yielded two crops of rice annually, women did between 16-29 percent of the fieldwork. The agricultural fieldwork of women varied greatly, according to climactic region, season, socio-economic class and crop. Women generally worked more during the planting and harvesting seasons. For middle-class peasant families, in the north especially, it was a source of pride that women did not work in the fields. (Davin in Young: 1973:78) Buck had found that women who did not have bound feet were more likely to do fieldwork, although in the spring wheat area of the far north, where women did have bound feet, their participation rate was high - 14 percent, which Davin attributes to adverse climactic and soil conditions (resulting in low productivity) and to a local problem of opium addiction among men. In the rice-growing south, women's participation rate was high because the cultivation of rice was highly labour-intensive. Some regional differences were difficult to explain, and Davin suggests factors such as local ethnic customs and the low-evaluation by

research respondents of light but time-consuming work such as tea-picking. As well, where women worked at sideline activities such as spinning, weaving and sericulture, they were less-likely to work in the fields. Davin points out some of the obstacles to women doing fieldwork. For example, having bound feet prevented women from carrying heavy loads and from walking any distance. As well, for most of her fertile years, a woman would be continuously pregnant, Davin assumes. Women generally did not have agricultural skills, and there was a social taboo against working outside the home, especially in the presence of men. (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:246-252; Croll:1985:15-19)

However, "if women's participation in directly productive work was traditionally minor, their share of work was not." (Davin:1976:123) The household-based work that women did was a necessary part of family subsistence and the rural food economy; it was demanding and arduous. Their work included gathering fuel for cooking and hauling water for cooking and washing. Food preparation included husking and grinding grain, preserving and drying fruit, beans, seeds and vegetables. Some women made beancurd and alcoholic drinks and prepared tobacco leaves for smoking. Clothes and cotton shoes were made at home, sometimes beginning with the cloth and thread. In rural China, women were responsible for growing the vegetables for the family and for some of the subsidiary work such as tea-processing, pig and poultry

raising, spinning, weaving, basket-making and other handicrafts. Sideline work provided about 14 percent of farm income. (Davin:ibid:249)

The family unit was to a large extent self-sufficient and was the chief organizational unit of production and consumption. The historian Bai Shouyi writes that with the change from slavery to feudalism around 200 B.C., China's family economy was based on the principle of men till and women weave. (Bai:1982: 106,124, 416) Croll analyzes this principle, pointing out that such a division of labour was also based on the subordination of women (Croll:1978a:275), although some historians maintain that in China complementarity between women and men has defined their relationship more accurately than dominance and subordination. (Bai: 1982;Li:1992) By the end of Imperial China, peasant women and men shared much misery. Deteriorating living conditions in China's countryside at the end of the last century have been described by Belden in China Shakes the World. Conditions of land ownership were acute, and the major cause was that population was increasing several times faster than the area of cultivated land. (Belden:1949:147) As well, public land tended to become private land. Peasants became the victims of a wild anarchy that prevailed as warlord regimes, backed by foreign powers, fought for control of the country. For peasant women and men, their poverty and oppression were intensified during this period. (Myrdal:1965:345)

In 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria and by 1938 occupied 10 provinces in north, east and south China. (Ono:1989:162) Pillage, burning, rape and slaughter were everyday affairs. (ibid) In some cases the Japanese and landlords took not only all the farmers' grain but all their seed as well. (Belden:ibid:165) By the end of the war against Japan, the rural economy had fallen below subsistence level. (ibid:228) The land was devastated but still the landlords wanted to recover the power they had lost to the communists. With the support of the Guomindang, the landlords adopted the strategy of kill all, burn all, loot all. They terrorized the peasants through forced conscription, kidnapping, theft, blackmail and extortion. People were buried alive, executed or driven into hiding. (Belden:ibid) For the peasants, conditions were so unbearable that Civil War was necessary for their very survival. (ibid:237)

Such were the conditions that the peasants endured for the 40 years leading up to 1949. In order to understand the lives of women in rural China today it is necessary to have another look at these years in order to know something about the experiences and roles of peasant women during these pre-revolutionary years, especially in their relation to the communist party.

### 3.3 CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY AND WOMEN

The 1922 proclamation of the Chinese Communist Party

(CCP) demanded women's rights and announced the organization of a woman's bureau, headed by Xiang Qing-yu, whose main interest was in organizing women factory workers to strike. She maintained that the Chinese women's movement should be incorporated into revolutionary political movements, and that women's issues should take second place to class struggle. (Leith in Young:1973:50-53;Walker:1978:60) Xiang believed that the subordinate position of women was determined by the social system and that to demand women's rights without changing the social system would lead nowhere. (Croll:1978a:120) From 1922 to 1926, women's peasant organizations were formed by revolutionary students who went into the countryside in south China. They found that although divorce was the main concern for the peasant women, it was a divisive issue and eventually considered to be dysfunctional to the revolution. The first communist-led peasant uprising against landlords occurred in Hunan Province in 1926, directed by Mao Zedong who wrote in his report that the "four thick ropes" of traditional authority (political, clan, religious and male) had been weakened. Mao believed that political (and economic) change would bring change in the other three areas. (Ono:1989:150)

In 1926 when the Guomindang and the Communists united in the Northern Expedition against the warlords, included were 300-400 girls whose job was to propagandize for women's rights in the newly liberated areas. One of their biggest

difficulties was the peasants' fear of them. (Leith:ibid:61-66) Nevertheless, by 1927, the year of the Guomindang's "white terror" against the communists in Shanghai, Nanjing and Canton, more than a million and a half rural women had been organized into women's groups in 10 provinces. (ibid: 52) Driven out of the cities, the CCP focused on rural China. Davin suggests that the experience in the early liberated areas "was important for the testing and development of practical problems. Among them were social and economic measures designed to alter the whole status of women." (Davin in Young:1973:73) In the liberated areas, female cadres established women's organizations to fight against opium, footbinding, child slavery, female infanticide, usury, arranged marriages and the buying and selling of women. They carried out campaigns for literacy, midwifery, hygiene, mutual aid and solidarity. (Davin:1976:21-52; Myrdal:1965:10,34,43) Ono writes that land reform was carried out, that people's consciousness was changed and that women were very active in the militia. She also found that women constituted up to 25 percent of the new government in certain areas. (Ono:1989:151) However, Davin points out that the CCP and the army were busy with the war and unable to spend much time on social programs for women's equality and land reform. (Davin in Young:1973:74) In 1934, under siege in the south, the Red Army abandoned this base of about 36 million people, travelling 6,000 miles for one

year in the Long March, to establish a new stronghold in northern China. The marchers' strict discipline and respectful treatment of the peasants established a good foundation for the future leadership of the CCP. (Ono:ibid:154) Mobilization of women was more difficult in the north, called the Border Region because it was a more conservative area. The women generally had bound feet and were not used to working outside the family courtyard. Nearly 95 percent of the people in the Border Region were illiterate. (ibid:165) Nevertheless, the CCP organized democratic governments. Women had equal rights to vote and to be elected. Ono remarks that such participation for illiterate women was "unprecedented in China." (ibid:166) However, it was an area where discrimination against women was "extremely severe." Ono believes that to call for equality between the sexes was too radical for such a place. (ibid)

In 1942, a feminist writer, Ding Ling, criticized the CCP's attitude toward women, pointing out that women in the liberated areas were being overworked. Her criticism provoked the CCP's rejection of "May Fourth feminism, isolated from the reality of the masses". The 1943 CCP resolution stated that women's emancipation would be achieved through productive work, and that the political need for cooperation among all groups was primary. (Davin in Young:1973:76) Ono writes that "practical realization gave rise to the four pillars of the women's movement at this time: production,

literacy, hygiene and democratic harmony in the family." (Ono:1989:167) Davin explains this apparent "soft-peddling" on woman-work<sup>3</sup> by pointing out that in 1942 the CCP needed the support of as many classes and groups as possible. For the same reason, class war was also delayed: radical land reform policies were compromised in favour of a more conciliatory campaign which merely reduced rents and interest rates. (Davin:ibid:77)

Belden also stresses the urgency of the conditions facing the CCP: "...in fighting the Japanese there was no question of making a revolution, there was only a question of existing. Doomed as they were to fight in the heart of enemy territory, surrounded on all sides by hostile forces, the only way the Communists could even remain alive was to find bases among the people. To have started a class war would have endangered these bases." Besides, in many ways, the national war indirectly promoted the class war. (Belden: 1949:161) Likewise, the mobilization of women for productive work, although necessary for political or military reasons, also contributed to their emancipation. Ono points out how the move for production improved women's status and helped to raise their consciousness. (Ono:1989:167-168)

Referring to J.L.Buck's 1930s surveys, Davin points out

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<sup>3</sup> woman-work is Davin's term for the Chinese fu-nu gong zuo, covering all sorts of "activities among women, including mobilizing them for production, literacy and hygiene campaigns, social reform and so on." (Davin in Young:1973:76)

that nowhere in China did women do less farm work than in the Border Region where they did only about 5 percent of the fieldwork, although their sideline activities were considerable. In one area, income from sideline activities, of which textile production was the most important, rose to approximately 30 percent of household income, following production campaigns. Besides spinning and weaving, other sideline activities included making vegetable oil, leather and paper, and sewing clothing and shoes for the army. (Davin:ibid:80) In areas near the battle lines, women sabotaged and repaired bridges and roads, prepared food and carried it to the army, rescued and nursed the wounded, carried messages and gathered intelligence. (ibid:81) Davin warns against viewing such work as secondary, but insists that it was vital to the guerrilla war - for example, in overcoming the economic blockade. Such activities increased women's commitment to the new society by giving them an opportunity to participate, and gave them some experiences and self-confidence which they could draw upon during land reform. (ibid:82)

At the end of the anti-Japanese War in 1945, a radical change was made in the CCP's agrarian policy, since there was no longer the need to avoid alienating the landlords. However, the change in policy towards women's emancipation was less radical. Although it was acknowledged that women had a special struggle, the CCP insisted that they go slowly. Propaganda and persuasion, rather than violence, were

advocated in the struggle to overthrow the oppression of women. (ibid:82-84) Production was not identified as the single panacea. Laws against footbinding, infanticide, purchase marriage, and adopted daughters-in-law were followed by education on the principle of equality between the sexes. (ibid) Women were given equal rights to land and in some areas where the men were away in the army women were the main force in land reform. (ibid:82-83) Ono remarks that "not a bit of landlord property escaped the notice of these women who had spent their entire lives attentive to every grain of rice." In land reform, the economic foundation of the traditional family system was destroyed, weakening the base by which men were able to control women. In addition, land reform changed women's consciousness: they played a leading role in speaking bitterness against landlords, and they fought desperately to protect and control their land, just as poor peasant men did, because land was life itself. (Ono:1989:173-174) As a result of land reform, women's political and economic status in the family and in society fundamentally changed. (Davin in Young:1973:82) With land reform, the "old fatalism of peasant women had begun to crack". (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:264)

In assessing the prerevolutionary successes of the CCP in relation to the liberation of women, Davin insists that it must be viewed in the context of a peasant society in revolution. For one thing, in a backward agricultural econ-

omy where physical strength was so important, it was nearly impossible for women to become the economic equals of men. She suggests that although western feminists might find it absurd that the Chinese peasant women would want the right to work in the fields and to have a monogamous marriage, nevertheless, this viewpoint is removed from the realities of peasants' lives. (ibid:87) Davin's comments are relevant to the criticism of ethnocentrism in socialist-feminist analysis of China because an important conclusion in the socialist-feminist literature is that the CCP consistently compromised or was indifferent about feminist goals. From Davin's perspective, it was practical necessity rather than indifference which determined CCP policies towards women. (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:263)

#### 3.4 WOMEN IN RURAL CHINA AFTER 1949

The land reform policy of the new government was based on the belief that redistribution of land would give women access to ownership of the means of production and a new bargaining power with which to redefine their subordinate position in society. (Croll:1985:59) However, as Croll argues, redistribution of land in the newly liberated areas tended to strengthen the resources of the household head. Croll wonders if the hostility to the 1950 Marriage Law was connected to the strengthening of the power base of rural households, and the consequent need to control the recruit-

ment of women through arranged marriage. (ibid:60) In any case, land reform seems to have had some effect on women's participation in fieldwork - in the newly liberated areas 24-40 percent of women aged 16 to 60 worked in the fields. (Ibid:24, table 2) Although Croll finds this participation rate for women low, especially in comparison with the older liberated areas where 50-80 percent of the women did fieldwork, Davin's research reveals some of the problems. In many cases, poor health prevented peasant women from working in the fields. Programs to train midwives in hygiene, pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care were effective, but it was difficult to bring these programs to remote areas, especially where superstitions about childbirth prevailed. (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:257-258) In some cases the seasonal unemployment of men was a serious disincentive for women to participate in agricultural production. Women sometimes found alternative work in sideline occupations, handicrafts production, and in irrigation and flood-prevention projects. (Davin:ibid:260-262,268)

In the mid-1950s private ownership of land was abolished in favour of collective ownership. The original mutual aid teams and small producer cooperatives became larger cooperatives and collectives. By 1957, rural China was organized into a system of collective brigades and production teams. More than 100 million women, 60 percent of the total number of peasant women aged 16 to 60 were members of

the collectives. (Andors:1983:45;Croll:1985:23-26) By 1959, women accounted for 50 percent of the agricultural labour force and up to 70 to 80 percent in some areas. (Andors: ibid:52) Government policy assumed that women's participation in agricultural production was necessary for rural development and a precondition for improvements in women's confidence, power and authority. (Croll:1985:9;<sup>4</sup> Although labour force participation did confer status, power and prestige within the family (Croll:ibid:58; Davin:1976: 122,150), certain structural features of collectivized agriculture and household organization discriminated against women. In the system of valuing work done in terms of work-points, the work of men was assumed to be worth more than the work of women, in spite of the official policy of equal pay for equal work. Sometimes equal pay was achieved through organized competition by which women were able to prove that their work was equal. (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:266)

Davin points out that the problem of evaluation of work done is complex and central to the system of collective agricultural production, and that the problems remained unsolved even under the commune organization. (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:267) Davin concludes that women worked fewer days than men in a year, that they often did lighter and less well-paid work, earned less when they did heavy work

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<sup>4</sup> for information on the central importance of women's contribution to agricultural production, see Andors: 1983:39-41;Croll:1985:9,20,78;Davin:1976:35-38)

like moving manure, or did more than men to earn the same workpoints. Croll argues that a gender division of labour limited women's full participation and that the majority of peasant women worked at menial and low status agricultural tasks. Their work was perceived to be subsidiary. (Croll: 1985:19,34-36) Andors also believes that women were marginal agricultural workers due to the double burden and deeply-rooted assumptions of women's inferiority. (Andors:1983:42-43) Certainly, the double burden of domestic and agricultural work was heavy for women. In one commune in 1953, the three main obstacles to women's participation in fieldwork were child care, weaving cloth for the family's clothes and cooking family meals. (Davin: *ibid*:272) The child care burden on young mothers was often shared by other family members (especially mothers-in-law), neighbours, or organized nurseries and childcare centers. Gradually, the most burdensome chores for rural women were eased with electric grinding mills, better water pumps, ready-made clothes and shoes, and public sewing groups. (*ibid*:255-256) A major obstacle to women's greater participation in agricultural production and political leadership was the custom of patrilocal marriage whereby a woman moves to her husband's village when she gets married. Davin found that this system discouraged a women's village or workteam from training her for leadership or in agricultural skills. (*ibid*:271)

Although the CCP believed that women's participation in

agricultural production was a precondition for improvements in their position in society, other important social programs designed specifically to promote the emancipation of women were carried out. The historian, Kazuko Ono, devotes an entire chapter on "The Impact of the Marriage Law of 1950". (Ono:1989:176-186) The law abolished "feudal" marriage and established a "new democratic" marriage system, with freedom of choice in marriage, equal rights for women and men, monogamy, prohibition of bigamy, concubinage and child-bride marriages, and freedom of remarriage for widows. Previously, women did not have the right to divorce, but the 1931 and 1950 laws granted wives that right. Between 1950 and 1952 the number of divorce petitions in China increased from 186,167 to 398,243 cases, 75 percent of which were requested by women. (ibid:179) Freedom of divorce was so significant for women that the Marriage Law was often called the "Divorce Law", even though for a woman to pursue a divorce was revolutionary - "virtually high treason against a natural order" and in tens of thousands of cases resulted in her death by murder or suicide. (ibid:181)

Scholars have differed in their impression of the significance of the Marriage Law for women. Nancy Milton writes that it "...represented in China an earthshaking change in one of the oldest continuous forms of family structure in the world." (Milton in Young:1973:186) Similarly, Ono maintains that the significance of the law was

"epochal". For instance, by requiring public registration of marriage and divorce, the government united public and private interests of women and men as constituent members of society. Registration not only allowed the government to verify whether the marriage was one of free will, but also to carry out a propaganda campaign. (Ono:ibid:178) In addition, just as land reform resulted in a transformation in the economy, the marriage law resulted in a transformation of consciousness. Ono argues that the genuinely "radical" ideas of freedom of marriage and gender equality sparked an improvement in all familial relationships. (ibid:185-186) By late 1952 land reform was completed; the government then carried out a nation-wide campaign to implement the marriage law, which was necessary for social construction. (ibid:183)

Stacey takes a contrary view - that the law was revisionist in that it moved away from ideas in the 1934 law which favoured women and assumed a profamily stance by requiring conciliation when divorce was disputed. (Stacey: 1983:177) For Stacey, the registration required by the 1950 Marriage Law was one aspect of the public patriarchy created by the CCP, rather than an opportunity for consciousness raising, as Ono saw it. For Johnson, the problem was that the CCP devoted only one month to a propaganda campaign for the Law in late 1952, even though the Law had potential significance for women's emancipation. (Johnson:1983:222)

To summarize, the first decade of the People's Republic

had transformed village life. Land reform, collective agricultural production and the marriage law had promoted the novel idea of equality between women and men, and had encouraged the participation of women in village, workteam and family affairs. Davin concluded that by 1960, "...women's place in rural China has undergone as tremendous a revolution as any other aspect of village society." (Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:273) However, many CCP leaders believed that as long as the peasant economy remained, so did the patriarchal system which oppressed women. (Croll:1978a:260)

**The Great Leap Forward, 1958 - 1962** The Great Leap Forward aimed to expand the economy and increase rural industrial production rapidly and on a large scale. The movement involved a new form of economic, political and social organization, the commune, which varied in size from 10 to 20 thousand households. Land and tools were owned by the commune. Expanding the rural economy beyond agricultural production, the communes engaged in forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, and other sideline activities, as well as industrial, trade and banking enterprises. The new organization facilitated agricultural mechanization and electrification, reducing the heaviest manual labour, results which benefited women. It also allowed for industrial, water conservancy and construction projects. In one province, women completed approximately one third of the conservancy works, building

reservoirs, ponds and canals. Women also were outstanding in experimental and innovative work for agriculture and in new rural agricultural industries. In 1960 it was estimated that the commune system had added almost a hundred million women to China's labour force. (Croll:1978a:263) Croll points out that women were said to have moved from a subsidiary role in the labour force to one in which they were "essential, necessary and important". (ibid)

The second way that the communes were to emancipate women, besides increasing their labour force participation, was to socialize housework, reducing the role of the family as a unit of consumption and easing women's double burden. Household labour such as preparing meals, processing food and grain, sewing clothes and caring for children gradually became collectively organized and paid work. By 1959 there were an estimated 5,000,000 nurseries and kindergartens, 3,600,000 public dining rooms and many grinding mills and sewing centers in rural China. (Croll:ibid:268) Peasants' opposition to the socialization of household activities seemed to stem from fears about the future of the recently recovered family life. The commune was called the "big family"; many peasants feared that their "small family" would be destroyed. (ibid:278) There were other obstacles to the socialization of housework in the countryside. Public opinion went against communal child care and dining rooms - pragmatic factors included cost, inconvenience and individ-

ual family habits. As well, the 5 percent of land reserved for private family production supported the traditional authority of the head of household. (ibid:283-284)<sup>5</sup>

What were the consequences for women of the Great Leap Forward? The results in labour force participation are astonishing. In 1959, a national conference on Women and Work estimated that in rural areas 90 percent of eligible women had participated in production. (Croll:1978a:279) Three hundred million women had been mobilized. (Andors: 1983:49) In 1959 women constituted 45 percent of the rural workforce. (Croll:1985:27) One report estimated that women worked 250 days in 1959, compared with 166 days in 1958. (ibid) In 1965 a report from China's southern provinces stated that women were 54 percent of the rural workforce and that they accounted for 55 percent of the work. In the north it was reported that women were not yet fully mobilized. (ibid:28) Programs to encourage women's participation in production revealed the inherent conflict between women's emancipation and economic growth. Rural public dining rooms and nurseries could be expensive to run. Andors argues that popular resistance to the mobilization of women was sometimes based on the perceived threat to economic development: sensing a potential threat to political stability, the government refused to invest capital or human resources to

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<sup>5</sup> China's unique experiment with socialized household services is discussed in Andors:1983;Croll:1978a;Croll: 1985;Davin:1976;Myrdal:1976.

build up rural health care or to manage socialized household services. (Andors:1983:55,57,72) Resistance to the socialization of household services was also attributed to social attitudes. Andors points out that the Great Leap Forward exposed "(t)he extreme conservatism of the Chinese regarding the proper role of women within the family (especially in the countryside) and the apparent reluctance to force change in this sphere of life..." (ibid:72) Stacey cites the resistance to socialized domestic service as a major contributing factor in the failure of the Great Leap Forward. (Stacey:1983:216,253) Other factors were natural disasters, a terrible famine in 1960, and the administrative problems involved in the shift to very large communes. The failure of the Great Leap Forward has been measured in terms of agricultural production, which declined steadily after bumper harvests of 1958 and 1959. (Chow:1985:72) After 1962 when the state restored private field plots and rural free markets, and abandoned most collective dining and child care facilities, women's labour force participation subsequently declined. (Stacey:ibid:221,253)

Croll argues that the Great Leap Forward highlighted the fundamental problem regarding the emancipation of women: "the removal of a whole history of cultural oppression and institutionalized and internalized subordination." (Croll: 1978a:288-289) To emphasize the understanding of history that a Chinese person may have, it is worth noting Lu's

comments that it would not be reasonable to expect the Chinese leadership to "undo 3000 years of history in 30 years." (Lu in Morgan:1984:151)

The Socialist Education Campaign, 1962-1965 The Socialist Education Campaign was partly the result of the government's realization of the need to change traditional, conservative attitudes in the countryside. (Andors:ibid:76) The role of women was an essential aspect of that campaign. For instance, one of the first steps was to identify and then to eliminate the continuing influence of old beliefs and attitudes - attitudes of inferiority, self-debasement and dependence. The Women's Federation recommended that the process of consciousness-raising should include the study of women's collective and individual history, the analysis of the foundations of women's subordination and the comparison between their historical and present or potential positions. As much as possible, consciousness-raising was based on women solving their practical problems through sisterly solidarity. (Croll:1978a:289-295)

During the early 1960s the Women's Federation organized an important national debate regarding the relationship between class struggle and gender struggle. Two separate movements for women developed out of that debate - one to raise their consciousness as women suffering a specific oppression and one to raise their class consciousness. It

was not always possible to separate the two movements: the Women's Federation emphasized that woman work was a necessary and indispensable part of the work of socialist revolution and socialist construction. On the other hand, political study groups found that women had specific problems and sometimes needed separate study groups suited to their busy timetables and interests. Different viewpoints arose within the Chinese women's movement at that time about the relationship between the class and gender struggles. In 1967 the CCP disbanded the Women's Federation along with other mass organizations. The priority for the next ten years would be class consciousness and class struggle. "Personal" feminism was considered to be bourgeois and therefore to be struggled against. Within this framework, attitudes towards women were included in class analysis and struggle. (ibid:310)

Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976 The Cultural Revolution is generally known as the ten lost years because of the chaos and social upheaval that prevailed. Honig and Hershatter call it a period of "extreme political repression and brutality." (Honig and Hershatter:1988:308) The decade began with political battles for power at the top level of the CCP and debates over strategies for building socialism. It was a radical-left ideological revolution against feudalism, capitalism, bureaucratism and bourgeois ideology. The central issues were political consciousness and participation.

To a very large extent it was an urban movement. (Johnson: 1983:184) From 1966 to 1972, universities and many central administrative and planning offices were closed. Students and other young people joined the Red Guards, rejected official and parental authority and travelled freely.

The effects on women in the countryside were varied and uneven. Honig and Hershatter suggest that for some unmarried women who joined the Red Guards, their experiences of mobility, confidence and enthusiasm were "unprecedented". (Honig and Hershatter:1988:4) These two researchers also feel that the sent-down-youth program, which began in 1968, created for many urban and rural young people "expectations and experiences that changed their lives irrevocably." (ibid) Although gender issues were considered to be bourgeois, and therefore taboo, ironically the socialist principle of equality between women and men took on radical aspects during this period. For example, Iron Girl Brigades of women workers challenged the gender division of labour in a very assertive way. A popular slogan was "whatever men can do, women can do also". Special teams of women repairing live high tension electrical cables in south China became world famous. As well, women, like men, were encouraged to participate more actively in political affairs, to "serve the people" and to "put politics in command". Such policies may have liberated women in some ways, but by condemning the private and personal as bourgeois, the period ultimately

ignored the special needs of women. (ibid:188-191)

When Croll carried out research in China in 1973, she found that gender was back on the official agenda. Mao Zedong criticized the attitude held by some people of "despising the women's movement because the people holding this concept fail to see its importance in redefining the role of women and the importance of their participation in the revolution". (Croll:1978a:315) Croll has stated that the experiences of the Cultural Revolution showed the Chinese people that the women's movement and the socialist movement were two interdependent movements. For women, the two movements created dual demands and competing claims. During the Cultural Revolution, and at other times, the uneasy alliance between class and gender was resolved by giving priority to class struggle on the grounds that "without the establishment of a new political and economic system there can be no substance to women's liberation." (ibid:331) For Croll the significance of the Cultural Revolution was that it highlighted for Chinese women the fact that socialism does not automatically bring about the emancipation they are looking for, and that they must struggle long and hard for the economic and ideological transformations that are needed for the feminist revolution.

Conclusions - Women in Rural China, 1949 to 1979 Potter and Potter maintain that in rural China between 1949 and 1979,

the "position of women was strengthened and the status of women was improved, by the public recognition of their labour and its reward in workpoints..." (Potter and Potter:1990:256) However, by 1979, the number of women working in agriculture had fallen from the 90 percent participation rate at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward. It was officially recognized in China by the late 1970s that women had not yet reached their full potential. (Croll:1978a:331) For Croll, the essential characteristic of the lives of Chinese rural women in 1987 was that they were lives in transition.

### **3.5 RURAL WOMEN: 1979-1990**

After the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the new leadership announced the reform of China's economy. The new development strategy, based on the Four Modernizations of Agriculture, Industry, Science and Technology, and Defence emphasized the liberalization and decentralization of economic decision-making and management. Agriculture was seen as the key to development since more than 75 percent of the population was living in rural areas. The production responsibility system was introduced, making the farm household the basic unit of economic decision-making for production and consumption. Parcels of farmland were contracted to individual or groups of households for cultivation. After delivery of the agreed quota to the collective, the farm

family could keep the surplus or sell it to the state at a negotiated price or on the free market. In 1978 the Fourth National Women's Federation Congress emphasized the supportive role for women in the Modernization strategy and a renewal of women's identification with their roles in the family.

There has been some concern in socialist-feminist literature about the possible negative effects of the reforms on women. For Andors, the reform program indicates a retreat from the earlier official social and economic goals for women, and a movement away from policies which had begun to redefine women's roles. (Andors:1983:152-153,163-169) Croll and Judd both fear that women may lose some of the independence and control they had achieved in the system of collectivized agriculture. (Croll:1985:107;Judd:1990:26) Finally, one study found that the reforms exacerbated the surplus labour problem, encouraging a large number of rural women to return to the home where "there is no explicit mechanism for crediting their contribution" to production. (Aslanbeigui and Summerfield:1989:344) In order to evaluate the reform period for its contribution or hindrance to women's emancipation, we consider in detail the subjects of labour force participation, the gender division of labour, the family and patriarchy. The single-child family policy is also discussed because of its central importance in the government's modernization drive and its impact on women.

Labour Force Participation: Women in China have one of the world's highest rates of labour force participation - women constitute approximately 37.6 percent of the total work force and 50 percent of the rural work force, which amounts to 180 million rural women workers. (Guan:1992:3) The evidence for rural women's employment is as much anecdotal as statistical, and is perhaps most useful for indicating trends. In the villages Croll visited, "almost all of the peasant women" in 1983 were employed - 55 percent of one commune's labour force were women, and 62 percent of the non-state labour force at another commune were women. (Croll:1985:156,168) Judd reports that in the two Shandong Province villages which she studied in 1986-1988, young women were "invariably employed, in most cases in a village factory, upon leaving school..." and that older, married women were less uniformly employed, often retiring at an early age. (Judd:ibid: 32)

The World Bank has studied economic diversification in rural China and predicted a decline of 18 percent in the agricultural labour force from 1982 to 2000. (World Bank: 1985b:94.table 5.1) The share of rural workers engaged in agriculture is expected to decline sharply in the same period from 94 percent to 55 percent. (ibid:93) In one densely populated area, 54 percent of the rural labour force in 1986 was employed in rural industry and only 46 percent in agriculture. (APDC and ACWF:1987:60) Nee and Stark cite

Chinese labour economists who reported that by 1986 nonagricultural production accounted for 46.9 percent of the total output in rural areas. (Nee and Stark:1989:22) Judd found that in one small village of 140 households in Shandong Province only 14 percent of total recorded work days were agricultural. (Judd:1990:28) As rural China's economy becomes more diversified, women find employment in rural industry and domestic sideline production. Judd points out that rural industry accounted for approximately 20 percent of the rural work force by the mid-1980s. About half of this percentage were women, 37 million women. (ibid:31) Officially encouraged because of low capital investment requirements, domestic sideline production appeals to rural women because of the flexible use of, and control over, their time and the opportunity to earn income from traditional skills. One study showed that in some areas households that specialized in sideline production generated between 55 and 65 percent of the total commodity output value, that 50 percent of the workers were women and that one third of the household businesses were managed by women. (APDC and ACWF:1987:15-17) In Shandong Province in 1987, 42 percent of specialized households were headed by women, accounting for more than 40 percent of the value produced by all specialized households in the province that year. (Judd:ibid:35) A national study by the Women's Federation in 1987 found approximately the same percentages. (Ho:1987:2)

In assessing the gains and losses for women of rural reforms, Ho points out that not only have employment opportunities increased and widened, but also women can now be paid according to their work performed rather than the previous workpoint system which systematically discriminated against them. (ibid:2) On the other hand, there are vast regional differences in employment opportunities for rural women and large numbers of them have joined China's "floating population" seeking urban contract employment. About 42 percent of the non-residents in Beijing in 1990 were women. (China Daily:December 16,1992)

Gender Division of Labour: The changing gender division of labour in rural China depends mostly on local opportunities and varies according to a woman's age and marital status. Where alternative employment opportunities are available for men, women have assumed almost total responsibility for agricultural production. In some areas this has resulted in a new gender division of labour between agricultural and non-agricultural work. Croll reports that on a large grain and dairy commune near Beijing, 88 percent of the fieldworkers were women. In her interviews, Croll was told that the women appreciated the flexibility that fieldwork allowed them in arranging their working day. (Croll: 1985:168) Croll also found that where alternative opportunities do not exist for men, they will stay in agricultural production and women will work at home in various sideline

activities. (ibid:99) Judd discovered that young rural women prefer to do off-farm work. However, they have more limited opportunities than men to find work in rural industries and almost always leave when they get married. Many of the jobs available to them are temporary and unskilled - they almost never have access to skilled and managerial jobs, as young men do. (Judd:1990:33) Croll found that rural industry was a popular source of employment for unmarried women because they usually acquired skills, received their own wages, which were separate from the family and higher than wages for fieldwork, and lived in dormitories where they experienced independence from their families and solidarity with other young women. (Croll:1985:101)

Because modernization policies in rural China stress the importance of science and technology, women's low educational level is a serious disadvantage. According to the 1982 census, there were more than 200 million illiterate people in rural China and 69 percent of them were women. (Beijing Review:"Coping with New Social Problems":1988:58) Only about 20 percent of rural women have a secondary school education. Boys traditionally have had priority for education in rural China, and the household responsibility system encourages girls to drop out of school in order to work. (Ho:1987:3)

The Family: Domestic Work and Power Relations: Davis-Friedmann suggests that "China is one of the most family-

oriented societies in the world" and that the "static nature" of the Chinese family is just beginning to change. (Davis-Friedmann:1983:109) In socialist-feminist literature, the apparent lack of change in the Chinese family is considered to be a central problem. Family reform is topic of a book-length study by Kay Ann Johnson entitled Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China. Her thesis is that family reform is the "uncompleted task" of the socialist revolution in China, since "... the family, and women's relationship to it, remains one of the most traditional features of a predominantly rural Chinese society." (Johnson:1983:215) Johnson argues that the traditional role and structure of the family has been restored rather than reformed. The central issue is that in rural China, the "meaning" of marriage continues to be the "exchange of women", and the structure continues to be patrilocal, reinforcing the traditional attitudes of male superiority and son preference. (ibid:221-224) Potter and Potter provide a more complex analysis of the family in rural China, which in some respects challenges this conventional view of marriage as the exchange of women in the interests of the male kin system. For example, marriage is "unambiguously defined as women's business..." As well, the authors found that in the arrangement of marriage, women create important and socially significant networks of women between villages. (Potter and Potter:1990:205-206) Thus, Johnson's conventional interpre-

tation of the role of Chinese women in marriage and the family overlooks some forms of their empowerment and control in these institutions. This needs further research.

Judd found patrilocal marriage to be a barrier to political activity and leadership and an underlying cause of limited employment opportunities for unmarried women. Although the Women's Federation and the CCP leadership have experimented with intra-village and near-by-village marriage structures, the patrilocal custom continues to dominate in the countryside. (Judd:1989:537-542) Potter and Potter suggest that families without sons may increasingly prefer same-village marriages. (Potter and Potter:1990: 205,263)

An important family-oriented problem for women is the double burden of domestic work which they must do in addition to their work in the labour force. In order to reduce the double burden, the Chinese government has carried out an ideological campaign to encourage men and children to share in domestic chores. Reports suggest that although the situation is slowly changing, women still do most of the domestic work, especially in rural China. (Lu in Morgan:1984:153) In the four-generation family that she lived with, Sheridan found that the youngest daughter-in-law and son shared cooking, cleaning and taking care of their new baby, and were more equal in the decision-making, while the older generation of women bore a heavy burden of work inside and outside the home. (Sheridan and Salaff:1984:234-235) In the

majority of peasant households the hardest workers are the grandmothers who generally retire from social production in order to take care of domestic work, especially child care, and sideline production. (Croll:1983:65)

Another major issue in relation to the role of women in the family is power relations between women and men. The 1950 Marriage Law provided that "husbands and wives may live in harmony, participate to the fullest extent in productive labour and rear united, democratic families." (Croll:1974: 32) Most of the research indicates gradual change in the direction of greater equality. Stacey found that there was a decline in the traditional deferential behaviour shown by rural wives to their husbands - "although the man is the clear head of the family, and a wife is expected to honour her husband's will, his authority over her is less absolute than in the past..." (Stacey:1983:227) Ho cites two rural surveys which indicate that women have more decision-making power within households, although in 10-20 percent of families, men still made all the important decisions. (Ho:1987: 2) Whyte and Parish found that the urban Chinese family was a unique combination of novel trends and traditional values. The direction of change was towards greater gender equality and the emphasis was on maintaining family stability. (Whyte and Parish:1984:226-227)

Patriarchy: Patriarchy is the ideology of male privilege and superiority. It involves the systematic power and

authority of men over women, and the devaluation of women's interests. Patriarchy is a key concept in socialist-feminist analysis. For instance, Stacey develops the main argument that patriarchy and socialism coexist in China because patriarchal power shifted from private to public control, thus reforming rather than eliminating patriarchy. As well, the "organized reforms and material incentives of current rural policy are likely to calcify the structures that sustain rural patriarchy." (Stacey:1983:272)

According to China's Fifth National Congress of Women, a major problem facing Chinese women today is the reappearance of the idea of male superiority. Results of a survey of 1,976 rural people revealed some patriarchal attitudes such as the preference of sons over daughters, the belief that widows should not remarry, that "to keep the house only" is sufficient work for women, and that daughters should be trained for marriage and not for the work place. However, other attitudes were changing for the better, such as the belief in equality between husband and wife, a woman's right to control her income, and the right of young people to choose marriage partners. (APDC and ACWF:1987: 17,18,47,48) One study found that the traditional bias against women in Chinese society shows up in contemporary patriarchal attitudes about the inferiority of women and the superiority of men. The major effects of this bias are increased violence against women (especially female infanticide), the high rate

of female illiteracy, limited employment opportunities for women, and reduced female enrolment in primary and secondary schools. (Aslanbeigui and Summerfield:1989:344)

There is concern that some of the economic reforms are resulting in increased discrimination against women in the labour force. The policy of decentralization of decision-making requires rural enterprises to be more efficient since they are responsible for profit and loss. This has resulted in a reluctance to hire women because of perceived costs such as maternity leave and the double burden which makes women less "efficient" as workers. (Lu in Morgan:1984:152) As well, the household responsibility system has increased the power and authority of the male household head, who now has more control over job allocation, income and family decisions such as education of children. (Aslanbeigui and Summerfield:1989:345-347) Finally, the workload of rural women has increased; they have lost the social, physical and technical advantages of shared work. (Honig and Hershatter: 1988:233-246) Such examples of discrimination against women are based on the belief in the superiority of men and the devaluation of women's needs and interests.

Single-child Family Policy: This policy is acknowledged as far-reaching in its strategic implications for women. (Johnson:1983:226-227) The policy entails a serious challenge to the attitude that males are superior to females, which lies at the heart of son preference. It also has

implications for a reduction in the demands on the mothering role of women, including grandmothers. As well, a campaign organized by the ACWF against female infanticide (which has increased mostly in remote rural areas as a consequence of the Single-Child Family Policy) has been expanded into a general campaign to reduce discrimination against females. (Croll:1985:127,132-134) The 1990 census showed that China's population had reached 1.14 billion, comprising 22 percent of the world and living on 7 percent of the world's arable land. There were 180 million illiterate or semi-illiterate people, and the average annual per capita income was US \$400. (China Today:August 1991:28) The family planning policy is considered by the government to be indispensable in that the success of the modernization reforms depends on population control. The current family planning policy advocates late marriage (around 25, but varying according to local regulations) and one child per family, although minorities and some rural families are allowed to have two, several years apart.(ibid) The program has been successful in reducing population growth rates. Between 1970 and 1990 the average birth rate of a woman of childbearing age decreased by 60 percent and now stands at 2.3 births. The target is less than 2 births by the year 2000. (Women of China:August:1991:14) The single-child family policy has subjected the Chinese people to a massive local and national education campaign. Birth control committees keep detailed

records of each woman's birth control history and make regular propaganda and technical visits, sometimes to women and sometimes to the family together. Two unique features of the program are the use of punitive economic sanctions and the high degree of state intervention in family affairs. (Croll:1985:127) For Stacey, the population policy is a good example of the role of the government as public patriarch, since the interests of society are in conflict with those of individuals and families. (Stacey:1983:232) Moreover, women are often caught in between the demands of a policy which they favour and pressure from their husbands or in-laws to bear more sons. (Croll:1985:134;Stacey:1983:279) Andors criticizes the family planning policy because women had no political input into its formulation although they are most directly responsible for implementing it. (Andors:1983:163) Stacey does see some positive implications for women's role in family structure and gender relations - as parents become more dependent on daughters, this could raise the status of daughters and weaken patrilocal marriage. (Stacey:1983:279) This is a long-term prediction (also supported by Croll and Andors), since a two-child family will likely remain the norm for rural families who depend on family labour.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

Part A is a summary of the socialist-feminist analysis by Maguire, Beneria and Sen, Sen and Grown, and Young, while Part B looks at the major socialist-feminist literature on women in China by Croll, Stacey and Wolf. The chapter is organized around individual scholars rather than the theoretical issues and debates because there is general agreement in the literature on the key concepts and the nuances and arguments are not relevant to the criticism of ethnocentrism in the specific case of China.

### 4.1 PART A SOCIALIST-FEMINIST LITERATURE

1. Pat Maguire The alternative analysis referred to in Pat Maguire's book, Women in Development: An Alternative Analysis (1984), is feminism from a critical perspective which is an alternative to the Women in Development (WID) perspective. Maguire defines feminism in the alternative analysis as "...a theory which analyzes and explains the causes, dynamics and structures of women's oppression. Feminist questions are directed at the causes of the inequality between and among women and men." (Maguire:1984:2) Maguire points out that the causes of inequality are not only gender but also class, race and underdevelopment. A socialist-feminist analysis is concerned with these various conflicting but inter-dependent forms of oppression. Maguire chal-

lenges three stated goals of the WID perspective. First, she argues that to integrate women more efficiently and productively into the development process is to deny women the freedom to define the kind of development they want. Second, on equality with men, Maguire asks - Which men do you want to be equal to? - for of course all men are not equal. Third, the issue for Maguire is not women's status because the concept is too vague and usually understood according to "man" as the norm. Maguire argues that women must be seen as subjects of development and that women must speak for themselves and determine their own needs. The WID goals, Maguire maintains, question neither the structures within which women and men relate to each other nor the nature of the relations between women and men.

The alternative goal, on the other hand, is to increase women's power - not power to dominate others but to control their own lives and to influence the direction of social change. (ibid:21-25) The objective of alternative analysis is to make development more just, not merely more efficient.

Maguire's analysis relies very heavily on empirical research carried out in developing countries. This research has been published in edited books, conference papers, academic journals and UN documents. In order to understand and criticize the WID perspective and to build a socialist feminist analysis, Maguire draws on a broad base of literature from community development, popular education, women's

studies, innovative education, feminism and international development. Given that evaluations of WID efforts by various UN and development agencies acknowledge almost a decade of unsuccessful programs (ibid:21), Maguire's hypothesis is that this failure can be attributed to the theory of social change from which it emerges. This theory is the dominant equilibrium paradigm entailing beliefs about the inherent rationality, goodness and growth tendencies of societies. The goal of planned change, with the assistance of invention, is to correct slight imbalances in order to increase efficiency. Evaluations are made in terms of economic effectiveness and program efficiency. (ibid:20)

Maguire points out that in the "development industry" efforts for Women in Development the emphasis has been on development and not on women. Women have been treated as objects to be targeted in order to improve program (economic) efficiency. Issues of justice and fairness, Maguire demonstrates, intentionally have been left out of the analysis. (ibid:22) The alternative analysis developed by Maguire does not come from the dominant equilibrium paradigm, but rather from a critical theoretical framework. With this framework, critical assumptions are made about the structural inequalities in societies which result in conflicts and struggles while change is explained as attempts to challenge and to transform structural inequalities. Domination and oppression, rather than imbalance, are the focus of analysis while

justice, rather than efficiency, is the criterion for evaluation of development programs. Feminist criticisms from within this framework point out that present economic relations, although profitable for some, exploit women's labour, and that gender relations within the household oppress women. Economic and equity issues must be studied together and not separately. (ibid:20-25)

Maguire devotes one chapter of her book to an evaluation of the development industry's WID effort, first from a liberal feminist perspective and then from a critical feminist perspective. This chapter shows clearly that the two paradigms indeed are two different "windows on reality". The development industry cites difficulties of definition, lack of baseline data for comparison, limited funding and lack of political will as explanations for the failure of WID programs to improve the status of women. The critical perspective, with a focus on justice and power redistribution, reaches a different conclusion and provides a different explanation. Women have not benefited from their increased participation in development because the WID analysis has ignored the various oppressions of gender, race, class and underdevelopment. Women (and men) have not been agents of their own self-defined development.

In summary, the two main themes of Maguire's work are Who speaks for women? and How is the problem defined? Her point of view is that women must speak for themselves. For

Maguire, the problem is unequal relations of power. Solutions must recognize the inter-relatedness of all forms of oppression, including class, gender, race and the hierarchy of development.

2. Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen One of the early socialist feminist analyses of women's role in (economic) development was written by Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen. Two papers, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role in Economic Development: Boserup Revisited" (1981) and "Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Role in Economic Development - Theoretical and Practical Implications" (1982), were based on a workshop which they presented in 1980. Acknowledging the "comprehensive and pioneering effort" of Boserup's book, Woman's Role in Economic Development (1970), Beneria and Sen nevertheless take a critical stance towards Boserup's theoretical framework, modernization, and the neoclassical assumptions which are entailed in that approach. In the earlier paper, Beneria and Sen maintain that modernization theory cannot provide a coherent explanation for women's negative experiences with the development process. They recommend two alternative theoretical concepts, accumulation and reproduction. (Beneria and Sen:1981)

The theory of accumulation analyzes the processes of production motivated by profit and regulated by the market, in which private ownership of resources leads to class differ-

entiation and growing inequalities. In the context of women and development, the theory includes an analysis of the effects of capital accumulation based on gender and class. For example, during the colonialization period, the alienation of peasants from the land as a consequence of the penetration of capitalism resulted in poor women's increased workload and loss of effective control over production. (ibid:284-290)

The second theoretical concept which is needed for an analysis of women's negative experiences with the development process is reproduction. Beneria and Sen discuss the concept of reproduction as a determinant of three aspects of women's lives - their work and gender relations inside the household, their role in the productive labour force, and social control over their sexuality and fertility. Boserup's analysis, they argue, is traditional in that it assumes that women's problems are located outside the household. One implication of Boserup's perspective is that she concludes that education is the solution to ensure women's equal participation in the development process, a conclusion which Beneria and Sen reject. For Beneria and Sen, increasing educational opportunities for women ignores the problems of unemployment for educated women, and the prohibiting factor of the burden of household work. (ibid:290-297)

Although Beneria and Sen conclude that in the long run a radical transformation of society is the only way to eliminate class and gender hierarchies, in the short run a basic needs

strategy is necessary for women. However, they qualify this by pointing out that women must be organized to control the basic needs programs for water provision, electrification, sanitation and health care. (ibid:298)

In their subsequent paper, "Class and Gender Inequalities and Women's Role in Economic Development - Theoretical and Practical Implications", Beneria and Sen elaborate these ideas. They look at three important strategies in the development literature which illustrate the need to understand "the interrelated problems of class exploitation and gender subordination." These are the basic needs approach adopted by the ILO during the 1970's; the land redistribution program in Ethiopia begun in 1975; and socialist development in the Soviet Union, Cuba and China. Because each of these strategies has proved inadequate from the perspective of women, the authors propose a fourth one. This strategy involves the self-organization and mobilization of women (and men) to attack deeply-ingrained prejudices and practices of male privilege. (Beneria and Sen:1982:172)

One interesting condition on this strategy is that it is determined by the "historical circumstances and the form of social and economic transformation of given societies." (ibid:173) Although strategic decisions may vary according to these circumstances, they must be based on feminist analysis which examines the interaction between class and gender in women's lives. In comparison with the authors' earlier

arguments, this paper suggests a deeper understanding of this interaction. For example, the authors argue that class determines the concrete meaning of gender for women and defines the relations among women as well. (ibid:162) Examples are given to illustrate the central impact of class on women's lives. (ibid:158-165) As well, gender relations of power in the domestic sphere affect social relations outside the home.

3. Gita Sen and Caren Grown Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions (1987) is the title of a book which Gita Sen and Caren Grown wrote for the DAWN collective of Third World socialist feminists, a group of development activists and scholars whose objective is to promote alternative development processes which emphasize basic survival needs of the majority of the world's people.

Because the book represents one of the first steps in the search for genuine alternatives for women and development, its formation through cooperative organizations and practices is symbolic. "To build a social order that is just, equitable, and life-affirming for all people, our methods must correspondingly be open and respectful of differences, and must try to break down hierarchies, power, and distrust." (Sen and Grown:1987:10) In the Preamble, Sen and Grown reaffirm and clarify their understanding of feminism in relation to the DAWN project. They suggest that although gender subordination has universal elements which are deeply-ingrained in econ-

omic, political and cultural processes, the issues, goals and strategies of feminism (because it is a political movement) are not universal. (ibid:18,79) Geographical regions, classes, nationalities and races will develop their own political agendas. The authors have summarized three major themes - the combined effects of gender subordination and class oppression, the urgency created by the crises in development and the firm belief in the self-empowerment of poor Third World women for change. For Sen and Grown, gender and class are two related determinants of women's experiences with the development process. In a brilliant and comprehensive analysis of empirical research, Sen and Grown describe the combined effects on women of structures of patriarchy and of capitalism during the colonial era. For poor women, the development process worsened their relative access to resources, incomes and employment; increased their burden of work; and reduced their relative and absolute health, nutritional and educational status. (ibid:28) The four development crises which concern the collective are the crises of food-water-fuel, debt, militarization and reactionary social trends. A large volume of empirical evidence is given to document the form and extent of these crises, their structural causes, and their impact on the lives of Third World women. It is interesting that in their discussion of the food-water-fuel crisis, Sen and Grown define reproduction as "the process by which human beings meet their basic needs and survive from one

day to the next." (ibid:50) They show that women's reproductive work does not necessarily take place within the household. (ibid:57) For very poor women, especially, the theoretical distinction between productive and reproductive work is blurred. Sen and Grown employ a concept of reproduction which is unusual in the socialist-feminist literature in that it does not include issues of sexuality and biological reproduction, nor does it require a strong conceptual distinction between productive and reproductive work. Sen and Grown present an alternative vision for the development process. What is striking is their recognition of women's potential "to mitigate and perhaps even resolve the various crises..." (ibid:77) They have a strong faith in the strength of women organizing for the transformation of themselves and society.

4. Kate Young One characteristic of a theory is that it can be tested; a theory which fails the test of applicability to actual situations is a weak theory indeed. Kate Young's contribution to the socialist feminist development literature consists partly in putting some aspects of the theory to the test of application, and partly in her conceptual analysis.

Regarding the latter point, in her introduction to the UNESCO book, Women and Economic Development, (1988), Young discusses the important conceptual distinction between the condition and the position of women. This division offers a theoretical basis for the socialist feminist criticism of

liberal feminism. Although modernization may have resulted in general improvements in the material conditions of women's lives, their social and economic position relative to men has worsened, Young argues. Moreover, a consideration of women's position in society necessarily entails structural analysis. Empirical data, on the other hand, provide information on the conditions of women's lives. (Young:1988:1-4)

Given this distinction, Young argues further that being clear about the concepts of condition and position helps to understand the conceptual differences between practical gender needs and strategic interests. Practical gender needs are determined by investigating the requirements around women's various roles in society, while strategic interests are understood by analyzing women's subordination to men and theorizing alternatives which are more just.

Regarding our first point, that Young's research can be used to test some of the key arguments in socialist feminist development literature, there are three important questions which Young asks. Who speaks for women? To what extent are the concerns of Third World women reflected in socialist feminist analysis? What are the unresolved theoretical difficulties? Socialist feminist theory maintains that women should speak for themselves. For Young, this is the one principle which cannot be compromised, in all the diversity of women's experiences and needs. The objective of development is the empowerment of people for self-determined action to change

their lives and transform society. One source of empowerment is knowledge. The five country papers (from Ecuador, Italy, Egypt, Togo and China) which comprise the main body of the book show how women create knowledge for self-empowerment. By uncovering women's historical roles, by carrying out surveys and interviews, by learning legal rights, by becoming literate and by organizing for political action, women create knowledge. An important issue in Young's theory is the critical use of knowledge to fundamentally transform unjust social relations. The point is not just research or knowledge creation, but political struggle. Research and knowledge which maintain the status quo of inequalities and injustices are not of any interest. The country papers indicate that when women have organized politically as agents in their own development, they have benefited from change.

Regarding Young's second question, many of the concerns voiced by women in the five country papers in this volume are important issues in socialist feminist development literature. For example, these papers emphasize solidarity among women, even though gender interests are often in conflict with religious, national or other issues and gender consciousness might be relatively undeveloped. An apparently low level of gender consciousness sometimes can be explained by the assumption of rational (in)action in that women are usually acutely aware of the "costs" and "risks" of social change. Consciousness raising, through organized political action and

shared struggle has played a big role for women in each of the countries studied in Young's volume.

The complexity and variety of women's experiences precludes any conclusions about common strategies for change, and highlights the need for empirical, historically-specific research and planning. Moreover, Young argues that this very diversity makes it difficult to construct a gender theory of inequality.

While explanations and strategies for change are diverse, they have in common a general awareness that the focus must be on deep underlying structures. It is interesting that in the country studies, the structural problem is almost never named patriarchy. The paper from Egypt refers to the "patriarchal structures of society" which impose an inferiority on women. This is one of the rare references to patriarchy. Given the heavy emphasis on the concept in socialist feminist literature, including Young's earlier book (1981), it is perplexing that Young does not use the concept at all in her analytic Introduction. In light of arguments in Young's earlier book that socialist-feminist analysis and policy require an explicit recognition of gender subordination, one must wonder why the country studies make only a rare reference to the concept of patriarchy. Is it a concern with ethnocentric connotations? Also conspicuous by its relative absence is reference to issues of sexuality and antagonistic power relations between women and men, two very important themes in

socialist feminist literature. The paper from Ecuador is the only one to mention family problems of physical abuse, sexual shyness and the need to make public the private misery of women in their marriages. Cultural burdens on women of Islam in Egypt, Voodoo in Togo and polygamy in both countries is very briefly mentioned.

In a book which Kate Young edited, entitled Of Marriage and the Market(1981), she argues that the main concern of theoretical analysis is gender relations of power, especially within marriage. Young maintains that although there are individual experiences of gender relations, the universal elements include women's lesser access to resources, sexual freedom and physical mobility, women's greater responsibility for child care and men's privileged command of women's labour. (Young:1981:viii) By analyzing gender relations within marriage, Young's analysis highlights the subordination of women as a consequence of their isolation inside the home and men's control of income as well as of ideas about women's behaviour. (ibid:ix)

The purpose of this book is to demonstrate the weakness of the economistic Marxist argument that in recent history women's subordinate status is defined in terms of their role in productive labour and specifically of women's work being profitable for capital. Young argues that the family is the main social institution which perpetuates gender inequality in that the key to women's subordination is their role in the

family. In this volume, Young's analysis of underlying causes of gender inequalities focuses on gender stereotyping and socialization, ideology, social relations of power, cultural subordination of women as well as power relations in the family. The 1988 volume, in contrast, was commissioned by UNESCO as background information for development planners, national governments and women's organizations wanting to promote women's concerns in development programs. As such, the focus of analysis was on topics seen as involving state planning (such as employment and education).

Two of the essays in Young's edited book, Of Marriage and The Market (1981), which are interesting for their contribution to socialist-feminist literature on development are by Maxine Molyneux, and Dianne Elson and Ruth Pearson. Molyneux looks at the experience of women in various socialist countries in order to discuss the practical and theoretical problems. She compares these countries with their historical situations and with capitalist countries. Her conclusion is that the accomplishments of socialist governments in eliminating the worst conditions of oppression against women are impressive, and yet serious constraints remain. These constraints are practical, theoretical and political. (Molyneux in Young:1981:17) The practical constraints need to be mentioned because conditions of scarcity and underdevelopment of productive forces are a "brake" on social change, including the emancipation of women. However, the theoretical issues are

Molyneux's main concern. For Molyneux, the essential contradiction in orthodox Marxist-Leninist theory is the assumption that participation in production is the means to emancipation for women, combined with the official conservative attitude towards women's "natural" abilities for motherhood and family-oriented roles. (ibid:178) Molyneux develops a feminist critique of this contradiction. She argues that the issue of women's emancipation cannot be reduced to full participation in productive labour. There are other sources of oppression, specifically relations between women and men. As well, psychological and ideological factors affect women's lives. (ibid:179-181) Molyneux also argues that the orthodox assumption that gender-based oppression would naturally disappear along with class-based oppression is faulty because it is based on an inadequate analysis of the link between gender and class. (ibid:178) Molyneux contrasts orthodox socialist theory with socialist-feminist theory in that for feminists there is an explicit gender struggle apart from the class struggle. The central issue is unequal relations of power and privilege between women and men, both socially and personally, and in particular focusing on the nuclear family, marriage and sexuality.

And finally, two additional constraints on the emancipation of women in socialist countries, Molyneux argues, are the productivist bias in socialist economies (because this limits the level of consumption of labour-saving household

goods and services) and the limited participation of women in political activity. Regarding the latter point, about political participation, Elson and Pearson (in Young:1981) maintain that the most important strategy for the emancipation of women is their political organization, on the basis of common experiences of gender subordination, because this develops capacities for self-determination and self-organization. (ibid:163-165) Political organization and activity are important because the conscious cooperation and solidarity which result are longer-lasting than other changes, such as those resulting from state policies, they claim. Elson and Pearson point out that the employment of women in export manufacturing or processing has the potential for organizing women because they are hired for skills or attributes they have as women. The political potential is rarely realized because of patriarchal attitudes and structures. (ibid:165)

Like Molyneux, Elson and Pearson reject the assumption that women's participation in production is a solution to the problem of their subordinate position in society, and argue instead that the process of gender construction needs to be the focus of analysis. (ibid:151) In addition to highlighting the private/public distinction, Elson and Pearson explain how male authority is experienced by young women workers in export processing and manufacturing zones. There are three distinct trends. (ibid:157) First, in Malaysia, multinational corporations intensify traditional forms of patriarchal power by

encouraging traditional prayer, clothing and discipline. Second, while the authority of fathers over daughters may be weakened, the authority of male bosses is strengthened. Young women may become more vulnerable to sexual harrassment as they gain some independence. (ibid:159) Third, some forms of male authority break down completely . For example, some Asian young women escape early marriage by going to work in the factories. But Elson and Pearson point out that modern free-choice marriage is more "free" for men than for women, who become commodified as marriage objects. (ibid:158)

It seems that although paid employment, for example, in export factories, has some potential for increasing women's economic independence, this potential is limited by gender relations of dominance and subordination. Elson and Pearson point out that the purpose of analysis is to clarify the strategic possibilities facing women. (ibid:157) At least women's employment in export factories may enable women to organize as women as a way of developing the capacity for self-determined struggle. (ibid:165) Elson and Pearson believe that for women gender subordination is primary while class exploitation is secondary and derivative. (ibid:164) However, it is not clear how "...the capitalist exploitation of women as wage workers is parasitic upon their subordination as a gender." (ibid:157) This is one of the unsettled questions in socialist-feminist theory - what exactly is the relationship between socialism and feminism?

5. The Class/Gender Debate One of the most important and difficult debates in the socialist- feminist perspective concerns the theoretical relationship between class and gender, between socialism and feminism, or between capitalism and patriarchy. It is a difficult debate because ideologies interfere with clear and creative thinking, and fresh ideas have not been forthcoming. As well, it is a very complex subject. Jaquette notes the "constant tension" for socialist-feminists between their feminist awareness and their acceptance of the materialist core of Marxism. (Jaquette:1982:275) It is an important debate because although Marxist analyses of the role of women in the processes of capital accumulation and revolution have been inadequate from a feminist perspective, the theoretical basis for the complaint has not been fully developed.

Orthodox Marxism subsumes the revolution for women's emancipation under the over-all socialist revolution. Because the oppression of women originated in the ownership by men of private productive property, a revolution which abolishes private property will destroy the material base for women's oppression, allowing it to gradually and "naturally" disappear. However, part of the motivation for socialist-feminists to discuss the theoretical relationship between class and gender is to explain the continuing oppression of women in socialist countries.

One of the first steps in the analysis has been to study

the role of women in the process of capital accumulation in developing countries. Ester Boserup was the first economist to show that women were in many ways affected negatively by economic development which favoured men, relative to women. Boserup's research demonstrated that economic analysis was not by itself sufficient to explain the process of capital accumulation, but that gender analysis was also necessary.

Similarly, the radical feminist position that the gender division is primary (in that all men are motivated, by some sort of male urge or socialization, to dominate women) is generally thought by socialist-feminists to be misguided in that it leads to the "dual spheres" perpetuation of female subordination. (Jaquette:1982:281) Certainly, class, as well as race, religious, ethnic, national and generational divisions cut across gender. For example, in rural China during the decades before 1949, women were considered to have revolutionary potential because of their oppression, but younger women were thought to be more "revolutionary" and older women more "conservative". (Croll: 1978a:138)

In Lydia Sargent's book, Women and Revolution (1981), Heidi Hartmann characterizes the relationship between gender and class as an "unhappy marriage" between two separate and inter-related sets of social relations, each with a material base and a dynamic. (Sargent:1981:Chapter One) Hartmann rejects the notion that there is a single system which determines both gender and class relations. According to

Hartmann, most attempts to unify gender and class, according to Hartmann, imply a necessary connection between socialism and feminism, or between capitalism and patriarchy. For example, Iris Young in the same volume, posits "patriarchal capitalism" as a single system in which a capitalist patriarchal gender division of labour is the basic analytic concept. (ibid:62-63) Young argues that the labour of women occupies a central place in any system of production, and that sexual hierarchy is a crucial element in any system of domination. (ibid:49-50) For Young, patriarchal capitalism is historically necessary; Hartmann maintains that it is a historical accident. (ibid:365)

Another single system analysis is by Eisenstein who suggests the concept of "women as class" in capitalist patriarchy, the theoretical link being made by hierarchy. In her view, Marxist definitions of alienation and revolutionary consciousness can be used to explain women's oppression and emancipation. (Jaquette:1982:276)

Judith Stacey's analysis of the Chinese revolution, Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China (1983), would lend support to Hartmann's position that a socialist revolution is not inherently anti-patriarchal. Stacey develops the thesis that because the Communist leadership was ambiguous and/or indifferent towards the women's revolution, "patriarchal socialism" was established in rural China. Thus, for Stacey there is no necessary connection between patriarchy

and capitalism or feminism and socialism.

Hartmann, along with many other socialist-feminist theorists, favours a dual systems approach rather than a single system uniting class and gender. The main difficulty with this position is to establish the precise theoretical relationship. Generally speaking, socialist-feminists reject the idea of a hierarchical relationship, in which either class or gender is determined by or derived from or the offspring of, the other, in which one category is primary. For example, the classical Marxist analysis which subordinates the gender struggle to the class struggle and postulates that gender analysis can be derived from class analysis is clearly rejected as being inadequate. As well, the radical feminist position represented by Shulamith Fire-stone's deterministic view that biology is destiny does not have wide acceptance. (Jaquette:1982:276) Also, Hartmann rejects the thesis that patriarchy is the basis of all hierarchy. (Hartmann in Sargent:1981:371)

Generally speaking, socialist countries have been remarkably successful in eliminating the worst forms of class oppression for all people, women included. (Molyneux in Young:1981:167) In China, basic needs for food security, shelter, health care, literacy and employment have been met for the vast majority, including women. Nevertheless, even when private productive property has been eliminated, discrimination by gender persists: in patrilocal marriage, the gender division of labour, male-dominated political leader-

ship, and the double burden of paid and unpaid work. From a socialist-feminist perspective, women's lives are affected by class relations as well as by gender relations, and yet, the socialist-feminist theory has to date been unable to postulate the necessary theoretical connection between gender and class, which can explain the continued subordination of women in socialist countries. In an article addressing this question, "Socialist Feminist Theory: The Issue of Revolution", Eileen Saunders (1983) uses the example of women's experiences in the Chinese revolution to show that a distinction must be made between the revolutionary process of seizing power and the post-revolutionary consolidation of the new state apparatus. (Saunders:1983:65) During the former phase in China, women were mobilized as necessary participants in the revolution, although certain 'boundaries of patriarchy' were respected by the Communist leadership. (ibid:79) During the latter phase, the new government's priorities were economic growth and the provision of basic services to the people. Because women's interests were not identified as important, a "pattern" of fluctuating policies towards women was established. The determining factor was the lack of commitment on the part of the Party leadership. Although Saunders seems to have adopted a particular totalitarian view of Chinese leadership which has been challenged by recent analyses (Nee and Stark:1989:3-8; Whyte and Parish: 1989:226), her perception of the discontinuity between ideology and praxis, between prerevolutionary

activity and postrevolutionary construction is useful. Saunders questions the emphasis in socialist-feminist literature on China with the "unfulfilled promise" of socialism, because it is based on an implicit acceptance of the "linear rationality of socialist revolution". (ibid:63) A shift away from this belief could weaken the political motivation of much of the class/gender debate, creating an opportunity for feminists to study socialism as it actually exists.

Molyneux argues that it is difficult to establish a necessary unity between socialism and feminism - she sees the "association" as an "uneasy alliance" based on both principle and necessity. (Molyneux in Young:1981:167-170) The principle referred to is socialism's "historical commitment to, and emphasis on, the need to emancipate women as part of its general endorsement of social equality". (ibid: 168) The necessity is the economic and social development entailed in the social transformation resulting from the socialist revolution. (ibid:167) The alliance is uneasy because the record of achievement is uneven. (ibid:168)

Molyneux and Saunders both stress the need to distinguish between socialist theory and the practical conditions which exist in different historical contexts. The theoretical link between socialism and feminism may be that the principles of equality and justice entailed in the broadest definitions of both theories are mutually inclusive. To establish the practical seems to be problematic, but to understand that the

need for analysis is on that level is a step in the right direction.

#### 4.2 SOCIALIST-FEMINIST LITERATURE ON CHINA

1. Elisabeth Croll A study of the changing lives of women in rural China could almost begin and end with Elisabeth Croll. Her research between 1974 and 1989 includes at least five books, one booklet, four UN documents, seven scholarly papers and four chapters in edited volumes. Croll's work is descriptive, analytic and critical, and is based on secondary published material as well as two short visits to China in the 1970's and two longer working trips in the 1980's. Five general areas of interest in Croll's work are socialist feminist theory, production and reproduction, rural development, government policies and the Chinese women's movement. Socialist Feminist Theory: Croll's first book, Feminism and Socialism in China (1978a), grapples with the difficult theoretical question of the relationship between feminism and socialism in China and of the implications of China's mixed experiences with that relationship. After 1949, the official position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held that class struggle was the motivating force behind the revolution, and that the special oppression of women required separate women's organizations within the larger revolution. With the twists and turns of China's development process during the next 30 years, the subject of this relationship was often a matter of

public debate at the national and local levels. (Croll: 1978a:Chapters 10 and 11) Generally speaking, however, the CCP stressed the mutual interdependence of the two movements, premised on the necessity of socialism for the goals of the women's movement and the need for women to create their separate struggle. (ibid:330) The relationship was summed up in the following way - there would be no redefinition of women's roles without a socialist revolution, and no transition to socialism unless women fully participated in the revolutionary process. (ibid:77) In a recent study prepared for the International Labour Office, Women and Rural Development in China. Croll maintains that "(t)he central problem in China and elsewhere has been analysing and understanding the connections between the two sets of broader and gender-specific policies. Underlying rural development programmes in China is the assumption that the two sets of policies are in harmony and both working toward the same goals." (Croll: 1985:152)

**Rural Development:** Much of Croll's scholarly work specifically concerns rural women. After 1949, the CCP believed that the participation of women was essential in order to carry out the strategy of expanding agricultural production and diversifying the rural economy. Equally important, participation in social production was assumed to be the most important condition for women's emancipation, giving women control over an income and the resulting confidence, power and

authority in the home and society. Croll (1985) maintains that for 25 years the Chinese government implemented a "comprehensive and integrated programme" for women's emancipation. She calls China unique in the world for the conscious attention paid to the roles of women in development and for the accomplishments achieved.

However, many problems were encountered in carrying out this ambitious program. For example, the reorganization of the relations of production in rural China did not extend to household production and consumption activities, thereby leaving intact domestic relations and kinship structures which perpetuate women's subordination. As well, an ideology which belittles women proved to be very resistant to change in rural China.

Croll believes that collectivized agricultural production offered several obvious advantages for women. One, gradually learning new skills and participating in new activities, women moved from an auxiliary to a main force in agricultural production. Two, for the first time, peasant women were paid for their work which thus became visible and socially acknowledged. Three, special laws for the protection of women at work were necessary in the beginning. Four, the communes allowed for the provision of nurseries, day care centers, dining rooms and other services; for various reasons not fully understood (Croll:1983a:7) they were abolished, and the sharing of domestic chores between women and men was promoted as the

solution. Five, rural women participated in political activity for the first time. (Croll:1985:Chapter 3)

**Government Policies, Implications for Women:** In Croll's analysis there are two general categories of policies which concern women - overall social and economic policies and gender-specific policies. Croll argues that the former are premised on the mistaken assumption that if they are good for China then they are also good for women. Although these policies do affect women's lives, Croll argues, they lack an analysis of their effect on women. Regarding the gender-specific policies, Croll maintains that the fundamental problem is that they are assumed to have ideological causes and explanations while economic constraints are ignored. (Croll:1983a:128-129)

Before 1980, for instance, the mobilization of rural women for agricultural production was assumed to be necessary for the socialist revolution and for women's emancipation. What was not understood, Croll points out, was the degree to which the success of the socialist revolution depended on the intensification of women's labour. In addition, the gender-specific policies designed to facilitate women's participation in collectivized agricultural production (by providing nurseries and day care centers, for example) were on the whole unsuccessful, but not only for the ideological reasons given by the government. Other causes, Croll insists, can be found in economic policies emphasizing production and accumulation,

and in social policies encouraging patrilocal marriage structures. Ultimately, it was the government's failure to understand the relationships between the three sectors of the rural economy (collective, private and domestic) and the increased value placed on women's labour resources which explain the limited successes of the women's revolution during the first 30 years. (ibid:8-14)

**Production and Reproduction:** Croll argues that certain modernization reforms have created contradictory demands on rural households. On the one hand, the household responsibility system and the expansion of domestic sidelines place greater value on household labour resources, especially those of women. On the other hand, the single-child family policy requires most rural families to have only one child, or at the most two children. Croll maintains that the government is aware of this contradiction, and nevertheless insists on the implementation of the single-child family policy because of its central importance to overall economic goals of modernization. "At the national level this incorporation of production and reproduction in national economic plans is one of the most significant new features of China's present development plans." (Croll:1983b:468)

Although the contradictions between production and reproduction are now explicitly recognized at the national level, they have existed for women since the early years of the socialist revolution when women were mobilized for

agricultural production. At that time, women's primary role in household reproductive functions intensified their workload and limited their participation in agricultural production. Although the government assumed that the causes of women's double burden had ideological roots in traditional ideas about women's inferiority and proper roles for women, Croll points out that economic policies having to do with national and local allocation of scarce resources also explain the persistence of the double burden. (Croll: 1983a:15)

**The Women's Movement:** One of Croll's consistent interests has been the Chinese women's movement and its relationship with the socialist movement. Although this latter topic was periodically a matter for debate within the Chinese women's movement, generally speaking the relationship was believed to be one of interdependence: the function of the women's movement was to raise women's consciousness both as members of a class and as women. However, whenever there was conflict, class struggle was to receive priority. (Croll in Caplan and Bujra:1978:64-71)

The CCP consistently maintained the strong position that the emancipation of women was a legitimate area for struggle and was necessary for the socialist revolution, and that the class struggle was a priority. (ibid:69) Croll's research concludes that the CCP took the question of the women's revolution seriously, actively encouraging women to speak and act for themselves to redefine their position in society.

(ibid:47,52,62) On the theoretical question of the relationship between women's solidarity groups and women's emancipation, two key concepts can be identified in Croll's analysis - empowerment and consciousness raising. During the early years of the revolution especially, women's solidarity groups were an important vehicle for challenging the traditional balance of power in the villages. (Croll: 1978b:146) Croll points out that consciousness raising was the primary method used to overcome the very difficult ideological constraints on women's full participation in social life. The campaign to criticize Confucius is a good example of the importance of consciousness raising among women. However, consciousness raising was not confined to occasional special campaigns but comprised an essential component of the women's movement program. (ibid:149)

An important political issue for Croll, especially in light of the dominant role of the CCP in the organizations including the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) is the extent to which women have spoken and acted on their own behalf. Croll's position is that since the 1983 Fifth Congress of Women, the ACWF has assumed a more active stance towards women's interests. Increased violence against women, due in part to an intensified preference for sons, has given the ACWF a legitimation as "...defender and protector of women to a degree not hitherto possible." (Croll:1985:144-146) Although more radical activity may be a relatively new trend for the

ACWF, Croll's research documents many examples of women during the socialist and feminist revolutions organizing and acting on their own behalf, sometimes under very oppressive conditions. (see Croll in Caplan and Bujra: 1978:62,68,72 and Croll:1978b:142,147,153) Croll does not gloss over the very real limits to women's emancipation in rural China, including the lack of political power above the level of village associations. However, she attributes the constraints on women's full participation in society to several factors, including the incomplete transformation of relations of production, lack of material resources in a poor and developing country, and most significantly the experimentation and adjustments of a new socialist country learning as it goes.

2. Judith Stacey Stacey's analysis focuses on the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese peasant family. She develops the theory that the private patriarchy of the traditional peasant family has been transformed into the public patriarchy of the CCP leadership. In Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China (1983), Stacey makes a thorough analysis of the Confucian family system, the women's revolution, and the peasant revolution. The research, Stacey herself admits, suffers from the serious shortcoming of depending on second- and third-hand evidence. However, it seems that she has chosen "...the best of relevant works by Chinese specialists..." (Stacey:1983:14) Her argument is that

the Chinese peasant family as an active agent in the revolution was able to direct the outcome of the revolution in such a way that the original goals regarding women's emancipation were compromised and that the revolution failed to emancipate women. The theoretical framework for her analysis is developed from an exploration of three central concepts - peasant family, feminism and agrarian revolution.

**Family Theory:** In discussing family theory, Stacey first describes the crisis in pre-revolutionary rural China by looking at particular features of the Confucian rural family system and ideology, especially as these contributed to that crisis, with particular reference to the lives of women. What is relevant is Stacey's analysis of how the traditional rural Chinese family was intimately connected to the economy and society. Indeed, Stacey argues, they constituted an indivisible whole. (ibid:26) The Confucian family farm system, based on small private, inherited land holdings and family labour, was the basic mode of production and consumption in traditional China. However, there existed some serious contradictions within the rural family system and its Confucian framework - the ideal of the large family with many sons to inherit land caused population and land-use pressures as increasingly fragmented farms could not support a large family. This situation, combined with exploitative rural class relations and other factors, contributed to the pre-revolutionary crisis in rural China. Women were the most disadvan-

taged in the Confucian family system and ideology, Stacey points out. Absolutely subordinate to men, women occupied the lowest positions in the Confucian hierarchy. Although there were also important class divisions, the position of women was invariably at the bottom. Social structures such as patrilocal marriage and the gender division of labour reinforced women's subordinate status.

The social and economic crisis in pre-revolutionary China was also a crisis in the rural family system. The family crisis (of survival and legitimacy) created a desire in the peasants for stability, so that when the Communists offered them a socialist revolution, the peasants "reached backward" to the Confucian ideal of a secure and harmonious farm family economy. Stacey maintains that the CCP was able to understand the peasants' desires because of their close relationship during the early decades of People's War in rural China. Responding to the desires of the peasants, the CCP compromised their original radical strategies, especially those intending to liberate women. Stacey argues that land reform increased family security and strengthened patriarchy since patriarchal privilege was "redistributed". (ibid:224) For instance, in pre-revolutionary China, a large number of peasant men were too poor to get married, because of the costs of bride price and marriage feasts. With land reform, more young men had access to social benefits, including a wife. In this way, the New Democratic Patriarchy was established, lasting until about

1953. This is Stacey's thesis. She claims that although the restoration of patriarchy was unintentional (ibid:216), it had far-reaching and negative consequences for the revolution's feminist goals.

Following the collectivization of agricultural production the basic principles and policies of the new democratic patriarchy were strengthened as a result of increased economic and social security, family-based subsistence production, and family-based accounting within the collective. Stacey argues that the period from the mid-1950s until 1976 witnessed the development of Patriarchal Socialism, characterized by increased family-based production activities, patrilocal marriage, patrilineal inheritance and the gender division of labour. (ibid:217-223) She concludes her analysis of the revolution in China's rural family with a discussion of modernization trends since 1979. A return to family-based agricultural production implies the strengthening of male kinship groups and increased authority of male heads of household. Stacey suggests as well that the single-child family policy has serious implications for family structure, especially regarding social welfare for older people and the status of daughters.

**Feminist Theory:** The second major area of interest for Stacey, after family theory, is feminist theory. She anticipates that her analysis of the apparent failure of the Chinese Communist revolution to liberate women will advance the

feminist debate regarding the relationship between women's emancipation and mode of production. Stacey maintains that Marxist theory is unable to account for the continued oppression of women under a socialist mode of production because by focusing on social production, Marxists overlook the important role of the family in the economy. Feminist theory has paid more attention to the role of the family and developed the concept of a sex-gender system, especially in relation to women's reproductive work, to explain the continuing oppression of women in socialist countries. In feminist theory, there is an ongoing debate concerning the relation between sex-gender system and mode of production - the class/gender debate. Stacey rejects the idea of an autonomous sex-gender system, the dual systems approach, on the grounds that such an idea encourages the theoretical separation of gender and the economy. Stacey's viewpoint is that the sex-gender system and the economy are integrated in important ways, in a relationship of "relative autonomy". She claims that her research, as an example of feminist historical materialist analysis, is useful for indicating some of the ways in which sex-gender system and mode of production are, in fact, integrated. To place her analysis in an historical context, Stacey shows how traditional Chinese society was one of the most patriarchal, and Chinese women were among the most oppressed in the world. According to Confucian ideology, women were subordinate to fathers when young, husbands when married,

and sons when old. Their duties were to obey, to serve and to bear sons for the continuation of the family name. (ibid:38-52)

During the few decades which preceeded the Communist revolution in China, women were the most downtrodden of all people. According to population sex-ratio statistics, men outnumbered women on a continual basis: women were less likely than men to survive to adulthood because of female infanticide or neglect, and death by starvation, suicide, natural disasters, war and overwork. (ibid:89-97,106)

Given this Confucian heritage and the social conditions prevalent in pre-revolutionary China, the CCP understood that Chinese women had tremendous revolutionary potential. (ibid:255) Stacey points out that the CPP leaders had been feminists in urban China during the May Fourth Era before they were Marxists; consequently they were sensitive to women's needs and dedicated to the feminist cause. (ibid: 105,255) Stacey argues that from a radical beginning, the CPP continuously adjusted its feminist goals and strategies to accommodate the rural patriarchal ideology and family structure. For example, the Provisional Constitution of 1931 contained marriage regulations which were more radical than the two Marriage Laws of 1950 and 1981. (ibid:163,177,276) In Stacey's view, the CCP became a constraint on revolutionary strategies for women. (ibid:246) The social and economic reforms of the current post-Mao reform era strengthen the patriarchal

elements of the rural family, especially private, family-based agricultural and sideline production, the gender division of labour and patrilocal marriage. (ibid:220) Stacey claims that a new class has been created - public patriarchs (ibid:193), with CCP leaders assuming the paternal role. The essential features of public patriarchy are the formal subordination of mass organizations, including the All-China Women's Federation, to the CCP, and state supervision over personal lives. (ibid:227-235)

**Peasant Revolution:** Stacey's third interest, along with family and feminist theories, is peasant revolution, and especially the relationship between feminism and peasant revolution. Based on her research, Stacey believes that feminism and peasant revolution are incompatible. (ibid:266)

As a socialist-feminist, Stacey is challenged by the classical Marxist assumption that peasants are incapable of revolutionary activity, for which the case of China gives contrary evidence. To account for this evidence, Stacey argues for an expanded version of the "little tradition" analysis of conventional wisdom which focuses on the traditional culture and moral economy of peasants who "reach backward toward revolution" to restore traditional subsistence, security and morality. (ibid:10-13,254) Stacey argues that an analysis including family and feminist theories provides a different perspective which reveals "...painful contradictions in the relationship between traditional cultures and progressive

social action." (ibid:12) Stacey develops her argument from an historical summary of the contradictions experienced by peasants in pre-revolutionary China. For example, the Confucian family system idealized a family life which was increasingly unavailable to peasants, creating a "reservoir of dissatisfaction". (ibid:60-61) As well, certain features of the Confucian family system contributed to endemic agrarian crisis which eventually became a revolution - high population growth rates and partible inheritance causing pressure on the land, for example. (ibid:63) And finally, Stacey reminds us that in traditional China, the family, the economy and the society were indivisible, so that family crisis was social crisis. In evaluating the likelihood of a peasant revolution providing suitable conditions for the emancipation of women, Stacey believes that the prospects are unlikely. In the case of China, although the peasant revolution created new organizations for the family, economy and society, their basis in patriarchal authority was not challenged, but was further strengthened. (ibid:217) Stacey argues that socialism in rural China has been compatible with a patriarchal sex-gender system because the family solidarity which was restored by the revolution has acted as a constraint on the development of a feminist consciousness. (ibid:266)

**3. Margery Wolf** Margery Wolf's research is interesting for several reasons. First, her analysis is innovative. In 1975,

she published Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan, in which she developed her concept of the "uterine family" to explain the emotional bonding which young mothers create with their sons. (Wolf:1975:32-41) The mothers' motivation was to escape the loneliness and powerlessness inherent in their position as new members of their husband's family. As well, a woman's uterine family, based as it is on the sentiments and loyalties between mother and son, would provide her with security in old age. (ibid:36) Wolf compares her concept of the uterine family with its male-centered counterpart - a patrilineal descent line. They differ in three ways. The system of patrilineal descent forms part of a male-defined ideology which excludes women, is formalized with rules (such as a taboo on marriage between cousins) and is public. The uterine family, in contrast, is not part of an ideology, has no formal structure and no public existence. (ibid)

A second interesting aspect of Wolf's research is her "style", which is more personal and descriptive, as well as analytic. Her work is enjoyable to read because it is rich with details of daily living. For her book, Revolution Postponed, Women in Contemporary China (1985), Wolf collected research data from interviews with 300 women in two cities and four communes in China in 1980. In Chapter Two of the book, Wolf describes some of her experiences with doing this research. The chapter is entitled "Speaking Bitterness: Doing Research in the People's Republic". Wolf complains about

bureaucratic restrictions on her mobility, a casual attitude to statistics and oblique answers to interview questions. She stresses the need for researchers to be politically sensitive to local conditions - such as the conservative and highly political leadership of Shandong Province.

Wolf found that her research in the People's Republic of China strengthened her admiration of Chinese women, especially their "capacity to force aside the multiple obstacles of language, illiteracy, fear, cultural misunderstandings, and political difference to tell me something about themselves and their lives." (Wolf:1985:47) Wolf discovered that her many pages of notes could not easily be analyzed statistically. Consequently, her text contains more quotes than tables, and she cautions her readers against generalizing to other parts of China. Finally, Wolf's work is interesting because although she has worked in China and has a profound respect for the Chinese women whom she has met, it nevertheless seems that Wolf cannot refrain from "preaching", in Surendra Patel's sense of judging other countries by one's own standards. (classroom seminar, 1993). Consequently, Revolution Postponed is useful for studying ethnocentrism in socialist-feminist theory.

Wolf's topics are sex-role socialization of children, women's labour force participation, marriage, the family and domestic relations, and the birth limitation program. The thesis which Wolf develops is that the revolution to emancipate women in Communist China consistently has been subordi-

nated to larger socialist revolutionary goals. Women's issues were always secondary and were not allowed to "interfere" with other programs, such as mobilization for production. Women's programs were relegated to secondary status with less funding and planning. For example, in the 1940s, women were mobilized for production during the Anti-Japanese War and Civil War against the Guomindang. Wolf argues that this mobilization represented a setting aside of women's special interests, and the establishment of a pattern of subordinating women which "continues to hamper the struggle of Chinese women for equality even today." (Wolf: 1985:15)

This pattern was repeated in 1950 when the Marriage Law and agrarian reform were introduced almost simultaneously. Wolf maintains that marriage reform received much less attention and support from CCP leaders than land reform. Although some government officials spoke out against the numbers of women committing suicide because of rejected divorce applications, the more conservative leaders and village cadres warned against letting women's "special problems" interfere with the important land reform work. Wolf argues that the CCP was more concerned with destroying the power of the feudal lineage system, and ignored the more difficult system of patriarchy. (ibid:145)

The Great Leap Forward witnessed the first real challenge to patriarchy (ibid:22) as the communes set up child care facilities, kitchens and mending centers. However, a three-

year drought, combined with inadequate central planning and popular resistance to socialized household services brought to an end the experiment with mobilizing women for collective agricultural production. Likewise, the benefits for women of the Cultural Revolution and the Anti-Confucius Campaign were also "negligible". (ibid:25) Wolf bases this conclusion on the attitudes toward the "natural" superiority of men revealed in her interview questionnaires collected in 1980.

Wolf's hypothesis is clearly stated - that the women's revolution consistently has been subordinated to the socialist revolution - and she provides many useful insights into the lives of women in China today. For example, she points out an interesting fact about the relation of rural women to collective agricultural production - their ambivalence. Wolf attributes this attitude to the division of labour and the workpoint system which discriminate against women, especially in relation to women's primary responsibility for household work. (ibid:106) Interestingly, Wolf disagrees with some researchers in her belief that, on the whole, collective agricultural production is economically disadvantageous for women, compared with sideline production. (ibid:104)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Potter and Potter found in the brigade which they studied that women's collective work in the team enhanced their status and independence, economically, socially and politically. Women's position relative to men was somewhat improved, although not equal. Because women did not control their income, their independence was limited. (Potter and Potter:1990:126)

Wolf cites data from 1978 which estimated that only one-third of rural women worked full-time in agriculture, while two-thirds worked part-time. This is in striking contrast with urban women, aged 20-49, of whom 90% were in the labour force. (ibid:80) Wolf notes that urban women identify very strongly with their role in the labour force. (ibid:109) On the other hand, Wolf's research revealed that rural women were deeply satisfied with their primary roles as wives, mothers and caretakers of the home. (ibid:110) Wolf noticed that the identification of rural women with the home was so strong that sideline production (especially raising pigs and growing vegetables) and part-time fieldwork were considered to be extensions of household-based work. (ibid:106,139) Sideline activities in some cases produced up to half of the family income. (ibid:191) One reason why rural women, especially married women, were satisfied with their work and family roles was that they are able to self-manage the flexibility of their work - of arranging work schedules around child care demands and of selling off some produce whenever they needed some money. (ibid:110)

Urban women, in comparison, had more role conflict: they worked full-time in the marketplace, for eight hours six days each week, and experienced a sense of failure when family responsibilities required their primary attention. (ibid:139) Rural/urban differences is a common theme in Wolf's analysis. In many instances, rural/urban differences "are more compel-

ling" than gender differences. (ibid:150, 117,242-243) For example, the uterine family which Wolf originally conceptualized in Taiwan (see above), has disappeared in urban China "because the need for it has disappeared." (ibid:207) In their senior years, urban women either have a pension from work or else are cared for by the state. As well, urban mothers are doing "considerably less of the caretaking than mothers did in previous generations", and their single child is spoiled by everyone. (ibid) Attitudes towards daughters have changed substantially in the cities (ibid:125,210) although in rural China parents hesitate to educate their daughters and would not consider living with a daughter in old age - only with a daughter-in-law! (ibid:190,197)

Wolf discovered an interesting belief among rural women that women are smarter and more capable than men. Wolf attributes this belief to a process of masculine demystification which has begun in rural China, as well as to a traditional subversiveness which Wolf has observed in rural Chinese women, in their response to a male-dominated society (ibid:33,137,206), and the apparent incompetence of men in domestic affairs. (ibid:137-8) In comparison, almost all of the urban respondents said that men are smarter than women. (ibid:132,table 12)

These examples of rural/urban differences are only a few of the many that Wolf discusses in her research analysis. Another category of differences which is significant for women

(and men) in China is generation-based differences in power and authority. Just as patriarchy is the ideological basis of the subordination of women in China, filial piety is the basis in traditional Confucian ideology for the power and authority of the older generation over younger family members. (ibid:205) In traditional China, one of the sources of parental power was control over family income and marriage, (ibid:162) and to a great extent that control has been weakened in the cities much more than in the countryside. (ibid:163) In the cities, daughters, but not sons, generally turn over their income to the family, usually the mother, in Wolf's small sample. (ibid:210) Rural adult sons and daughters do not receive their own pay for collective agricultural production - it is given to the head of the household, the father. (ibid:190) Moreover, young rural women are not likely to have any say in what work they will do - this is decided on the basis of a division of labour based on generation as well as gender. (ibid:191)

Regarding marriage, Wolf points out that the 1950 Marriage Law mandated free choice marriage which was aimed at "destroying the authority of the extended, multi-generation unit" and the male lineage system. (ibid:144-5) Only about half of Wolf's female sample in rural China in 1981 exercised autonomy in choosing their husband. (ibid: 171) However, Wolf cautions that because to a very large extent rural China is a sex-segregated society, western criticisms of

Chinese customs regarding arranged marriage may be ethnocentric, in that these customs may be less oppressive than we presume. (ibid:172) In Wolf's urban sample, the young people had more say but many parents were "deeply involved in the matches finally made." (ibid:154) Urban young people were more dependent on the state for permission to marry and get an apartment, usually through the work units of the young people, while rural parents usually provided the goods and money needed for a wedding. (ibid:174,181)

One indication of changing power relations between generations is the nature of contemporary urban mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships. Wolf discovered that on the one hand, power struggles continue to define that relationship. (ibid:214) On the other hand, urban daughters-in-law earn considerable respect and status because of their labour force participation, and mothers-in-law (or mothers) often help the younger generation by providing much-needed child care. (ibid:215) Indeed, the 1981 Marriage Law extended the requirement of mutual obligation between parents and children to include both maternal and paternal grandparents. (ibid:208) In rural China, the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship is primarily a division of labour: the younger women work in the fields and the older women work in the home, including sideline production. (ibid:228) Their quarrels are also power struggles, generally battles of will over objects, chores or status makers. (ibid:230)

In conclusion, what is striking about Wolf's analysis is its complexity. Gender relations of power are a central focus for analysis, but other important determinants of the conditions of a women's life and her position in the family and society include rural/urban differences and generational relations of power and authority. Scholars interested in the changing lives of women in China can find Wolf's research interesting, without necessarily agreeing with her hypothesis, expressed in the book's title, that the women's revolution in China has been postponed. On the contrary, Wolf's evidence seems to suggest that the continued emancipation of women is central to life in China.

## CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATION

As discussed in Chapter Two, ethnocentrism is the mistaken assumption that one's worldview, which includes deeply-held values and beliefs, is shared by people in other societies. Some development theorists, such as Hettne (1990) and Maguire(1984) have argued that ethnocentric assumptions of the dominant modernization paradigm have contributed to the cultural colonialization of developing countries by the west. In the case of China, which experiences very little cultural similarity or interaction with the west, it is especially important to analyze ethnocentric assumptions in western theories and explanations. Ethnocentrism has been a concern in feminist development analysis since Boserup (1970) and the 1975 United Nations Conference on Equality, Development and Peace. Many researchers have questioned whether fundamental western feminist assumptions about the subordinate position of women are ethnocentric because they are derived from western culture. (Brydon and Chant:1989: 7,62-67) In China western feminist ideas had some popularity during the urban May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the 1920s, but since that time feminism has assumed a particularly Chinese character - integrated into the socialist movement as both a separate and a shared struggle. (Croll:1978a:87, 137,185) The relationship between feminism and socialism has been complicated and experimental (ibid:331ff), and unique in the world. To a certain extent,

socialist-feminist analysis of the lives of women in China is based on western experiences, beliefs and values, which cannot be assumed to be universal. There are three general topics under which the criticism of ethnocentrism in socialist-feminist analysis may be explored - issues of sexuality, political issues and socio-economic issues.

### 5.1 ISSUES OF SEXUALITY

Experiences and meaning of sexuality are culturally-defined rather than universal. Western feminist ideas about sexuality have been influenced by a liberal philosophical tradition (in which the individual's rights and freedoms are paramount), Freudian psychology and the sexual revolution of the 60s and 70s. In contrast, Chinese attitudes towards sexuality have been (and are) conditioned by Confucian philosophical and ethical ideas (about mutual responsibility, duty and social propriety) and the Communist revolution requiring sexual restraint.

The criticism of ethnocentrism in the area of sexuality is based on a consideration of these different philosophical and social contexts. Issues which are identified as central to the socialist-feminist theory of development either are not important in China or else are experienced differently and have a different meaning. The issues which have been important in China, such as concubinage and footbirding, are ignored in socialist-feminist analysis. As well, the potential "liberat-

ing" effects on women of living in a relatively conservative sexual environment is not an idea which is admitted for consideration.

Sexuality is a central concept in socialist-feminist theory in several ways - the sexual oppression of women and control of women's mobility, the right of women to make decisions about their own fertility (for example through contraception and abortion), marriage and gender-specific role typing. Young, whose work has been very influential in the formation of a socialist-feminist theory of development, analyzes the theoretical framework within which the needs of women in developing countries can be identified. She argues that this framework presumes that the oppression and subordination of women are determined by the gender division of labour and the social organization of sexuality and procreation. Although forms of women's oppression vary according to historical and cultural conditions, the division of labour and sexuality are fundamental (i.e. universal) units of analysis. Women are denied control over their own sexuality and fertility while their autonomy and freedom of action are limited. (Young:1988:4)

Beneria and Sen also emphasize sexuality and fertility. They insist that liberal and Marxist analyses which view women's productive role in economic and social activities as the solution to women's subordination are incomplete. An analysis of women's reproductive role inside the home also is

needed. (Beneria and Sen:1982:165) This analysis includes a discussion of how the controls exercised over women's sexuality and fertility limit women's mobility and concentrate their activities in the domestic sphere. Beneria and Sen point out that an emphasis on reproduction, including sexuality and reproductive freedom, mothering and domestic labour, makes gender relations of power a focal point of analysis. (ibid:166)

Molyneux is another major socialist-feminist theorist who pinpoints issues of sexuality as central to a socialist-feminist theoretical framework. Molyneux discusses five major differences between orthodox socialist theory and western feminist ideas, one of which is the feminist emphasis on issues of sexual liberation. Molyneux mentions specifically women's rights to extra-marital and homosexual freedom, and remarks that socialist countries are generally intolerant of such matters and consider sexual liberation to be a decadent western concern. (Molyneux in Young:1981:179-180) Molyneux makes note of the general refusal in socialist countries to confront directly the question of sexual relations, for example by enacting laws against rape. (ibid) She states that many legal reforms concerning marriage, divorce, marital relations and labour protection of women, do address this issue of sexuality indirectly and unsatisfactorily. For example, family reform in socialist countries raises issues of sexuality in several ways - heterosexual monogamy is the only

form of marriage allowed; motherhood is more heavily promoted than fatherhood; and family planning policies are related to wider economic or political goals, ignoring individual freedoms and rights. Finally, gender-specific role-typing (especially of "masculinity" as superior and "femininity" as inferior) in education, employment and domestic activities are impediments to women's emancipation. (ibid:179-199) The suggestion implicit in Molyneux's criticism is that the western feminist movement sets the standard on matters of sexual freedoms and that socialist societies should conform. Taplin, in a discussion of ethnocentrism in historical-materialist analysis of women in development points out that Molyneux has criticized the sexual attitudes in some socialist countries for being "puritanical". Taplin maintains that such a criticism contains "ethnocentric tendencies". (Taplin:1989:34)<sup>7</sup> The assumption is that sexual morality has the same meaning in China as it has to western feminists. However, what is puritanical to western feminists is understood as sexual restraint and responsibility in China.

Part of the difficulty in analyzing the issue of sexuality in socialist-feminist literature on China is that the subject is so seldom discussed. For example, one of the most prolific and respected writers, Elisabeth Croll, stated in her first book-length study that sexuality seemed not to have been

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<sup>7</sup> Johnson also refers to the "socialist puritanism" and "restrictive moral attitudes" in China's revolution. (Johnson:1983:188)

an issue in the women's movement since 1949. (Croll:1978a:302) Croll apologizes for leaving out of her study one set of questions, "the difficult one of sexuality. This topic is probably subject more than any other to the dangers of simplification and ethnocentrism. I have preferred to leave its consideration to future studies." (ibid:9) Unfortunately, she has not yet done those studies. This is remarkable, because Croll's research has been extensive. Croll's reluctance may be indicative of the difficulty in making a socialist-feminist analysis of this topic without being ethnocentric. Wolf found that her informants were embarrassed by anything to do with sexual matters, such as puberty. (Wolf:1985:131) In her research, Wolf does not ask direct questions on the subject, nor does the subject appear to be important to her informants. Even when questions were asked about relations between husbands and wives, only emotional and social relations were discussed. Issues of sexuality were not mentioned, suggesting that this subject, which is central to socialist-feminist theory, does not have a similar importance in China. However, this is a matter needing further research. Wolf does study the subject of gender-specific role typing of girls and boys. She found that rural/urban differences were more significant than gender differences in raising children, for example in the use of corporal punishment and availability of nursery schools, although gender-specific role typing operates in China - boys are too quarrelsome and girls are too

timid. (ibid:117)

Stacey addresses the issue of sexuality directly, although she did not do field research. She states that the 1950 Marriage Law and the family reform policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) advocated a puritanical sexual morality in that they supported conjugal sexuality and required very strict sexual restraint of Red Army members. (Stacey:1983:186-187) Stacey interprets marriage registration following the 1950 Marriage Law as the intrusion of a public patriarchy into private affairs. However, Ono has pointed out that the registration benefited women in that it allowed the government to verify whether the marriage was free or coerced and also to carry out a propaganda campaign for the reforms. (Ono:1989:178) Stacey's hypothesis is that for reasons of political and economic stability, the CCP compromised revolutionary family reform by supporting the desires of poor peasant men for monogamous families, which Stacey equates with puritanism. However, Stacey acknowledges that the new morality was "pro-woman" in some ways, because "under prevailing social conditions, women ... would be further exploited rather than emancipated by free love morality." (ibid:187) Stacey nonetheless overlooks this observation in the development of her argument that the CCP compromised the women's revolution by linking sexuality with harmonious marital relations, a connection which is alien to the socialist-feminist emphasis on freedom of choice in fertility and procreation. For Stacey,

the problem was that the CCP gradually introduced state regulation into the affairs of personal life (first by requiring marriage registration), and that the new morality appealed to traditional peasant values such as conjugal family life. (ibid:189) Stacey complains that marriage and divorce were not seen as the means for attaining private, "individual fulfillment as in the West" but rather for building socialism. (ibid:192)

Milton responds to a similar presumption by Salaff that the shift from widespread divorce in the early 1930s to a more conciliatory attitude toward the family in the 1950 Marriage Act was a step backwards for women. Milton points out that the goal was "not universal divorce but successful marriage and families". (Milton in Young:1973:187)

If sexuality, as defined in socialist-feminist literature has not been a central issue in China's socialist revolution, neither has it been entirely absent; but it has been differently defined, in terms that are distinctly Chinese. As noted in Chapter Three, peasant women in the early liberated areas of south China experienced marriage as oppressive - divorce was their first goal. In addition, many of the gains that Chinese women have made in this century have to do with sexuality - the abolition of prostitution, concubinage, footbinding (as a sexual fetish used to control women), the buying and selling of women and girls as slaves, servants or wives, child betrothal, forced marriage, the ideal of female

chastity, and the standards of female virtue. As well, Chinese Marriage Laws of 1950 and 1981 guaranteed widows the right to remarry and wives the right to divorce (implying freedom from sexual oppression in marriage) and introduced the new idea of democratic, harmonious family relations. Although divorce is an uncommon occurrence in rural China, this fact must be understood in terms of Chinese value systems rather than western feminist principles. The aim of marriage reform in China has been to improve marriage rather than dissolve it. (Johnson:1983:118) During the early years of the People's Republic of China, a conservative code of sexual behaviour prohibited premarital and extramarital sexual activity, encouraged the sublimation of sexual energy through productive work, and set standards for austere, asexual clothing. In some ways the relatively "asexual" nature of Communist China has been "liberating" for women. For example, this period had a "neutralizing" effect on the traditional idealization of female chastity and virtue, which some historians have identified as the major obstacle to women's emancipation. As well, westerners who have visited China notice the comfortable and unselfconscious feeling Chinese women and men have about their bodies, in contrast with the sexual over-stimulation of western societies.

In a sociological study of women in contemporary China, Honig and Hershatter discovered that attitudes towards sexuality were changing and that sexuality had become a topic

for public debate by 1979, reflecting a general liberalization of public mores after the Cultural Revolution. The main themes which Honig and Hershatter investigated, in relation to the issue of sexuality, were changing sexual mores of young people, the double standard of morality for women and men, and violence against women. (Honig and Hershatter:1988:42,51-53,60-68) Honig and Hershatter found that young people in the 1980s had more freedom to express their sexuality through fashion or music, for example, and that they were expected to avoid excesses and vanity. Official policies stressed the need for a simple and conservative sexual morality, appropriate to a socialist country. They also warned against the harmful effects of sexual liberation, for young people and society. Young people were taught that sexual feelings, while natural, had to be restrained, delayed or sublimated through study, sports or work. In this aspect, a double standard required young women to be responsible not only for their own behaviour but also of the behaviour of young men. Girls had more to lose by engaging in premarital sex, although more and more of them did. Honig and Hershatter found that young people had very limited knowledge of sexual matters. In 1980 the official press began to publish a series of sex manuals for newly married couples, sex education courses were organized for couples and sexuality columns began to appear in the popular press. In 1983 a national campaign against "spiritual pollution" severely criticized pornography and questioned the

wisdom of opening to the west and pursuing economic reforms. Honig and Hershatter felt that the campaign reflected a deep concern by the government for the changing sex mores of young people. (Honig and Hershatter:1988:62,183) Violence against women is a topic often linked in people's minds with the sexual oppression of women. Although the evidence is anecdotal rather than statistical, Honig and Hershatter maintain that kidnapping, infanticide and rape increased during the 1980s and that wife beating was taken for granted in some areas. (ibid:273) As part of a book-length study of violence in contemporary China, Lipman and Harrell found that there was a considerable amount of violence against women, especially in rural China. The concerns were kidnapping, wife beating, rape, murder and female infanticide. In 1983, as part of a national anti-crime program, the government announced that rape and other serious offences were increasing. (Lipman and Harrell:1990:211,219) These authors suggest that the household responsibility system and the single-child family policy had caused an increase in violence against women, especially female infanticide. The household responsibility system increased the value of family labour for earning income, and encouraged the traditional custom of favouring boys, which was further exacerbated by the single-child family policy. Female infanticide is a social problem which the government recognizes - in 1989 women constituted 48.9 percent of China's population. (Beijing Review:March 27-April 2,1989:page 9)

According to a UN Report, in China in 1990 there were 94 females for every 100 males. The figure is the same for Hong Kong. (United Nations:1991:table 1,pp.22-25) Potter and Potter found that although female infanticide existed in traditional China, in contemporary China it is deplored as immoral: even though families want to have sons, villagers generally do not consider female infanticide to be a legitimate act. The authors' research indicated that it occurs mainly in remote areas. (Potter and Potter:1990:243)

Honig and Hershatter point out that the public discussion in China about violence against women differed from what they were accustomed to in the west. For example, western discourse on rape stressed such ideas as the social and psychological sources of male hostility towards women, the function of rape in controlling women's behaviour and limiting their freedom, and rape as an act of violence rather than an expression of dysfunctional sexual desire. Chinese analysts were more interested in the social conditions which cause increased crime in general - the social upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, western ideas of sexual liberation and pornography, ignorance of the law and the persistence of feudal ideas about women's inferiority. (Honig and Hershatter:ibid:285)

Generally speaking, the western feminist notion of sexual freedoms in the sense of the rights of individuals to self-determined decisions about their bodies and expressions of personal sexual identity is a culturally-specific concept of

sexuality and sexual freedom which is not applicable to China. (Potter and Potter:1990:231) Where sexual freedoms exist, they are expected to be restrained by the deeply-rooted (traditional and modern) "framework of social relationships and network of reciprocity ..." which characterize Asian societies. (Gunatilleke in Ahooja-Patel, et al:1986: 198) Issues of sexuality, such as violence against women or the sexual morality of young people, are public concerns in China, for women and men, of equal importance with other social problems. (See Beijing Review, China After Mao:1984: 118-123)

Socialist-feminist theory encourages the criticism of China's marriage policies and socialist attitudes towards permitted sexual behaviours as puritan. This attitude is ethnocentric, because it entails transposing a set of social mores from one society to another. The Chinese government views western-style sexual liberation as chaotic and dangerous, as not necessarily liberating for women nor as suitable for the historical and social conditions of Chinese life.

## **5.2 POLITICAL ISSUES**

These issues concern the themes of power, authority and social change, which, like sexuality, must be understood in China's historic and cultural contexts. There are five ways in which socialist-feminist theoretical analysis of women in China has been ethnocentric in relation to these themes. The

analysis has underestimated the impact of the socialist revolution for women, overemphasized the class/gender debate, downplayed the role of generational authority, disparaged the role of the All-China Women's Federation, and assumed an antagonistic relation between women and men.

Molyneux remarks that western feminists are less impressed by socialist revolution than are women in developing countries. (Molyneux in Young:1981:201,fn.7) For contemporary Chinese women, this seems to be true. In a collection of readings from the Chinese women's movement, Croll advises her (western?) readers that the language of some of the translated articles may seem alien because Chinese women are very familiar with Marxist-Leninist concepts and have a "high degree of political consciousness." (Croll:1974:v) The political consciousness of Chinese women is a revolutionary consciousness, developed over a period of about 100 years. Socialist-feminists have underestimated the impact of revolutionary consciousness and society on women's lives in China and misunderstood the meaning of the revolution to Chinese women. Although the concept of equality between women and men was integral to some peasant rebellions in the mid-1800s, it is generally believed that feminism originated in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which incorporated literary, political, social and feminist ideas. (Ono: 1989:101) Revolutionaries in the 1920s thought that western-style feminism was "barren" since it was not part of a larger revolutionary

movement, and that Chinese feminism was integrated with Chinese nationalism. (Li:1992:91) What does it mean that in China feminism and socialism are integrated? The concept of the integration of complementary aspects of a whole is an abstract idea, deeply-rooted in Chinese philosophy. One meaning is that each of the two parts is never without the other since each contains elements of the other. Another meaning is that you cannot have one without the other: if there is a socialist revolution, there is also a feminist revolution, and vice versa. Within such a philosophical framework, feminism has to be understood as an integrated aspect of the socialist revolution. Davin gives an example of the integration of the two movements in the 1950 speaking bitterness campaign - the women's movement and the socialist revolution stimulated and acted favourably with one another. (Davin:in Wolf and Witke:1975:263) Another example is that feminism in China is not merely a gender question, but has a wider social meaning because feminism demands political and economic equality for all people. (Ono:1989:88)

Consequently, a theoretical framework which fundamentally requires a feminist consciousness patterned on western feminism will not "work" in China. In her study of feminism and nationalism in developing countries, Jayawardena maintains that feminist consciousness in China was part of the revolutionary consciousness. (Jayawardena:1986:195) An interesting

example of the intimate relationship between the feminist movement and the nationalist movement is the life history of a middle-class woman from a village in the northwest who joined the nationalist women's association where she developed her feminist courage to oppose the family patriarchs. (Sheridan and Salaff:1984:183)

Socialist-feminist theory requires that gender is on the political agenda in its own right, but given the unique historical and theoretical understanding in China of the relationship between socialism and feminism, this requirement becomes problematic. One implication of the Chinese understanding is that social change is generally conceived in a long-term perspective with education and persuasion rather than confrontation as the appropriate methods for transformation.<sup>8</sup> Persuasion is a "traditional solution rather than an innovation since 1949." (Potter and Potter:1990:240) Generally speaking, people are persuaded to change their minds by "example, explanation, and discussion." In China's conformist society, persuasion is "an appropriate and legitimate way" to

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<sup>8</sup> It has been pointed out that persuasion is difficult when it comes from the person with less power in an unequal relationship. Thus, assuming that women are less powerful than men in marriage, women will generally lose out in the persuasion process. Although an important caution to assuming that women will benefit, this point overlooks the tendency in rural China to the "masculine demystification which Wolf observed (Wolf:1985:33,137,206) and downplays the "social sanction" effects of the goal of harmonious marriage. Molyneux suggests that official ideology creates expectations which may induce pressure to see promises fulfilled. (Molyneux in Young:1981:173)

foster the sharing of society's values. (ibid) Political and economic stability are important social values which are not necessarily in conflict, in the long term, with women's emancipation. When Potter and Potter interviewed a women's movement leader, they found that her socialist and feminist ideals were inextricably linked in her political beliefs. She believed that by bringing economic prosperity, socialism would also bring social justice and harmonious family life. "Socialism was the natural, complete, and far-reaching solution to the problems of family life, and the exploitation, particularly of women, inherent in the family structure." (Potter and Potter:1990: 243) Another implication is that the strong identification in China of the women's revolution with the socialist revolution means that for women political participation, especially at the local level, is at the same time participation in the women's revolution.

A difficult problem in socialist-feminist theory is the theoretical relationship between class and gender. There is a tendency to simplify this relationship in three general ways. First, because gender is central to socialist-feminist analysis, instances of gender goals being sacrificed or compromised by class goals are criticized as a matter of principle. Stacey (1983), Salaff in Young (1973) and Johnson (1983) develop arguments which are partly based on an uncomplicated and rigid interpretation of the theoretical relationship between gender and class, in which gender is presumed

to be necessarily primary. This is in spite of the fact that their interpretation is inconsistent with the viewpoint of the society they are studying, in which compromise and contradictions are expected. Nee and Stark maintain that "practical compromises and mutually contradictory principles" are accepted in "reforming socialist societies" such as China as a "given condition of social life." (Nee and Stark:1989:31) This interesting observation needs further research in the context of the changing lives of women in contemporary China.

A second way in which the class/gender debate is simplified in socialist-feminist theory is to view the relationship as antagonistic, because conflicting demands are made on women's identity. (Croll:1978a:5) The confrontational approach to social problems, which is the basis for the assumption of antagonism, is typical of the west but not of China. The Chinese historical experience of integrating the women's movement and socialist revolution, of attempting to unite the interests of individuals and society, is not recognized in socialist-feminist analysis as a valid alternative viewpoint. Stacey (1983) presumes that the concerns of the Chinese peasant family were contrary to women's interests, and overlooks the attempts of the CCP to integrate them.

Third, there is a tendency in socialist-feminist theory to over-emphasize gender, in relation to class and other forms of oppressions such as generation. For example, although Croll

does recognize the central role of material constraints in China's social development programs, (Croll: 1985:54,79), the tendency in most socialist-feminist analysis, especially that which is more theoretical, is to down-play this factor. It is interesting that in contrast, the DAWN analysis, a voice from feminists in developing countries, stresses the necessary connection between feminism and poverty. (Sen and Grown:1987) The DAWN voice is a reminder of the criticism from Third World women in the mid-1970s that western feminism was ethnocentric and bourgeois feminism. (Moser:1989:1811)

Such examples suggest an ethnocentric bias in socialist-feminist theory in that gender oppression is viewed in ways which are alien to Chinese thinking. Around 1964, the class/gender debate in China was resolved in line with western feminism, but only for a very brief time. On the whole, analysis of this debate in China has stressed the complex interdependence of class solidarity and women's solidarity. (Croll in Caplan and Bujra:1978:71)

As we argued in Chapter Two, a paradigm (such as feminism) is a lens through which we view reality and the lens does determine what we see, in very significant ways. Judd found this to be true in her research in three villages in Shandong Province. Studying relationships between married women and their natal families, Judd discovered, by chance, customary practices that had been overlooked and were not easily explained by conventional western discourse on patrilineal,

patrilocal and patriarchal kinship. (Judd:1989) Stacey's analysis of patriarchy and the socialist revolution in China is an example of discourse on patriarchy which, Judd argues, overlooks and cannot explain her chance discovery of a married woman's relations with her natal family. In Chapter Two we introduce the idea that socialist-feminist theory downplays the role of generational oppression in China, and the significance for women of the changes that have occurred in this area. This is an important point to understand for three reasons. First, the power and authority of the older generation has a very long history and remains a valued characteristic of Chinese society. Second, the CCP recognized that for the success of the socialist revolution and construction, the power and authority of the older generation had to be weakened, so this became a major focus of analysis and action, along with class and gender. Third, in socialist-feminist analysis of the successes and failures of the socialist revolution in relation to the feminist revolution, this aspect of the account is not sufficiently acknowledged.

Generational power and authority traditionally were derived from aspects of the Confucian moral code (which emphasized filial duty and the proper relationship between people), the structure and function of the household in relation to the rural economy, and the patrilocal marriage system whereby the older generation controlled the "recruitment" of women through marriage. (Croll:1985:126) Croll

describes the traditional Chinese family as "based on a hierarchy of the generations and sexes that are divided in interest from each other." Croll also states that rural women "were divided by social class and generation." (Croll in Caplan and Bujra:1978:50-53) These examples illustrate the central role of generational authority, traditionally, in the lives of Chinese women and men.

In the early years of the revolution, generational authority was one of the successful targets of the CCP in the struggle to destroy the old base of elite power. Land reform severely weakened clan and kinship systems, and the 1950 Marriage Law established a legal and moral basis for the younger generation's greater independence. As well, ideological campaigns were aimed at redefining relations within the household. The effects of generational power and authority, although weakened, are still felt in rural China today, in the division of labour inside the household, in the sense of filial duty that young people feel towards their parents and grandparents, in the complicated relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, and in generational interdependence for security and basic needs. In contemporary urban China both generation and gender relations of power and authority seem to be breaking down together, but a profound sense of (reciprocal) filial duty conditions many of the relationships between people. (Wolf: 1985:Chapter Eight) Like relations between husbands and wives, relations between generations are con-

sidered to be non-antagonistic. For example, respect for parents and love for children are officially demanded in the Marriage Law. Ironically, in the 1981 Marriage Law the government found it necessary to re-establish intergenerational links by expanding the idea of mutual obligations between parents and children to include grandparents. Wolf suggests that this change represents a response to disruption in families during the Cultural Revolution and a pragmatic acknowledgement of the problems of an "aging" population. (Wolf:ibid: 208-209) Croll found that in rural China multigenerational families are indeed becoming more common, partly because economic reforms demand an expanded household. (Croll:1985: 59) The complex subject of generational power is overlooked in socialist-feminist analysis because the theory overemphasizes gender subordination.<sup>9</sup>

One subject which is better suited to a longer analysis, which unfortunately is not possible here, is the role of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and the trend in socialist-feminist literature to disparage that role because the ACWF is not an autonomous women's association operating independently of the CCP. Molyneux argues that a women's movement must be independent and concerned with "identifiably feminist" objectives. Because mass organizations

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<sup>9</sup> an excellent source of information on intergenerational relationships in contemporary China is Davis-Friedmann (1983).

such as the ACWF are "agents for the implementation of official policy", they often "divert women from demanding the further changes which are needed for their complete emancipation." (Molyneux in Young:1981:193,196; Moser:1989: 1803) On the same theme, Stacey argues that peasant revolutions, because of restorationist consciousness, are unlikely to develop an autonomous feminist movement. In China, she maintains, elitist radical feminist ideas were subordinated to political goals and dissolved during the peasant revolutionary process. Capitalist societies, on the other hand, have provided soil "for the growth of feminist consciousness and an independent feminist movement." (Stacey:1983:262) Johnson also believes that the lack of autonomy of the women's movement in China was an obstacle to achieving feminist goals. (Johnson:1983:193,195,207)

A contrary conclusion is reached by Croll who argues that female solidarity in rural China required that women conceive of themselves as a separate social category with common interests and that they openly defend these interests and participate in village affairs. (Croll in Caplan and Bujra:1978:51-52) Although Croll recognizes that at certain times in China's recent history, the ACWF did neglect the special interests of women when class struggle had prior claim, on the whole the conditions for female solidarity have been met in rural China. Potter and Potter also believe that the ACWF, by acting as women's organizational advocate in

rural China, contributed to improving women's status. (Potter and Potter:1990:256) Potter and Potter give an example of how the dual functions of the ACWF to promote CCP policies and to represent the interests of women have worked to the advantage of women. In the brigade which they studied between 1979 and 1981, they found that the ACWF actively worked to ensure that marriage reforms concerning mutual choice in mate selection were followed. In one case, the ACWF interfered to protect a woman who was being coerced into marriage. (Potter and Potter:1990:199) In another instance the ACWF unsuccessfully promoted the idea of matrilocal marriage in order to raise the status of women. (ibid:262-263)

The western concept of an independent radical feminist movement, which Stacey, Molyneux and others argue for is ethnocentric when used as the standard for judging the ACWF, because the result is a limited understanding of the ACWF and a devaluation of its successes for women. For instance, Honig and Hershatler reach a paradoxical and ethnocentric conclusion that in spite of the new active role of the ACWF in defending and representing women's interests, the organization is unsatisfactory because it remains a "top-down, government-sponsored organization, rather than one independently formed by women." (Honig and Hershatler:1988:320, 325) However, when judged by Chinese requirements and conditions, the women's associations and the ACWF have been just as radical and successful as many feminist organizations in the west. When

the ACWF is understood in its historical, political and cultural context, the lack of western style autonomy becomes less important. Such an understanding requires a thorough analysis of the reciprocal relationship between the ACWF and the CCP, the role of the "mass-line" in Communist China's history and political philosophy, the role of "agency" and "consciousness raising" in China's women's movement and the democratic organization and function of the ACWF, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>10</sup>

One of the theoretical challenges of socialist-feminist theory is to clarify the distinctions between the universal and the specific. For example, the subordination of women by men is assumed to be a universal condition. Molyneux states that in socialist-feminist theory this subordination constitutes the target of a specific struggle which involves problematizing relations between women and men, socially and personally. (Molyneux in Young:1981:179) In western terms this is the "battle of the sexes"; however, it is ethnocentric to assume that the battle of the sexes is universal. For example, in a discussion of ethnocentrism in development literature, Brydon and Chant point out that some societies have the concept of the complementarity of women and men rather than the western feminist notion of equality between women and men.

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<sup>10</sup> for information on the historical and contemporary contribution of the ACWF to the women's movement, see Croll in Caplan and Bujra:1978:52-63; Davin in Wolf and Witke:1975:254,264-268; Davin in Young:1973:73-87; Honig and Hershtatter:1988:317-320

(Brydon and Chant:1989:62-65) Similarly, Jaquette warns that researchers must be sensitive "both to the fact that developing countries have valued and will continue to value complementary rather than egalitarian roles for women..." (Jaquette:1982;284)

Certain cultural values, social attitudes and theories of feminism in the specific case of China indicate that complementarity rather than opposition is the basis for relations between women and men. The conciliatory, as opposed to the antagonistic, approach to personal and social transformation is an important determinant of gender relations. For example, contested divorce applications are "mediated" by the court, sometimes over a period of several years and involving neighbours, family, workmates and court officials. Of the 290 students who attended a "School for Education Before Divorce" in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong Province, 36.5 percent were reconciled. (China Daily:December12,1992) Couples are generally told to "try to solve their problems and stay married." (Whyte and Parish: 1984:151) Such an attitude may seem oppressive and unthinkable to western feminists, for whom personal happiness and fulfillment are important values, but from the Chinese perspective, the conciliatory attitude is a reflection of a "preeminent emphasis on family solidarity and loyalty and enduring marriage bonds." (ibid:227)

It has been a firm principle in the Chinese women's movement that men were not to be made the "target of

struggle". (Croll:1978a: 317) Contradictions in relations between women and men were to be resolved through education and persuasion, mutual criticism and united struggle towards the common goal of harmonious and democratic relations. Of course this was the ideal, which was not generally achieved. But what is significant is that the discourse is specifically Chinese. (Walker:1978:55-56) Ono remarks that Chinese women have not been deeply aware of contradictions between women and men, and that a strong sense of solidarity has existed between women and men as subjects of oppression. (Ono:1989:xiv)

A discussion of relations between women and men introduces a trait in Chinese women which is not well known or understood. Wolf calls it the "subtle flouting of authority" which she has "long admired in Chinese women everywhere." (Wolf:1985:33) She writes that "(t)raditionally, Chinese women have been subversives in a male supremacist society, acquiescing on one level to the superiority of their masters and undermining their power on another level. Rural women have been more competent at living these contradictions than their urban sisters..." (ibid:137) In her study of rural women in Taiwan, Wolf developed the concept of the uterine family which women create by bonding emotionally with their sons in order to provide for their emotional and material security within the patriarchal family system. (Wolf:1975: 32-41) In another example of rural women's subversiveness, Judd discovered, by chance, fragmentary customs concerning the relation between

married women and their natal families. These customs do not directly counter the standard model but operate "in the silences and on the edges of the official model", and are both "intrinsic to and intrinsically subversive of that model." (Judd:1989:538-539) Although Jaquette warns that there is a difference between resisting the power which is exercised against us and creating our own power (Jaquette:1982:281), the case of women in China deserves deeper analysis since their strategies may go beyond mere resistance. For instance, Johnson found that traditionally, Chinese women were "resourceful" in creating their own power within the family. (Johnson:1983:20-22) Rural Chinese women have traditional and modern methods of resisting and transforming their subordinate position in society and the family, methods which are contrary to the socialist-feminist methods of confrontation and direct struggle to problematize relations between women and men.

### 5.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

Some teleological assumptions in socialist-feminist theory are ethnocentric when applied to China. For example, in some of the literature, China's feminist revolution is assessed according to western-defined goals of gender equality and family reform. Stacey explicitly states that the socialist revolution in China must be judged "by feminist standards ... to be a failure." (Stacey:1983:4) Johnson takes the radical and urban May Fourth feminism as the standard by which family

reform is the uncompleted task of the Chinese revolution. (Johnson:1983:232) Implicit goals or standards can be inferred from statements such as the following. "What is needed is radical steps to socialize housework and domesticate males." (Wolf:1985: 268) "Thus far, rural China is still dominated by the family." (ibid: 247) "Mothers-in-law have a lot of power but are not yet out of the running. Daughters-in-law have a new respect but are not yet managing the household...I think that in twenty years there will still be mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law sharing a stove and quarreling over the man who is significant to the lives of both." (ibid:237) The undefined ideal towards which the Chinese family appears for Wolf to be too slowly moving is based on her own cultural values and experiences. On the same issue, Milton argues that one of the implicit and invalid assumptions underlying Salaff's analysis of the failure of the socialist revolution to liberate Chinese women is the assumption that the "maintenance of the nuclear family in China constitutes a failure of Chinese women to achieve liberation", suggesting that the revolutionary goal for Chinese women was to demolish the family. (Milton in Young: 1973:180-187)

A teleological interpretation of revolution in China is ethnocentric in the following two ways - an evolutionary model of historical transition towards an ideal goal does not take into account non-linear, multi-dimensional social change, and by focusing on the goal the analysis diminishes the process.

Milton finds a tendency in Salaff's analysis to view historical change in simplistic and absolutist terms and to ignore the complexity of the process. (ibid:186) In his discussion of the cultural dimension of Asian development (including China), Gunatilleke states that in Asian societies, history and development are multi-dimensional concepts in which "recollection and renewal" are as important as the "casting away and the forgetting". (Gunatilleke in Ahooja-Patel et al:1986:201) In their study of reform in contemporary socialist countries, Nee and Stark argue that the totalitarian and modernization models of revolutionary change entail assumptions about socialism's predictable future (Stalinism or industrialism) but cannot explain transformations in socialism today. (Nee and Stark:1989:4-8) Their position is that an analytic framework is emerging in the social sciences which focuses on institutions and social groups in order to describe actually-existing socialism. (ibid:8) This is an idea worth further study.

Three assumptions in socialist-feminist analysis of family reform illustrate the problem. First, the nuclear family is presumed to be the goal of family reform, (Molyneux in Young:1981:179) but this presumption overlooks differences between Chinese and western value systems regarding the family and underestimates rural/urban differences in the social role of the family. Second, based on the ideas of Engels, there is an assumption that the family is a conserva-

tive social institution which lacks an internal dynamic. This assumption negates the role of the family in initiating or contributing to social change. For example, some of the changes in urban family life in China which Whyte and Parish have studied (such as female money management and bilineality) are important factors in promoting gender equality. (Whyte and Parish:1984:226) Third, the assumption that radical change is needed in the family is prejudicial towards the reforms that have already occurred, such as reduced generational authority in mate selection and increased valuation of daughters. In a discussion of the role of romantic feelings in mate selection, Potter and Potter argue that "...the facile assumption that the marriage law has failed as a reform because courtship patterns remain so unlike those of the West is an ethnocentric fallacy." In a recent selection of biographies of Caribbean women, Haniff's discussion of arranged marriage highlights differences in the meaning of arranged and free-choice marriage for western and non-western societies. The western falling-in-love concept of marriage is foreign in many cultures. Also, there are many advantages to arranged marriages, and studies of successful marriages reveal similar characteristics for free choice or arranged marriages. (Haniff:1988:46-47) Potter and Potter also criticize the tendency in western research on rural China to downplay the importance of changes that have taken place in marriage customs. (Potter and Potter: 1990:197) As well, they point out

that although feelings of love may be involved in mate selection, the capacity to work is more important than the capacity to love, and "love itself remains infinitely private." (ibid:192)

Ethnocentric assumptions in the literature on family reform can be illustrated with reference to Stacey who writes that "the traditionalist cast of Maoist family reform" was anti-feminist in that the 1950 Marriage Law was a compromise on the more radical 1930s. (Stacey:1983:184-185) The assumption is that family reform must be radical and that compromise is anti-feminist. Stacey also assumes that family solidarity inhibits prospects for the development of a feminist consciousness in rural China. (ibid:266) These assumptions are ethnocentric because the standards by which "radical" and "compromise" are defined are not those of rural China in 1950 but of western feminism in the 1980s. There are several other examples of ethnocentric assumptions in socialist-feminist analysis of family reform. First, based on patterns in other developing countries, socialist-feminist analysis of the post-Mao reforms assumes that a return to household-based responsibility for rural production will be disadvantageous to women, because their work will go unrecognized and unpaid, they will have to work in lonely isolation, and the male household head will assume control over the work and resources of the family. (see Andors:1983:165;Croll:1985:127;Stacey:1983:274) This assumption underestimates the effects of the "social sanction"

which officially guarantees equality between women and men, thus creating expectations (Molyneux in Young:1981:173), and the consequent process of "masculine demystification" that is going on in rural China. Women are "less impressed" by men's dominance. (Wolf:1985:137) The assumption also dismisses the advantages of household-based work for farm women, their financial success with sideline production, and the importance of the private sector (and women's role in it) for the rural economy.

Second, the tendency in socialist-feminist theory to universalize the patriarchal and patrilineal family is ethnocentric in that it does not recognize culturally-specific characteristics such as the power and authority that women have in the Chinese family, (Potter and Potter:1990: 254) and more female-centered family structures (the uterine family, bilineal trends, and relations with natal families) which operate within the boundaries of the official family form. For example, Judd argues that social patterns of married women's relations with their natal families do not fit the conventional model of the patrilineal and patrilocal family. (Judd:1989:537) Generally speaking, the complexity of the Chinese family may challenge some of the socialist-feminist assumptions about family reform. For example, in a recent study, Greenhalgh distinguishes two families "... one a trans-historical male fraternity concerned with inheritance and succession, the other a contemporaneous group of males and

females concerned with daily subsistence and intergenerational reproduction." (Greenhalgh in McNicoll and Cain:1990:84) Potter and Potter observed a similar complexity. They distinguish between the concept of the family and that of the household, the latter being more relevant in local usage. Moreover, the Chinese household, family and person exist in a web of social obligations and mutual responsibilities quite different from western experience. (Potter and Potter:1990:215-216)

Third, in socialist-feminist theory, the conceptual distinctions between productive and reproductive work is an important analytic tool for discussing the role of women in the family and society. The basic premise is that the almost-exclusive role of women in reproductive work and their subordinate role in productive work are linked in ways that reveal and perpetuate patriarchy. Although it is acknowledged that the distinctions between productive and reproductive work are often blurred, especially for poor women (see Sen and Grown:1987:57), the very meaning of work itself in rural Chinese society poses a challenge to the basic assumption. Potter and Potter discuss the different cultural contexts of emotion in western societies and Chinese society in order to understand "without ethnocentrism" the meaning of a person and the relationship between a person and society in China. (Potter and Potter:1990:180ff) They argue that while emotion is the indicator of relations in a western context, in the

Chinese cultural framework, work is the critical measure of human relationships. Work is the symbolic medium for the expression of social connection. (ibid:195) The implications and significance of this cultural characteristic need to be studied, especially with a view to defining the cultural specificity of the meaning of the "double burden" and the "gender division of labour" for rural Chinese women. As noted above, in rural China sideline production and even agricultural fieldwork traditionally were considered to be part of women's household tasks.

(Wolf:1985:139)

Finally, socialist-feminist analysis of the changing roles of women in China tends to downplay the tremendous achievements that have been made in national socio-economic indicators such as literacy, education, health, legal rights, maternal and infant mortality, fertility, longevity and food security. To some extent, there is a lack of credible baseline and long-term statistical data from China, especially in comparison with similar developing countries. Nevertheless, in socialist-feminist analysis, the emphasis on the family and the personal level of women's oppression and emancipation results in a corresponding weakness in analysis of national level data for over-all direction of change in such areas as health, education and employment. For example, socialist-feminist analysis overlooks the significant trend towards a reduction which has been observed in urban China in the gender

"education gap" and gender "income gap". (Whyte and Parish:1984:226-227) As well, there is a tendency in socialist-feminist analysis to be more concerned with the strategic gender interests of women rather than their practical gender needs. Moser points out that the strategic needs or interests are often identified as "feminist" and are considered by feminists to be women's "real" interests. (Moser:1989:1803) Although practical needs are recognized as necessary concerns, the theoretical emphasis in socialist-feminist analysis is on strategic interests, because they are "...feminist in content." (ibid:1804,1806) Moser maintains that the distinction between practical needs and strategic interests can be used as a methodological tool for gender planning. (ibid:1806) However, given that strategic interests are the "real" feminist concerns, and that feminism is understood differently in China than in western societies, the analysis tends to be ethnocentric in relation to China. For example, Molyneux suggests that strategic interests include freedom of choice in childbearing. On this basis the single-child family policy is often considered to be oppressive to women in China. (Charlton:1984:117;Johnson:1983:229) However, in China the policy is widely believed to be necessary, both practically and strategically, for the goals of modernization and the emancipation of women. (Croll:1985:9) Indeed the very distinction between practical needs and strategic interests is less meaningful in China where development goals are often

thought to be practical and strategic together. For example, in the 1950s the greater participation of rural women in agricultural production was considered necessary to increase land productivity and family welfare and to liberate women. (Croll:1983a:8-14)

In this chapter the hypothesis that socialist-feminist development theory is ethnocentric in the case of China has been explored under the three general headings of sexuality, political issues and socio-economic issues. In the final chapter, some conclusions are reached which summarize the arguments.

## CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter is organized into three parts which summarize the arguments in support of the hypothesis that socialist-feminist development theory is ethnocentric when applied to China, and suggest some implications for socialist-feminist development theory and research in China.

### 6.1 THE UNIVERSAL VERSUS THE SPECIFIC

One of the significant weaknesses of the socialist-feminist development theory is the failure to adequately distinguish between the universal and the specific, with the consequence that universal assumptions in the theory have ethnocentric connotations of other societies being just like western societies. Sen and Grown (1987) maintain that although the fact of women's subordination is universal, the political agenda to change this is specific. China's unique political agenda has included unusual over-all and gender-specific policies and programs, a particular direction and pace of change and a particular analysis of the gender struggle. In many ways the "social meaning" of concepts such as work or personhood are culturally-specific, calling into question socialist-feminist assumptions about the universal meaning of the gender division of labour and the double burden, for example. As well, assumptions in socialist-feminist analysis about patrilocal marriage customs, "modern" family forms and

free-choice marriage have ethnocentric connotations because these institutions carry culturally-specific social meaning which challenge socialist-feminist explanations of the lives of women in China. Wolf (1975) and Judd(1989) discovered important social meaning in family and marriage customs possibly unique to China while Whyte and Parish (1984) brought to light recent changes in family and marriage customs in urban China which are atypical of other developing countries. Potter and Potter believe that western researchers find China to be an alien-seeming society which, they argue, must be understood in its own terms, "insofar as possible." (Potter and Potter:1990:xiii)

The western feminist assumption of the universality of the battle of the sexes is ethnocentric in China where complementarity between women and men (although weakened since the 10th. Century) is deeply-engrained and most likely signals the direction of change. Conciliation is preferred to confrontation for resolving conflicts. In Morgan's anthology of the international women's movement, Rayna Green points out that traditional relations between women and men in Cherokee society stressed mutual respect and honour, mutual dependence and individual strength, cooperation and community - concepts which are more familiar to Chinese society than to western industrialized societies. (Morgan: 1984:706) The important western feminist interest in the sexual oppression and liberation of women cannot be applied

universally. For example, when it is applied to socialist countries such as China or Cuba, the important cultural value of sexual restraint is misinterpreted as puritanism.

The implications of a rejection of the universal applicability of key concepts in socialist-feminist analysis may be serious - can there be a socialist-feminist theory of development if it is culturally-specific? Can there be several feminisms? Sen and Grown (1987) recommend a diversity of feminisms which presumes the universal subordination of women and leaves open the question of political agendas apart from a general statement that the gender struggle cannot be separated from other liberation struggles. They refer to this view as a "Third World perspective".

#### 6.2 THE CLASS/GENDER DEBATE

A second fundamental shortcoming of the socialist-feminist theory of development is the failure to adequately resolve the important class/gender debate. This is especially problematic in the case of China where the prevailing understanding is that class and gender struggles are integrated to the extent that where there is one there is also the other. In China a revolutionary consciousness is at one and the same time a class and a gender consciousness. In the socialist-feminist literature on China, however, compromise on gender issues has been interpreted as indifference or ambiguity on the part of the leadership. This position is

ethnocentric because in China compromise is generally believed to be a reasonable response to practical necessity. One of the fundamental difficulties with the socialist-feminist analysis of the class/gender debate has been pointed out by Saunders - the emphasis on the "unfulfilled promise of socialism" based on an implicit belief in the linear rationality of socialist revolution. (Saunders:1983: 63) Certainly the socialist-feminist literature on China seems overly concerned with the unfinished liberation (Andors:1983), the uncompleted task (Johnson:1983) and the postponed revolution (Wolf:1985). Put in another way, the sociologists Whyte and Parish summarize their chapter on women in contemporary urban China by arguing that there are "half-empty cup" and "half-full cup" versions of the picture. (Whyte and Parish:1984:223-227) Both versions are necessary, just as both class and gender struggles are necessary. The first women prime minister of Portugal, Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, maintains that women's struggle is part and parcel of the whole process of change, and that "...there really is no theoretical question of priorities; women's struggle and the global process in society are two aspects of the same front." (Morgan:1984:573) By rejecting China's explanation of the complex and changing inter-dependency between socialism and feminism, and by adopting an unbalanced "half-empty cup" stance, socialist-feminist analysis is prejudiced and ethnocentric in that China's

experience is not accepted or judged on its own terms.

One implication for socialist-feminist development theory is that analysis which gives expression to voices of women in developing countries provides a more balanced perspective in which gender, class, race and other oppressions are equally important. The second implication concerns an emerging perspective in the social sciences which has been introduced by Nee and Stark (1989) and Whyte and Parish (1984) and which analyzes institutions and social groups rather than government policy and political ideology. This perspective looks at actually-existing socialism rather than at an ideal socialism entailing an unfulfilled promise.

### 6.3 DIFFERENCES

Proving the hypothesis that socialist-feminist development theory is ethnocentric in the case of China depends partly on demonstrating the extent of differences, both historical and contemporary, between Chinese society and western societies. These differences, combined with China's closed doors for most of this century, have resulted in most western scholars studying China "from outside" as Stacey (1983) acknowledged, thus understanding and explaining China with western and presumed universal concepts. For example, women's solidarity, political activity and consciousness raising have a vivid history in China, but this "herstory" has diverged in significant ways from that of the western

women's movement. Generally speaking, western feminists do not know China's herstory, or they judge it according to their own experiences, for example in underestimating the importance for Chinese feminists of social revolutionary movements in China since the early 1800s.

Potter and Potter devote one chapter of their book to give "a cultural account" of Chinese birth planning. They argue that the Chinese meaning of birth must be understood in its own terms - including the idea that birth is appropriately the concern of the state and of the family. (Potter and Potter:1990:225-250) One important distinction which the authors stress is that between policy and law in relation to birth planning in rural China. A policy is considered to be like a goal or an ideal to be approached. They do not expect a high degree of compliance. For Potter and Potter, this nuance in China produces a "socially-specific and distinctive attitude toward social control." (Potter and Potter: 1990:245) In socialist-feminist analysis of issues of sexuality, presumptions are made about the "public patriarchy" of the Chinese Communist Party leadership based on an ethnocentric understanding of the meaning of birth and the role of the state in birth planning.

Potter and Potter also point out that abortion has a different cultural meaning in China, compared with the United States and that it is ethnocentric to understand abortion and birth planning in China according to American

terms. For example, in China abortion is a more traditional, public and legal act and is not emotionally charged with feelings towards sex, morality, violence, female identity and motherhood as it is in the west. As well, the attitude in China is that abortion is not cruel while irresponsible population growth is. (Potter and Potter:1990:238-239) In addition, traditional values in China having to do with the social worth of a person attribute more negative significance to sterilization than to abortion. (ibid:247)

The extent of differences has implications not only for western feminist researchers who want to do research in China, but also for western institutions training China's social scientists. We must avoid repeating the ethnocentric mistakes of the modernization paradigm which was based on the assumption that western industrialized nations constituted a model for developing countries. Because Chinese society and western societies are vastly different, socialist-feminist theory is ethnocentric when presumed-universal concepts and ideas are applied a priori to China. One way to approach this situation is to view it as an opportunity to look at social institutions and social groups in China to test some of the assumptions of socialist-feminist theory. For example, it would be interesting to assess Jaquette's warning that there is an important distinction between women's exercise of power and their strategies to limit the power that men have over them. (Jaquette:1982:281) Or,

during the more relaxed atmosphere of the reform period, feminists in China may want to experiment with a new slogan - Whatever is good for Chinese women is also good for China. Since 1975 feminists have stressed the question - Who speaks for women? Beijing will host the 1995 Fourth World Congress of Women. This represents a chance for Chinese feminists to speak for themselves with their global sisters.

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