

1 Creating a Feminist Discourse

In January 1916, Chen Duxiu published his "1916" in *New Youth*. He formally proposed that women should rise from the position of the conquered to the position of conqueror. He formally advocated that the three principles of Confucianism should be destroyed. Thus appeared a single spark that would ignite the prairie fire of a true female revolution.

Chen Dongyuan, *Zhongguo funü shenhua shi*
[A history of the lives of Chinese women], 1928

Of all those self-proclaimed "awakened elements," whether women or men, there were none who ignored such texts, the so-called New Culture literature at the time. They also wrote and talked about it. The number of people who dived into the tide to swim was so large that it was unprecedented.

Chen Wangdao, "Chinese Women's Awakening,"
in *Xinnüxing* [The new woman], 1925

In the mid 1920s, Chinese male intellectuals such as Chen Dongyuan and Chen Wangdao were still writing on the subject of women. Chen Dongyuan spent two years writing *A History of the Lives of Chinese Women*. Chen Wangdao contributed to *The New Woman*, a newly founded women's journal that was entirely staffed by men. The agitation for women's emancipation, which had reached its peak in the early 1920s, was already being overshadowed by a rapidly growing nationalism. But many May Fourth men had taken to "swimming," and so they kept discussing women's issues even though the "tide" was on the ebb. As the chapter epigraphs illustrate, May Fourth men were conscious of their own and other men's roles in advocating women's emancipation.

May Fourth men's attention to the "woman problem" has been largely overlooked by Western scholars. The only substantial research on the May Fourth debates on women is Roxane H. Witke's dissertation, completed in 1971 but never published. In her exhaustive study, she points out that "most of the May Fourth polemics were carried out by youth in the name

of youth. However, the youth (most often male) talked less about liberating themselves than about liberating women. For a major part of the acting out of their own liberation from the strictures of the old social order was the spectacularly anti-traditional act of championing the cause of women.¹

The extensive literature on the "woman problem" written by men during the New Culture movement formed a prevailing gender discourse that affected many Chinese women of the twentieth century. This chapter traces the origins and development of gender discourse in early-twentieth-century China. I begin with a review of men's advocacy for women's emancipation in the late Qing period, then focus on the further development of this discourse after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, when Chinese intellectuals advocated women's emancipation as part of their attack on Confucian culture in such publications as *New Youth*, first published in 1915. Examining male intellectuals' role in promoting a feminist discourse, I delineate the process by which ideas about feminism were circulated and embraced by educated women of the May Fourth era (1915–1925). Women's organized activities for women's rights in 1922 and 1923 marked the peak of liberal feminism in China. Meanwhile, parallel to the wave of liberal feminism, a Marxist discourse of women's emancipation, promoted by the newly founded Chinese Communist Party, entered the intellectual contest. The development and interaction of these two competing discourses in the 1920s provided the political and intellectual setting against which our protagonists—the new women—played out their life dramas.

LATE QING PRECEDENTS

The late Qing reformer Kang Youwei should rank at the top of the list of Chinese male champions of women's emancipation, if we judge each by what he advocated. Kang's endorsement of Western liberalism and his pursuit of individual freedom and equality led him to feminism. In *Datong shu* [The book of one world], which he began composing in 1884 and finished in 1902, Kang expressed his own feminist views before Western feminist texts were introduced to China.² He not only advocated gender equality, but also placed gender issues at the center of social transformation. His ideas about gender

1. Witke, Roxane H., "Transformation of Attitudes towards Women during the May Fourth Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1971), 331.

2. Kang Youwei's view on gender relations could have been influenced by an American utopian novel *Looking Backward*. The novel, first published in 1888,

equality and independence were the foundation for his design of a one-world utopia, from which all boundaries—such as family, private property, nation, and race—would be abolished, along with the human miseries he believed those boundaries cause. The feminist issues he raised anticipated many issues raised in the Chinese women's movement later on: women's education, women's rights to public office, women's equal legal rights, married women's right to keep their own names, freedom to choose one's spouse, freedom to have a social life, abolition of what Kang called "corporal punishment" (binding feet, piercing ears, wearing girdles, and so on), unisex clothes for men and women, and freedom of marriage. In order to ensure individual freedom and happiness, Kang boldly proposed that marriage should be temporary: men and women should sign marriage contracts that last no longer than one year. For that proposal alone, Kang should be regarded as the most radical Chinese man of his time and the first to articulate the goal of sexual freedom.³

An evolutionist, Kang did not expect his vision of "One World of Complete Peace and Equality" to materialize immediately. He cautioned that the process of women's emancipation must go through three stages of social evolution—the Age of Disorder, the Age of Increasing Peace and Equality, and the Age of Complete Peace and Equality—because precipitous change could cause great disorder. For that reason, he did not publish *Datong shu* in his lifetime. Consistent with his view that the first step in women's emancipation was to stop torturing women physically and liberate them from family confinement, Kang organized the first Chinese anti-footbinding society in his hometown in 1883. He continued this effort with his brother and with friends, such as Liang Qichao. Anti-footbinding associations spread nationwide by the end of the nineteenth cen-

became a best-seller in the United States. It caught the attention not only of American reformers of the late nineteenth century, but also of Chinese reformers. It was translated into Chinese in the following years. The novel critiques gender relations in nineteenth-century America and expresses familiarity with contemporary feminist ideas in the West. See Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 183–193.

3. Kang Youwei, "Quxingjie Baoduli" [Abolishing sex boundaries and preserving independence], part 5 of *Datong shu* [The book of one world] (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1935). In many respects, Kang's feminism anticipated contemporary feminism in the West. For instance, he identified the patriarchal family as the institution responsible for women's subjugation and recognized women's reproductive function as an important factor that made them susceptible to male domination.

tury. In 1898, Kang submitted a memorial on the prohibition of footbinding, which was approved by the emperor as part of the great one hundred days of reform.⁴

Kang's campaign against footbinding had great significance for Chinese women's social advancement. But the social impact of his feminist ideas is far less clear, because *Datong shu* was not published in its entirety until 1935. Although his feminist views anticipated many New Culturalists' ideas about women's emancipation, there is no evidence that the New Culturalists read the draft of Kang's book. There was no such delay in publication of another famous reformer's views on women's issues. In *Ren xue* [The study of *jen*], Tan Sitong, a disciple of Kang, attacked the three principles of Confucianism (*sangang*). Like Kang, Tan also advocated gender equality, freedom to choose one's spouse, and sexual freedom. *Ren xue* was published in 1899, twenty years before the May Fourth movement. However, the feminist ideas of Kang and Tan were apparently unknown to Chen Dongyuan when he wrote *A History of the Lives of Chinese Women*. He merely highlighted Kang's promotion of the anti-footbinding movement and Liang Qichao's advocacy of women's education, calling the period before the 1898 reform movement the "embryonic stage" of the Chinese women's movement.

In Chen's estimation, the most influential publication on women's liberation in the late Qing was *Nüjie zhong* [The women's bell], a pamphlet published in 1903 by Jin Tianhe.⁵ Jin Tianhe, whose pen name was Freedom Lover Jin Yi, was a prolific revolutionary writer. In this pamphlet, Jin demonstrated his familiarity with Western liberalism and feminism. He compared Western ideologies to "a ray of sun appearing in a dark China," a ray that had yet to reach Chinese women. Jin tried to ring the "bell" to wake up Chinese women, so that they would join the revolution to overthrow the monarchy. In *Nüjie zhong*, Jin advocated a Western concept of liberal civil rights and women's rights. He believed that "civil rights and women's rights were born together."⁶ He stressed that Western scientific

4. Jung-Pang Lo, *Kang You-wei: A Biography and a Symposium* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967), 38–39. For a discussion of Kang Youwei and *Datong shu* and Kang's role in Chinese women's liberation, see Xiong Yuezhi, *Zhongguo jindai minzhu sixiangshi* [An intellectual history of democracy in modern China] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin chubanshe, 1986), 232–242 and 416.

5. Chen Dongyuan, *Zhongguo funü shenghuoshi* [A history of the lives of Chinese Women] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1928), 316–329.

6. Jin Yi, *Nüjie zhong* [The women's bell] (Shanghai: Datong shuju, 1903), 3. For a study of Jin Yi, see Li Yu-ning, "Nüjie zhong yu Zhonghua nüxing de xiandai-

research showed no difference in men's and women's intelligence, and he argued that inequality between Chinese men and women "resulted partly from sages' instructions dating from a barbaric age, and partly from the policies of dictatorial monarchs."⁷ He believed that the twentieth century was an age of feminist revolution when Chinese women should rise up to recover their rights.

Jin's proposal for women's rights (*nüquan*) included the right to go to school, the right to make friends, the right to run a business, the right to own property, the right to engage freely in social activities, and the right to choose one's own spouse. He also called for women's political participation, especially participation in revolution and in establishing a republican government. He declared, "If the new government of the new twentieth-century China is not held in women's hands, I will die with my eyes open."⁸

Jin did not merely urge women to leave their conventional confinement to live a new life. He also prescribed new standards for molding new women and proposed eight goals of women's education:

1. Develop noble, pure, and completely natural human beings.
2. Develop free human beings who can eliminate oppression.
3. Develop highly intellectual human beings who possess manly qualities [*nanxing*].
4. Develop enlightened leaders of women, who can change social mores.
5. Develop physically strong human beings who can raise healthy children.
6. Develop moral human beings who are model citizens.
7. Develop compassionate human beings who are concerned with public affairs.
8. Develop faithful and unyielding human beings who will promote revolution.⁹

Nüjie zhong, then, was more than a "bell" to wake up the oppressed Chinese women. It was a blueprint for making new Chinese women in the twentieth century. The new woman, distinctly different from the traditional

hua" [The women's bell and the modernization of Chinese women], in *Jinshi jiazu yu zhengzhi bijiaolishi lunwenji* [Family process and political process in modern Chinese history], ed. Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo (Taibei: Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1992), part 2, pp. 1055–1082.

7. Jin Yi, *Nüjie zhong*, 48.

8. Ibid., 50–67.

9. Ibid., 45.

woman, should be an independent and active citizen, just as a man should be. It is significant that in his eight points, Jin used the word *ren* (persons, or human beings) rather than *nüzi* (women) to refer to new women. He conceptualized Chinese women in terms of Western individualism. Motherhood was the only traditional role that new women should maintain, and he conceptualized that role in biological terms. Women's other traditional familial obligations as daughters, wives, or daughters-in-law were discarded completely. Therefore, although *Nüjie zhong* took the traditional form of didactic literature for women, it provided a radically new canon for Chinese women to follow.

Published in a time of revolutionary ferment, Jin's pamphlet was enormously popular, especially among anti-Qing revolutionaries. The first printing sold out in a few months. Many newspapers and magazines for women either discussed the ideas in *Nüjie zhong* or directly copied its phrases, and Jin Tianhe was praised as a "Rousseau for Chinese women."¹⁰ With the publication and wide circulation of *Nüjie zhong*, the term *nüquan* (women's rights) entered Chinese social and political discourse. Moreover, it was Jin who first articulated a feminist principle for early-twentieth-century Chinese liberals: natural rights should include women's rights.

Although Jin Tianhe was the most vocal advocate of women's rights in this period, a group of educated women from elite families were also actively spreading feminist ideas. A study of Chinese women's publications between 1897 and 1912 shows that of forty women's periodicals and newspapers published in Shanghai, Beijing, Tokyo (where many Chinese women went for an education), and other cities, the majority were run by women, and only three appeared before 1903. This may indicate that *Nüjie zhong* inspired educated women to take action. The women's periodicals, though mostly short-lived and of limited circulation, promulgated newly introduced Western ideologies with the slogans "natural rights" (*tianfu renquan*), "equality between men and women" (*nannü pingden*), and "recovering women's rights" (*huifu niuquan*). Although influential mainstream newspapers such as *Wanguo gongbao* [Review of the times] and journals such as *Dongfang zazhi* [The eastern miscellany] also printed articles contributed by men and women promoting women's education and covering women's rights issues in Europe and the United States, women's publications stand out in this period because it was the first time in Chinese history that women created

¹⁰. For a discussion of the impact of *Nüjie zhong*, see Xiong Yuezhi, *Zhongguo jindai minzhu sixiangshi*, 431–433.

their own newspapers and journals. And they did so with the professed goal of promoting *nüquan*.¹¹

This first generation of Chinese feminist activists were highly conscious of their pioneering role in bringing about historical transformations. Like many male reformers and revolutionaries of the time, these educated women used foreign women's social advancement as a reference point to discuss the necessity of reforming social institutions that kept Chinese women subordinate. Articles on women's education, women's political participation, and women's career and occupational opportunities and achievements in Japan, the United States, Great Britain, and other European countries were a prominent feature of Chinese women's journals. Information about ongoing women's movements in Europe and the United States appeared frequently in articles that introduced the foreign women's situations as well as in articles that discussed the Chinese women's situation. Contrasting Western women's progress with Chinese women's sufferings (such as footbinding, illiteracy, gender segregation, arranged marriage, and so on), many women writers urgently called for Chinese women to rise up. In an article titled "The Future of Chinese Women," the author, pen-named "A Hunan Woman," said that Hua Mulan was the only woman who had shone brightly in Chinese history before the nineteenth century. The author deplored the fact that, even given Mulan's great talent and aspiration, she still had to disguise herself as a man to join the army. The author asked rhetorically, "In the long thousands years [of history], except for the fortunate Mulan who became prominent, has there been no one else with unique ideas? It is all because women have been restrained by customs and controlled by the family. Even those with remarkable talent and aspirations have been unable to cross the boundaries to demonstrate their talent and express their aspirations." However, the author argued, this kind of situation would change, and Chinese women would shine brilliantly in the twentieth century:

Some people may ask, if women in China lived in this way until the end of the nineteenth century, how can we expect women in the twen-

¹¹. Shen Zhi, "Xinhai geming qianhou de nüzi baokan" [Women's newspapers and periodicals before and during the Xinhai Revolution] (paper presented at the conference on the Seventieth Anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution, Wuhan, 1981). See also All-China Women's Federation, *Zhongguo funü yundong shi* [A history of the Chinese women's movement] (Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe, 1989), 37–61. For a discussion of anarchist feminist He Zhen and her newspaper *Tianyibao*, see Peter Zarrow, chapter 6 of *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

tieth century to develop so fast? I would say, until the nineteenth century, Chinese women had neither historical precedents to invoke nor contemporary examples to emulate. Occasionally, there were women of special quality who thought of doing something. But men rose in flocks to suppress such behavior. Today the whole world is changing. New books and new journals increase in number daily and broaden our scope. Sensible men not only do not prohibit new ideas, but some also advocate women's education. Although their words may not be sincere, we women can use their lip service to pursue our goals. Well! It is wonderful! The current situation that we are in is a state that one could hardly expect to encounter in ten thousand years!

After this shrewd assessment of the changing historical tides, the author called for women's active participation in transforming the world and warned them against being mere onlookers: "If you reduce one point of your responsibility today, you will have ten points less of rights tomorrow." Therefore, women should try their best to promote reform. "Those good at speech should advocate with speech; those good at writing should promote with writing; and those good at doing should do it." The author emphasized vehemently, "We must understand that this is the moment for women to move from the dark to the light. We should not lose this opportunity and sink back to the eighteenth level of hell. It is understandable that women before the nineteenth century did not achieve anything. It would be unforgivable if women after the nineteenth century failed to achieve anything!"¹²

The end of the Qing witnessed the emergence of feminism together with the rise of nationalism. A large number of publications, *Nüjie zhong* among them, called for Chinese men and women to rise up against the Manchu dictatorship. Many women activists regarded the Qing monarchy as the first obstacle to women's liberation and to the national well-being. Obtaining women's rights became inseparable from an anti-Manchu position. Or rather, participation in anti-Manchu activities meant the beginning of an actual process of achieving women's equal rights. Qiu Jin, the most famous martyr of the 1911 Revolution, exemplified this generation of women activists. A talented woman who was extremely depressed by her unhappy marriage, Qiu divorced her unworthy husband at a time when divorce was unheard of and went to Japan in 1904, where she changed her name to Jinxiong (competing with the male). In 1904, she founded *Baihua* [Vernacular

12. Chun'an Nüzi, "Zhongguo nüzi zhi qiantu" [The future of Chinese women], *Nüxuebao* (Tokyo), no. 4 (1903), cited from Li Yu-ning and Zhang Yufa, eds., *Jindai Zhongguo nüquan yundong shiliao* [Historical source material on the modern Chinese feminist movement] (Taibei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1975), 393–396.

lar journal], and after she returned to Shanghai in 1906, she founded *Zhongguo nüba* [Chinese women's journal]. She wrote many articles and poems advocating women's rights. While in Japan, she joined the Revolutionary Alliance; she returned to China to participate in anti-Manchu activities and promote women's rights. Qiu firmly believed that to achieve equal rights, women had to shoulder the responsibilities of citizenship. In her poem "Mian nüquan ge" [Promoting women's rights], she wrote, "Equality between men and women is endowed by Heaven. How can we be content to lag behind? . . . Our fair hands are needed in order to recover our rivers and mountains. . . . Taking responsibility on our shoulders, we citizen heroines must never fail to live up to our expectations."¹³ Her strong desire to show the world that women could accomplish heroic deeds equal to those of men led to her martyrdom in 1907, when she was twenty-nine years old.¹⁴

For this generation of women revolutionaries, responsibility to the nation was associated with rights that women deserved. Many female revolutionaries, including Qiu Jin's friends and students, became suffragists soon after the last emperor was dethroned.¹⁵ The short-lived suffrage movement in the early 1910s demonstrated that many women who joined the revolutionary camp had feminist expectations. They had contributed to the birth of the republic, and because they had shared equal responsibility for the

13. Qiu Jin, "Mian nüquan ge" [Promoting women's rights] in *Zhongguo nüba* [Chinese women's periodical], no. 2 (1907), cited from Li Yu-ning and Zhang Yufa, *Jindai Zhongguo nüquan yundong shiliao*, 441. Qiu Jin was one of the few early female members of the Revolutionary Alliance, the anti-Manchu organization created by Sun Yat-sen.

14. Bao Jialin argues convincingly that Qiu Jin had enough time to run away before she was arrested, but she chose not to because she had long wished to be a heroine equal to those anti-Manchu male martyrs. See Bao Jialin, "Qiu Jin yu Qingmo funü yundong" [Qiu Jin and the women's movement in the late Qing], in *Zhongguo funushi lunji* [Collected essays on Chinese women's history], ed. Bao Jialin (Taibei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1992). The year of Qiu Jin's birth is unclear. Different historians cite the year of her birth differently. Wang Shilun studied the genealogy that Qiu Jin wrote to her best friend, Wu Zhiying, and decided that the year of her birth was 1877; see Wang Shilun, "Qiu Jin chusheng niandai" [The year of Qiu Jin's birth], *Lishi yanjiu* [Historical studies] 12 (1979): 64–65. In her confession after her arrest, Qiu wrote that she was twenty-nine years old. But Wu Zhiying said that Qiu died when she was thirty-one. The inconsistency could be a result of the difference in Chinese and Western ways of calculating age.

15. If Qiu Jin had not died as a revolutionary martyr, she probably would have become a prominent suffragist like many of her revolutionary friends. For further discussion on the Chinese suffragists in the early 1910s, see chapter 4 and 5 in this volume.

nation, they assumed that the new republic would meet their demand for equal rights. These revolutionaries-turned-suffragists were the first generation of Chinese women who entered the political arena via nationalism. Although the suffragists failed to obtain political rights—a fact often used by the People's Republic of China historians to prove that "bourgeois feminism" is inapplicable to China—the feminist agenda in the first decade of the twentieth century did in fact voice resistance to Chinese political culture. As such, it served as an intellectual precondition for the surge of feminism in the May Fourth New Culture era. Moreover, the first generation of women activists and suffragists set concrete examples for the subsequent generation of May Fourth young women. The narratives of May Fourth new women in part 2 of this study illustrate the important effect of those childhood role models on the May Fourth women's pursuit of a new life. In short, rather than a discrete phenomenon, the surge of feminism in the New Culture era was a continuation and an explosion of a feminist discourse that had existed in China since the late Qing.

PROMINENT CHAMPIONS OF FEMINISM IN THE EARLY NEW CULTURE MOVEMENT (1915–1919)

Only two years after the suppression of China's first women's suffrage movement by the Yuan Shikai government, Chen Duxiu started *New Youth* in 1915.¹⁶ It is not clear if the silencing of women's voices contributed to Chen's aversion to the dark age of Yuan dictatorship. But it is certain that his vision of a new culture for China included women's emancipation. In the first issue of *New Youth*, Chen wrote "To the Youth." Under the subheading "Autonomy, Not Slavery," he stated:

Given the rise of theories that espouse human rights and equality, courageous and upright people can no longer bear being slaves. Modern European history is called a "history of emancipation." To destroy the power of monarchs is to seek political emancipation. To deny the power of the church is to seek religious emancipation. To promote the theory of equalizing property is to seek economic emancipation. The women's

¹⁶ Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) was the leader of the powerful North China army in the late Qing. When the 1911 Revolution broke out, he played an instrumental role in arranging the abdication of the Qing. Because of his power in the military, Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the 1911 Revolution, offered Yuan the presidency of the new republic. The Yuan Shikai government made a series of moves that disillusioned many Chinese who had fought for the republic. Yuan eventually revealed his true political conviction by proclaiming himself emperor in 1915.

suffrage movement seeks emancipation from the power of men. To seek such emancipation is to throw off the yoke of slavery in order to realize an autonomous and free personhood.¹⁷

At a time when the women's movement was still marginal and encountering many obstacles in the West, Chen viewed it optimistically as a part of the Western history of emancipation from slavery. Moreover, this "history of emancipation," in the opinion of Chen and many New Culturalists, represented the trend of modern civilization and pointed the direction in which Chinese civilization would develop. The goal of this historical trend, as Chen described it, was to pursue "autonomous personhood." This theme of individualistic emancipation would be repeated by other New Culturalists in the following years.

In the next influential article that he wrote, titled "1916," Chen expounded the relevance of individualism to the Chinese people. With a sense of urgency, Chen called upon young men and women to discard the Confucian mentality, to establish independent personhood, and "to conquer but not to be conquered." He argued that individuals in the West cherished autonomy and the rights to equality and freedom; individual power led to national power. By contrast, in China the rule of Confucianism had reduced the Chinese people to a state of slavery.

The three principles that subordinate the subject to the monarch, son to father, and wife to husband have made the subject, son, and wife appendages to the monarch, father, and husband, lacking their own independent and autonomous personhood. Men and women under heaven are all subjects, sons, and wives, but none is an independent and autonomous person. Beyond that, the three principles have given rise to unchangeable standards of morality. But loyalty, filial piety, and chastity are not at all a master morality that extends standards to others from the self; rather, they are a slavery morality that makes oneself subordinate to others.¹⁸

This article was regarded by Chen's contemporaries as the first bombshell of the New Culture movement. Chen was "destroying the temple of Confucius and abolishing the worship of him."¹⁹ Tan Sitong had severely

¹⁷ Chen Duxiu, "Jinggao qingnian" [To the youth], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 1, no. 1 (1915): 2.

¹⁸ Chen Duxiu, "Yijiuyiliu" [1916], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 1, no. 5 (1915): 3.

¹⁹ Chen's students at Beijing University created this description of Chen's work, which his colleague Zhou Zuoren, another famous New Culturalist, thought "very much to the point." See Zhou Zuoren, *Zhitang huixianglu* [A memoir of Zhou Zuoren] (Hong Kong: Sanyu tushu wenju gongsi, 1974), 483.

criticized the Confucian three principles, and Jin Tianhe had vehemently promoted individual freedom and independence, but it was Chen Duxiu who imagined the opposition between Confucianism and individualism as that between slave and master. These images were powerfully persuasive to Chinese people at that time, because China's defeat by the West was fresh in their minds. With the analogy of slave and master, Chen provided an analysis of as well as a solution to China's weakness: China was almost conquered by the West because Confucian culture made Chinese people weak. To rise up from slavery, the Chinese first must acquire a master mentality—namely, the same independence and autonomy that Westerners possessed. And it was the youth—young men and women—who were most likely to become the new citizens who possessed this new mentality. In Chen's opinion at this time, molding new people to create a new culture (or creating a new culture to mold new people) was the only way to move the ancient nation toward modernity.²⁰

In "The Way of Confucius and Modern Life," Chen further demonstrated the incompatibility of Confucianism and modern life. Two-thirds of the examples he gave to illustrate the absurdity of Confucianism were rules about women. He contrasted these rules to Western women's activities, which he felt represented the standards of modern civilization. Thus, the women's suffrage movement, as "an example of women's life in modern civilization," was compared with the Confucian teaching that "women's words should not extend outside the home." The pairs of opposites also include Western widow's freedom to remarry versus the Confucian custom of widow's chastity; Western women's free social contact with men versus Confucian gender segregation; Western women's economic independence and employment opportunity versus Confucian women's seclusion and dependence on men; and a Western wife in the nuclear family versus the Confucian ritual obligations of a Chinese wife to her husband's family. In this manner, Chen's professed attack on Confucianism served to expose women's oppression in China. The gender issues he raised in the article would soon be

20. In 1914, Chen Duxiu told his friend, "If I run a periodical for ten years, the whole country's mind will be changed." When he was invited to be the dean of liberal arts at Beijing University in 1916, Chen initially declined the offer because he was running *New Youth*. He accepted the offer only when Cai Yuanpei, the university president, told him to bring the periodical with him to Beijing. Changing people's mind was Chen's and other New Culturalists' goal at this stage. See Tang Baolin and Lin Maoshen, *Chen Duxiu nianpu* [A chronicle of Chen Duxiu's life] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1988), 63–76. See also Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu, Founder of the Chinese Communist Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

developed into a focused, New Culture movement debate on the "woman problem" (*funi wenti*).²¹

As an evolutionist, Chen regarded all the contrasts between Chinese women and Western women as a difference in developmental stages. The way of Confucius represented feudalism, which must be discarded if China wanted to advance toward a higher stage of civilization. Chen contended,

Confucius lived in the feudal age. The morality he promoted was a morality of a feudal age. The rituals he taught, and the conditions of life surrounding them, were the rituals of a feudal age and the conditions of life of a feudal age. The politics he proposed was the politics of a feudal age. The morality, rituals, life and politics of a feudal age, did not go beyond the scope of the rights and honor of a small number of monarchs and nobility. They had nothing to do with the happiness of the majority of citizens. . . .

I urge the followers of Confucius not to blindly follow, but to wipe your eyes and use your brains. Observe carefully what the way of Confucius was and what the state of modern life is. With your conscience, make a clear judgment about right or wrong, benevolence or evil, evolution or regression.²²

Chen's equating of Confucian culture and feudalism would become a familiar concept to Chinese men and women of the twentieth century. Women's oppression was, or has been seen as, mainly associated with feudalism. This analytical framework does not explain gender inequality after the stage of feudalism, but Chinese women under socialism today still blame "feudal remnants" as the cause of current women's oppression. In the 1910s, it was a liberating idea that the Confucian "feudal" culture oppressed women and should be abandoned.

If women's lowly status exemplified the backwardness of Confucian culture, Chinese culture must change the status of women in order to evolve and progress. Late Qing reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao had made great efforts to change the custom of women's footbinding and to institutionalize women's education, because they believed that the backwardness of Chinese women impeded the evolution of the Chinese nation. Using the same evolutionist logic, New Culturalists turned their attention

21. Chen Duxiu, "Kongzi zhi dao yu xiandai shenghuo" [The way of Confucius and modern life], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 2, no. 4 (1916); reprint, in *Wusi shiqi funi wenti wenxuan* [Selected articles on women's problems in the May Fourth period], ed. All-China Women's Federation (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 1981), 99–105.

22. All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funi wenti wenxuan*, 104–105.

first to the situation of women. But what New Culturalists aimed to redress was more than bound feet and illiteracy. In their view, the submission of women, and the culture that was responsible for making women submissive, should be changed. In other words, without the birth of new women, it could never be said that China had achieved a new culture, a higher stage of civilization. Therefore, New Culturalists such as Chen thought it was urgent to call people's attention to women's issues.

Chen did not wait long before he made a special effort to reach women. In February 1917, *New Youth* began a column on the "woman problem." All authors were said to be women, but at least one article later proved to have been written by a man. The column appeared in four issues over the next five months and altogether printed seven articles on women. One of the seven, "Nüquan pingyi" [On women's rights], was later shown to be the work of the alleged author's husband, Wu Yu.²³ These articles advocated women's equal education and employment, criticized the Confucian concept of women's inferiority, feudal rituals, and the marriage system, and promoted "feminist revolution" (*nüquan geming*). Some authors still argued that the purpose of women's education should be to foster good wives and virtuous mothers. But the most radical article, "Nüquan pingyi," argued that a feminist revolution was necessary. In the article, Wu Yu used citations from Confucian texts to prove that Chinese women had inferior status and lacked equal rights. He described Western women's increasingly public roles and their current struggle for suffrage, which, he emphasized, represented the trends of the world. He called on Chinese women to study and improve their abilities in order to obtain their rights. He hoped that Chinese women would "strive together with men in nationalism, following women in today's Britain and Germany."²⁴

The column on the "woman problem" eventually folded either because there were too few women contributors in 1917 or because *New Youth* did not yet have a large female readership. Editorial staff member Liu Bannong wrote, "Our periodical pays great attention to the woman problem. But we

23. After "Nüquan pingyi," Wu Yu published many articles in *New Youth* under his own name. He became a prominent New Culturalist and was famous for denouncing Confucianism.

24. Wu Yu, "Nüquan pingyi" [On women's rights], in All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 8–14.

Although "Nüquan pingyi" presented powerful arguments and contained radical ideas, being one of the earliest articles on women's rights in this period, it did not receive the public attention it deserved. Chen Dongyuan did not mention it in his careful study of the influential articles on women's emancipation in *New Youth*. It is possible that the article's classic form of writing impeded popularization. Other

have received very few articles from the outside. After we reporters published our own opinions, no one joined us to discuss them. So this problem has been put aside." Staff member Tao Lügong said, "We seek women contributors who can boldly study and solve the woman problem, analyze woman's true nature, understand woman's true positions, and discuss the close relationships between woman and state and society. But such women are as rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns [*fengmao linjiao*]."²⁵

In fact, however, the cold response from women readers did not thwart the men of *New Youth*. Their response might actually have had the opposite effect: the male forerunners of a new culture were more convinced than ever of their responsibility to awaken Chinese women. In "The Woman Problem," published in January 1918, Tao Lügong discussed Western women's pursuit of economic independence and the changing political, economic, and social life of women in the West. Tao emphasized the emergence of Western feminist ideas in the past century, mentioning several female theorists, such as Ellen Key and Jane Addams. Tao believed that social changes gave rise to the emergence of women's problems such as equal opportunity of education and employment in the West and that new ideas made women awaken to address those problems. This Western pattern was relevant to Chinese women. Tao argued,

The world today is linked by dense networks of transportation and communication. Development in the economy, in occupations, and in ideas reaches everywhere, creating a global trend. What is happening in European societies today will happen in our society tomorrow. Today's women's problems in Europe and America will surely soon appear in this country. There is no doubt. As to how to find solutions, this is a difficult task that no one person can shoulder alone. Solutions depend on today's youth, especially on today's young women.²⁶

Tao's article expressed an attitude that was common among the New Culturalists. Their belief in evolutionism and their "eagerness to merge into

more influential articles were deliberately written in the vernacular to reach a potential female readership. But insofar as Wu's other articles, which made him famous, were also in the classic form yet written under his own name, one suspects that it was the name that made all the difference. A woman's name, unfortunately, devalued the important article.

25. Beijing Women's Federation, *Beijing funü baokan kao* [A study of Beijing women's newspapers and periodicals] (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1990), 111–117.

26. Tao Lügong, "Nüzi wenti" [The woman problem], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 4, no. 1 (1918): 19.

the major trends of the world" led to their universalistic thinking.²⁷ The Chinese nation was thought to be at a low stage of development, hindered by Confucianism. To accelerate the process of evolution, Chinese people should consciously remold themselves according to the example of Western culture. Moreover, the rapid changes in Western women's lives constituted an important part of modernity. Logically, only when the same changes occurred in Chinese women's lives could China be regarded as approaching modernity. Therefore, discussing the Chinese woman problem in Western terms was part of the New Culturalists' anxious effort to push China toward modernity.

The renowned "new literature" forerunner Hu Shi also used the Western model to stimulate Chinese women. In "American Women," originally a speech he made at the Beijing Women's Normal School, he argued that American women strove to be free and independent human beings and that Chinese women should emulate American women's self-reliance and get rid of dependency. "At first sight, the spirit of self-reliance seems like extreme individualism. Actually, it is an indispensable condition of a good society."²⁸

Hu's promulgation of individualism reached a climax in the publication of Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. In 1918 Hu Shi organized a special issue of *New Youth* on "Ibsenism" [Yibosheng zhuyi]. *A Doll's House* was translated into Chinese and given the title *Nuola* [Nora]. Ibsen's critique of the patriarchal European family was used to attack the Chinese family. In opposition to an evil family system, the character Nora symbolized individual resistance. Before she abandoned her family, Nora declared to her husband, "I am a human being, the same as you. No matter what, I will try my best to be a human being." With these words, Nora became the number one Western role model for a generation of Chinese educated women. Nora illustrated what a Chinese new woman should do: courageously rebel against the feudal family and strive to be an independent human being. The image of Nora, associated with the catch word *duli renge* (independent personhood), spread quickly among urban educated young women, especially after the May Fourth movement. Our aged narrators in part 2 still echo Nora's message.²⁹

27. In "More Than Ideological Beings" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1994), Hung-Yok Ip offers a detailed discussion of the May Fourth intellectuals' worldview. She defines the May Fourth intellectuals' cosmopolitanism as "the eagerness to merge into the major trend of the world" (81).

28. Hu Shi, "Meiguo de furen" [American women], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 5, no. 3 (1918): 213–224.

29. Hu Shi, "Yibosheng zhuyi" [Ibsenism], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 5, no. 6 (1918): 489–507. For a discussion of Nora's impact on Chinese women, see Witke,

In presenting new role models for Chinese women, the New Culturalists hoped to destroy the Confucian role models. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, the warlord government retained old legislation that upheld a chastity cult. The government stipulated that three kinds of women should be rewarded and praised: first, *jiefu*, women who were widowed before they turned thirty and remained widows past the age of fifty; second, *lienü* or *liefu*, women who died resisting rape, or who committed suicide after being raped, or who committed suicide after being widowed; third, *zhennü*, women whose fiancés died and who then remained virgins until death. Newspapers in the 1910s often printed stories of *jiefu* and *lienü*. After all the agitation for women's rights during the first decade, and with the emergence of many female revolutionaries in the 1911 Revolution, chastity was still officially touted as a supreme virtue in women.³⁰

In 1918, as a bold challenge to the prevailing sexual morality, Zhou Zuoren published his translation "On Chastity" in *New Youth*. The provocative article was originally written by contemporary Japanese woman poet Yosano Akiko. She questioned conventional assumptions of chastity and argued that chastity should not be connected with morality. Moreover, she exposed the oppression inherent in traditional sexual morality by analyzing double sexual standards in the society. She declared, "If the chastity code did not contradict, but rather benefited the development of human life, then we would welcome it as a new morality. But if only women should keep it, and men can be released from it, then it is contradictory. It is an old morality that makes human life disharmonious and broken. We cannot believe in it."³¹ Yosano did not specify the cultural background of the chastity moral-

"Transformation of Attitudes," 164–167; All-China Women's Federation, *Zhongguo funü yundong shi*, 69; and Chen Dongyuan, *Zhongguo funü shenghuoshi*, 375–376. For a study of Hu Shi, see Jerome B. Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). Like all other Western works on Chinese May Fourth intellectuals, Grieder's work also overlooks Hu Shih's effort at promoting Chinese women's emancipation. The emergence of the "new woman" in China can testify to Hu Shih's and his colleagues' success in spreading Western liberalism. Considering the changes in Chinese women's life during the past century, the New Culturalists' endeavor should not be viewed, as Grieder thinks, as a failure.

30. See Hu Shi, "Zhencao wenti" [The chastity problem], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 5, no. 1 (1918): 5–14.

31. Yosano Akiko, "Zhencao Lun" [On chastity], trans. Zhou Zuoren, *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 4, no. 5 (1918): 386–394. For a study of Japanese feminism, see Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983). Yosano Akiko's poems have been translated into English. See *Tangled Hair: Love Poems of Yosano Akiko*, trans. Dennis Maloney and Hide Oshiro (Fredonia, N.Y.: White Pine Press, 1987).

ity. To Chinese readers, her powerful argument spoke of a universal truth applicable directly to the Chinese situation.

Zhou Zuoren claimed that he translated this article just for the reference of a few awakened men who were concerned about the woman problem. Hu Shi responded quickly by publishing "The Chastity Problem." He dramatized the absurdity of the coexistence of chastity morality with polygamy and legalized prostitution. Hu openly opposed the government's regulations on *jiefu* and *lienü* and condemned them as "barbaric and cruel laws that should have no place today." He called for the formation of a new public opinion that would regard "anyone encouraging women to be *jiefu* and *lienü* as committing willful murder." With his liberal concept of equality, Hu also promoted one sexual standard for both men and women. He stressed, "Chastity is an attitude with which one 'person' treats another 'person.' Therefore, men should treat women as equals in respect to chastity. If a man cannot reciprocate, then he is not qualified to accept a woman's chastity."³²

Following Hu Shi, another "awakened" man, Zhou Zuoren's elder brother Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren), launched a bitter attack on chastity morality. In "My Views on *Jielie*," Lu Xun linked the chastity cult with Confucianism and pointed out that whenever the nation was in crisis, Confucians resorted to women's chastity as a means of national salvation. Aiming at the warlord government that promulgated the chastity cult, and with his typical sardonic wit, Lu asked, "How did women without chastity harm the nation? . . . Are polygamous men qualified to reward women's chastity?" He observed, "The more an emperor wanted loyalty from his subordinates, the more men wanted chastity from women." He depicted Chinese men under the dominance of Confucian tradition as despicable cowards. They regarded women as their personal possessions. They seduced and victimized women. And they blamed women for all family failures and for the defeat of the nation. As a fighter for the new culture, Lu Xun expressed his strong wish at the end of the article: "Eliminate the senseless pain in life. Eliminate the stupor and violence of making and enjoying others' pain. We further vow that all humankind should enjoy legitimate happiness."³³

32. Hu Shi, "Zhencao wenti." Hu wrote two more articles attacking the chastity cult: "Lun zhencao wenti" [On chastity] and "Lun nüzi wei qiangbao suowu" [On women who are raped], in *Hu Shi wencun* [An anthology of Hu Shi] (Taibei: Yuan-dong tushu gongsi, 1968), vol. 1, no. 4.

33. Tang Si (Lu Xun's pen name), "Wozhi jieliegua" [My views on *jielie*], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 5, no. 2 (1918); reprint, in All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 115–123. This article reveals Lu Xun's early con-

The New Culturalists' attack on Confucian sexual morality was extremely radical for their time. Powerfully exposing Chinese women's sufferings, they effectively challenged Confucian ethics. What Chinese men and women had taken for granted for centuries, what had always been a normal way of life, was now revealed to be nothing but a custom that could be summarized in two characters: *chiren* (eat humans).³⁴ The barbaric inhuman system surely had no reason to persist in the modern world. The few "awakened" men's professed courage and humanity, together with their insight and wit, quickly attracted numerous young followers. In the succeeding years, an explosion of a nationwide discussion on "women's problems" demonstrated the strong impact of these early works. Educated young men and women all over the country began to discuss new sexual morality, marriage, divorce, and so on. As a result, the sexual behavior of the May Fourth men and women changed rapidly. The narratives in part 2 illustrate this point.

Before the May Fourth Incident, an essay in the newly founded *Xin chao* [New wave], an influential New Culture periodical, summarized the New Culturalists' theses on women's emancipation. Stimulated by "several awakened men's talks" on women's problems, Ye Shaojun presented a coherent analysis of "the problem of women's personhood." He defined "personhood" as "a spirit of being an independent and wholesome individual in a big group." Chinese women did not possess personhood, he argued, not only because the sexual division of labor placed women in a dependent position in domestic life, but also because Confucian men denied women's personhood out of their own self-interest. Following New Culturalists' critiques of various aspects of women's oppression in the Confucian culture, Ye listed the many ways in which men trapped women: through women's subordinate normative status (*mingfen*) prescribed in the Confucian principle "husband guides wife"; through the teaching of "virtuous mother and good wife"; through the morality of chastity and *jielie*; and through the treatment of women as sexual and reproductive machines and as appendages. He urged women to acquire a consciousness of being human (*ren*):

ception of his famous story "Zhufu" [The new year's sacrifice] (1924), in *Lu Xun xuanji* [Selected works of Lu Xun], ed. Wenxue chubanshe (Hong Kong: Wenxue chubanshe, 1956), 78–94.

34. In his short story "Kuangren riji" [A madman's diary] (1918), Lu Xun first used the metaphor *chiren* to denounce the inhumanness of Confucian rituals. Wu Yu then wrote an essay titled "Chiren yu lijiao" [Eating humans and Confucian ethics]. Both influential works contributed greatly to anti-Confucianist discourse in modern China.

A woman should know that she is a human being. She should fully develop her capacities to do whatever a human being should do. To be a human being one should follow the truth and abandon and destroy the absurd normative status [*mingfen*] and false morality. . . . Men and women should be of one mind on this matter: each human being is a member in the process of evolution; each should reach the state of independence and wholesomeness; and each should enjoy the state of being upright and high-minded, and enjoy the happiness of freedom.³⁵

Ye's essay cogently displayed the centrality of women's independent personhood in the "woman problem" as perceived by the New Culturalists in this period. Achieving independent personhood (*duli renge*) was soon to become the hallmark of May Fourth feminism. It also became a goal as well as a behavioral standard for the new women of the May Fourth era.

THE MOTIVATIONS OF MALE CHAMPIONS

The emergence of a group of male champions in early-twentieth-century China is a unique phenomenon with a particular historical context. As I have discussed, a nationalistic concern, an attack on Confucianism, a trust in evolutionism, a faith in liberal humanism, and a belief in universalism combined to facilitate those men's ready acceptance of feminism. The women's suffrage movements in Europe and North America added timely weight to the New Culturalists' belief that the whole world, men and women, would evolve toward equality and freedom. World events in the nineteenth and early twentieth century conveyed a message to New Culturalists that humanism, or "the discovery of the human being," in Zhou Zuoren's words, should include women.³⁶

In his study of Zhou Zuoren's ideas about women's emancipation, Chinese scholar Shu Wu comments,

35. Ye Shaojun, "Nüzi renge wenti" [On the problem of women's personhood], *Xinchao* [New tide] 1, no. 2 (1919); cited from All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 129–130. The language in Ye's article was typical of the time. Terms like *duli jianquan* (independent and wholesome) and *guangming gaoshang* (upright and high-minded) appeared frequently in many articles written by the New Culturalists and May Fourth students. These terms, signifying an utopian ideal, were deliberately used to mold a new national character. They have become frequently used phrases by educated Chinese in the twentieth century.

36. See Zhou Zuoren, "Ren de wenxue" [Human literature] (1918), in *Nüxing de faxian* [The discovery of women], ed. Shu Wu (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1990), 3–10. Zhou advocated an individualistic humanism and claimed that, after four thousand years of history, Chinese had not yet discovered the human being.

In the early stages of China's New Culture movement, progressive ideas about women's emancipation and the woman problem in general were all guided by the fundamental idea of "the discovery of the human being." "The discovery of the human being" happened in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It became an old issue by the beginning of the twentieth century. But it was a fresh issue in China. "The discovery of the human being" in Europe did not, at first, include women. "The discovery of women" only happened two centuries later. But in China, the two discoveries were made simultaneously, which was certainly a more difficult task than that in Europe. The race to catch up by a nation lagging behind necessarily required double effort. However, unlike Europe, which had to experience an interval of two centuries, China accomplished the two discoveries in one battle. If we just talk about speed, we can say the successors surpass the predecessors.³⁷

The Chinese enlightenment was perceived as in line with the universal process of evolution—with the difference that the newcomers had the benefit of hindsight in their eventually successful efforts to catch up. European enlightenment began with exclusive male rights, and as a result, the West had to wait another two centuries to make the second discovery—"the discovery of women." The advocates of Chinese enlightenment were fully aware of the limitations of earlier Western models, and in their universalist thinking, China could leap over this long interval if women's emancipation was included in the Chinese enlightenment. Moreover, many New Culturalists observed that Western societies were still male-centered. In achieving women's emancipation, China might "surpass" the West in the process of democratization.³⁸

Whereas Shu's observation, substantiated by historical documentation, points to the strands of humanism and universalism in the New Culture, another Chinese scholar, Qian Liqun, emphasizes the importance of cosmopolitanism in the New Culturalists' perception of women's issues. Qian contends that the "awakening of human beings" in the New Culture movement was a simultaneous awakening of the "consciousness of the individual"

37. Ibid., 5–6.

38. For example, Li Dazhao in 1919 called for women's emancipation and criticized the West in this respect: "Democracy in contemporary Europe and America is still not true democracy, because all their movements, legislation, speech and ideas are still male-centered. They have no concern for the interests of the other half, women." Li Dazhao, "Funü jiefang yu democracy" [Women's emancipation and democracy], *Shaonian Zhongguo* [The young China] 1, no. 4 (1919); cited from All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 27.

and the "consciousness of humankind." New Culturalists' concern for the development of the individual was linked to their deep concern about the future of humankind. "In the minds of Zhou Zuoren's generation, women's emancipation was closely connected to a holistic development of human nature. Their thinking on the woman problem, in fact, encompassed their thinking on the development of human nature in general."³⁹

Hung-Yok Ip, in her study of the May Fourth intellectuals, noticed this same cosmopolitan-internationalist commitment to democracy. Analyzing Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, Ip comments,

To be sure, a nationalistic commitment underlay their wish to construct a "democratic" international relationship, since such a relationship would promote the independence and dignity of the weak nations. Even so, the nationalistic commitment at least did not narrow these two eminent intellectuals' cosmopolitan-internationalist democratic vision to an exclusive concern for the removal of oppression, but inspired them further to appreciate the more positive elements—love, mutual respect and mutual aid—at an international level.⁴⁰

This cosmopolitan-internationalist strand was extant in much of the New Culture works on women. Writers would often discuss women's issues both in the West and in China in the same article, conveying a concern for the entire human race. Li Dazhao wrote "The Woman Problem after the War" to examine Western women's situation and the feminist movement there. The article not only shows Li's familiarity with developments in the West, but also demonstrates his astute understanding of the relationship between gender and class. Such a careful study arose out of his deep concern not only for China but also for world civilization. He ended his article with these words: "I cannot arbitrarily decide if women in China have any interest in women's problems in the world. But I strongly wish that Chinese society was not in 'semiparalysis.' And I strongly hope that China will not be a reason why world civilization in the new century will remain a civilization in 'semiparalysis.'"⁴¹

39. Qian Liqun, *Zhou Zuoren lun* [On Zhou Zuoren] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), 124.

40. Ip, "More Than Ideological Beings," 94.

41. Li Dazhao, "Zhanhou zhi furen wenti" [Women's problems after the war], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 6, no. 2 (1919); cited from All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 20. "Semiparalysis" was a metaphor used earlier by Jin Tianhe, the author of *Nüjie zhong*, when he argued that if women did not have education, the nation would be like a semiparalyzed person. The paralyzed half would eventually affect the other half of the body. Because of the New Culturalists'

Li Dazhao's utopian vision of humanity's future stresses the centrality of gender, an emphasis similar to Kang Youwei's thesis in *Datong shu*. In the high tide of student activism after the May Fourth Incident, Li wrote "Women's Emancipation and Democracy" to instigate a women's liberation movement in China. In that article he argued,

All classes in the society can be changed. The rich can become poor, and the poor can become rich. Landlords and capitalists can become workers, and workers can become landlords and capitalists. With adequate social transformation, all these classes may disappear. Only the line between man and woman is permanent and unchangeable. Therefore, democracy between the two sexes is more important than anything else. If we want to demand democracy between the two sexes, the women's liberation movement is also more important than anything else.⁴²

In later years, in the Communist Party's analysis, a proletarian revolution became more important than anything else, and women's emancipation could only be achieved through women's participation in the revolution, rather than through an independent feminist movement. However, in the first stage of the New Culture movement, male champions—including Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, future founders of the Chinese Communist Party—insisted that the gender issue was central. Although they approached the gender issue from a variety of intellectual commitments and concerns, and although many of them changed intellectual ground constantly, the concerted voices of these eminent men nevertheless created a liberal humanist discourse on women's emancipation.

Before we leave these male champions, there is one more question that should be asked. Beyond or beneath their professed intellectual commitment to women's emancipation, is there something at the subconscious level that might explain these men's behavior?

In an interesting study "The Language of Despair: Ideological Representations of the 'New Women' by May Fourth Writers," Ching-ku Stephen Chan argues that "the modern intellectual wanted desperately to re-present *himself* via a mutation in the crisis of the 'other.'" The May Fourth intellectuals, Chan suggests, not only conveyed to their readers a crit-

repeated use, this phrase became well-known in the May Fourth era. Most people used it to connect women's emancipation with the well-being of the nation. But Li Dazhao uses it here to express concerns beyond the nation's interests.

42. Li Dazhao, "Funü jiefang yu democracy"; cited from All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 27.

ical sense of unrest and bewilderment, but actually shaped the collective consciousness of historical crisis. Moreover, Chan proposes, "[For] the May Fourth intellectuals (among them iconoclastic writers of all sorts), to capture the historical moments of their time was, in essence, to summon up those experiences of crisis for a new mode of representation, and (thus) as the question of representation itself." And the act of representation, Chan contends, should be "recognized as an objectifying process of the identity crisis rooted in the collective unconscious of the May Fourth writers."⁴³ Therefore, the May Fourth men's construction of the images of new women reflected these men's unconscious anxiety over their own identity crisis.

Chan focuses on the representation of women in literary works by May Fourth male writers. His purpose differs from my purpose in this study, which examines the disruption of traditional gender relationships by male champions. His source materials are different from mine, insofar as he does not discuss the nonliterary texts about women written by May Fourth male intellectuals. The messages in their nonliterary texts, such as the debates on the woman problem and agitation for a feminist movement, often differ greatly from those in their literary texts. For example, the representation of new women in literary works, as Chan illustrates, appropriated the sex binary, an intellectual self (male) versus the emotional other (female). But in nonliterary texts, the most prominent theme contradicts the sex binary by appealing to the liberal concept of an ungendered, universal human being. Our previous discussion of male champions' nonliterary works demonstrates that the goal of Chinese women's emancipation, as perceived by those men, was for Chinese women to cross gender boundaries and to become independent *ren* (persons, or human beings). Therefore, the literary representation of new women, though a part of the discourse about new women during the May Fourth era, should be distinguished from the dominant liberal humanist theme in the same discourse. The distinction may help us understand the construction of subjectivity on the part of actual new women, beyond the new women who appear as a trope in male literary representations.

If we keep this distinction in mind, Chan's theory of representation is useful in our examination of male champions' advocacy of women's emancipation. After all, the nonliterary texts by men were but a different form of representation. The critique of women's oppression in Confucian culture

43. Ching-ku Stephen Chan, "The Language of Despair: Ideological Representations of the 'New Women' by May Fourth Writers," *Modern Chinese Literature* 4, nos. 1 and 2 (1988): 19–38.

and the advocacy of women's emancipation highlighted the point that "the modern intellectual desperately wanted to re-present *himself*" via gender issues. His attack on the gender system in China allowed him to express his alienation from the ancient culture. His embrace of Nora revealed not only his frustration with the Chinese hierarchical and patriarchal family, but also—at a more profound level—his resentment of the burdens and constraints he experienced in a social structure based on networks of hierarchical and differential human relationships and their associated responsibilities and obligations (namely, Confucian ethics). He himself dreamed of being an independent person with individual freedom. Moreover, his fundamental crisis was generated by a painful realization of his peripheral and subaltern position in China's semicolonization by the West. The comforting, centuries-old sense of superiority enjoyed by Chinese male literati was forcefully undermined by the powerful, "superior" West. Taking a leading role in identifying an "oppressed" and "inferior" social group—women—the modern intellectual reaffirmed his own superiority. In short, his outcry for women's emancipation also *represented*, or, gave voice to, his own conscious or unconscious desires, conflicts, and crises.⁴⁴

The modern intellectual's need of representation was psychologically connected to his unconscious identity crisis, a point Chan expounds in his study. Retaining the idea of identity crisis, we may approach the question of male representation from a cultural and social perspective. Why didn't the Western-educated, modern Chinese intellectual simply raise the banner of self-emancipation instead of women's emancipation? What prevented him from openly acting out his own desire to be emancipated? These questions lead us to a point that many Western scholars of May Fourth Chinese intellectuals have made: even the so-called cultural rebels or iconoclasts were severely constrained by the very culture they wanted to remodel.⁴⁵ In the hegemony of Confucian culture, individual self-interest could not be a professed end of one's action, especially if one desired social prestige. The Confucian maxim *ke ji fu li* (subdue the self and return to the rituals of antiquity) did not grant legitimacy to "being oneself" or "expressing oneself."

44. For a comparison of Western and Chinese societies, and a discussion on Chinese moral obligations in the Confucian norms, see Fei Xiaotong's *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, trans. Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

45. For example, Jerome Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance*, Lee Feigon, *Chen Duxiu*, and Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) all noticed the cultural continuity in the New Culturalists.

Instead, the Confucian ethical system "grants each individual a highly personal satisfaction in heeding its standards but directs every person's behavior toward the good of the family and the larger society."⁴⁶ To be ethical and moral was to fulfill social obligations to others. Anyone who wanted social standing must display a decent level of social-mindedness. In this cultural context, a demand for self-emancipation would not be seen as legitimate. And anyone who made such a demand could go nowhere beyond being viewed as idiosyncratic. Promoting Western individualism, the New Culturalists nevertheless had to legitimize this effort (either consciously or unconsciously) in terms of national well-being and modernity. Seen in this light, the discovery of women as an oppressed social group by the New Culturalists was indeed fortunate. Representing the oppressed, the modern intellectuals not only were able to express their own alienation and frustration, but, more important, could now also locate their own social positions in a turbulent world. As Zhou Zuoren remarked astutely in 1927, "The masses are still the most fashionable icon now. Whatever oneself wants to do is done in order to fulfill the demand of the masses, just like receiving the mandate from heaven in ancient times."⁴⁷

Chinese women were the first oppressed group that the modern intellectuals chose to represent. Later, under the influence of Marxism and Leninism, intellectuals on the Left would represent workers and peasants, a trend so strong by 1927 that the detached Zhou Zuoren felt he must criticize it.

Representing oppressed women, the modern intellectual achieved several things simultaneously. He satisfied his own culturally implanted need for social responsibility, as well as meeting societal expectations for a scholar. He found a social issue with a potentially large constituency, unlike his effort at "new literature," which could be viewed as merely a fight among literati (*wenren*) over literary forms. Now, with the new form of literature and vernacular (*baihua*) to advocate women's emancipation, the modern intellectual found himself moving rapidly away from his former obscurity. The explosion of debate on the woman problem, or by now women's problems, in the May Fourth student movement both testified to the increasing influence of the New Culturalists and helped to extend their influence beyond

46. Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 41. In the Confucian concept, a human being is constituted by what he or she is supposed to perform in accordance with Confucian moral codes. For a further discussion of self and society in Confucian culture, see the introduction to Fei, *From the Soil*.

47. Zhou Zuoren, "Beigouyan tongxin" [A correspondence from Beigouyan], in Shu Wu, *Nüxing de faxian*, 12.

literary circles. By the early 1920s, the small number of New Culturalists had established themselves as the guides who would lead youth into a new age. Without understanding the underlying benefits (psychological or social) for male champions of women's emancipation, we could not comprehend why so many educated men followed their trail so quickly during the May Fourth era. It was an exhilarating historical moment, when both educated men and women were empowered by a man-made feminist discourse.

Empowering as it was, the New Culturalists' representation of Chinese women had problems. As Chan points out, in the male literary representation, the new woman spoke what was on men's minds rather than in her own voice. The male representation undermined the initial effort to subvert the dominant discourse on women. In their study of May Fourth literature, Chinese scholars Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua observe that the "oppressed women" and the new women in literary texts were the products of male writers' concepts of women, rather than actual descriptions of the women of that historical time. They find that in the men's discourse, "women were asked simultaneously to wake up and to continue sleeping."⁴⁸ In a study of Chinese modern fiction, Yue Ming-bao further criticizes May Fourth male writers' failure to link women's issues to language itself: "[M]any female voices which had historically been silenced by the tools of representation continued to be muffled by the new linguistic tools advocated by the revolutionary intellectuals of the May Fourth period. . . . Even though the writers are sincere in their intentions to defend women, their writing betrays the discursive habits of a patriarchal tradition which excludes women's experiences from its articulation."⁴⁹

When women were inspired by the man-made feminist discourse in the larger social scene rather than in literary images, new dynamics came into play in ways that defied their male champions' imaginations. In women's own organized activities for women's emancipation in the early 1920s, women raised their voices loudly. Encouraged by the new language of women's emancipation, many educated women bravely pursued a life of their own rather than "continue sleeping." As I emphasize throughout this study, women are not passively made by male discourses. The May Fourth new women lived very different lives from the new women images con-

48. Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* [Emerging from history] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1989), 43.

49. Yue Ming-bao, "Gendering the Origins of Modern Chinese Fiction," in *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society*, ed. Tonglin Lu (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 48, 54.

structed by male writers. Nevertheless, the discursive power of the New Culture elite paradoxically both stimulated a feminist movement and undermined the cause of women's emancipation in China.

With their increasing discursive and political power (especially after the mid 1920s), the New Culturalists defined why they wanted women's emancipation and what constituted women's emancipation. After they rose to the center of intellectual discourse in the early 1920s, the New Culturalists were quite complacent with their new authoritative position in defining women's issues. They could be extremely condescending toward women's own efforts at self-emancipation. Shen Yanbing, the renowned champion of the Chinese feminist movement, revealed his sense of superiority clearly in "On *The New Woman*," a critique of the newly published women's magazine. In his view, the articles written by women on the subject of women's emancipation only demonstrated the writers' ignorance of Western intellectual and literary theories. Because the articles "simply talk about what every one knows and what you see in every newspaper and periodical," they were devoid of value. Deploring women writers' lack of book knowledge, he admonished them in the voice of the guardian of the New Culture: "I advise the women in *The New Woman*, when in the future you have read a lot of books and want very much to express your opinions, it will still be better not to publish your own magazine. Because the New Culture movement does not need publications in larger numbers, but publications with higher standards."⁵⁰

The male champions thus simultaneously disrupted and maintained hierarchical gender relationships. It was liberating to many women that the patriarchal power of Confucianism was challenged severely by the New Culturalists. But then women found a new male authority in the New Culture elite. It was reassuring to both men and women that the New Culture elite had assumed the position of moral and intellectual authority, but this authority could undermine the development of an independent women's movement.

The male champions' definition of women's emancipation changed with the changing intellectual and political currents. At the beginning of the New Culture movement, individualism was used to combat the Confucian culture, and women were urged to be independent persons and to revolt against feudalism. After the leftist intellectuals accepted Marxism, the individualistic theme was dropped and replaced by an emphasis on socialist revolu-

50. Pei Wei (Shen Yanbing), "Ping xinfunü" [On the new women], *Funü zazhi* [The ladies' journal] 6, no. 2 (1920): 1–3.

tion. In a speech to women in 1921, Chen Duxiu stressed that it was erroneous to think that women could achieve independence merely by leaving their natal families, because in capitalism, even if women found employment in society, they were still the slaves of capitalists. Women could only achieve independent personhood in socialism. "Nine-tenths of women's pain derives from economic problems. Socialism can solve not only women's problems but all problems. . . . Therefore, I hope men and women will all strive for socialism."⁵¹ Chen's rudimentary Marxist analysis of women's problems, substantiated by translated European socialist works on women in those years, would develop into a dominant theory on women's emancipation in the CCP. Although the May Fourth intellectuals' endorsement of socialism was driven in part by a search for solutions to women's problems, in Marxist and Leninist analysis, gender issues were soon obscured by class struggle.⁵²

Perhaps the most problematic issue in May Fourth men's representations of women is the fact that they viewed women's emancipation as serving larger purposes rather than as being an end in itself. The professed purposes included overthrowing feudalism, advancing the nation toward modernity, overcoming imperialism, and later, saving the nation. Associating women's emancipation with those grand causes helped clear the obstacles for Chinese women's advancement into the public arena, but at the same time, only a women's movement that was appended to a great cause could occupy a legitimate position in the mainstream discourse. The altruistic nature of Chinese women's emancipation eventually made some women feel more used than liberated, a sentiment expressed in the narratives in part 2.

All in all, the role of emancipator allowed May Fourth intellectuals to gloss over the contradictions and conflicts between old and new cultures in the minds of New Culturalists themselves. In naming Confucian culture as the oppressor, the New Culturalists successfully placed themselves in opposition to that oppressor. At the time, no one asked this New Culture elite,

51. Chen Duxiu, "Funü wenti yu shehuizhuyi" [The woman problem and socialism] (1921), in All-China Women's Federation, *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 82–83.

52. Regardless of their different intellectual commitments or political orientations, the majority of May Fourth men who pondered women's emancipation agreed that the abolishing of private ownership was a precondition for women's final emancipation. Socialism, therefore, was embraced by many as the fundamental solution to women's problems. Chen Duxiu expressed this line of thinking in these simple words: "Women and laborers are both weak. If we want to help the weak resist the strong, there is no other way except for socialism" ("Funü wenti yu shehuizhuyi," 82–83).

"To what extent are you yourself a product of the hegemonic Confucian discourse? And what measures are you taking to address the patriarchal assumptions in your own consciousness?" In sharp contrast to the abundant discussion of how women should overcome all kinds of obstacles to achieve emancipation, few examined men's problems in achieving their own emancipation, especially psychological emancipation from the constraints and construction of the patriarchal culture.⁵³ In other words, raising women's consciousness did not go hand in hand with raising men's consciousness. The position of emancipator seemed to exempt male champions from self-scrutiny. As a result, male-centeredness and patriarchal language were not only present in many New Culturalists' written works but also openly maintained in their private lives.

Lu Xun's life exemplifies this patriarchal recidivism. After a long and unhappy arranged marriage, Lu Xun fell in love with Xu Guangping, a student seventeen years younger than himself. Xu was a new woman who had once been an activist in the May Fourth student movement in Tianjin. Having fully absorbed the May Fourth feminist language, she was ready to break free of the "old ethics" and to pursue her own love: "We believe that nothing should restrain a relationship between two persons of the opposite sex, and only the two involved should decide about their own life. So long as they love each other, respect and trust each other, and treat each other like

53. In this respect, Zhou Zuoren was an exception among the New Culturalists. He was consistent in his critique of male-centeredness. In "Beigouyan tongxin," he stressed, "A big error now is that everything still follows men's standards, including the women's movement." In later years, he continued to write short essays expressing his concern over women's fate in a male-centered culture. In many essays he emphasized the necessity and importance of women's own conscious effort at women's emancipation, revealing his distrust of men's activities on women's behalf. However, in the May Fourth era, his focus was on women's sexual freedom instead of men's interest in a male-centered culture. For Zhou Zuoren's discussions on a range of topics relating to women's liberation, see Shu Wu, *Nüxing de faxian*.

An article written in 1920 by Li Renjie touched upon the topic of men's emancipation. The author commented that few people discussed men's emancipation and proceeded to give his view on this issue. He argued that private ownership made men suffer but that a necessary precondition to eliminating private ownership was to allow women independence. Therefore, women's emancipation should come before men's emancipation, and men should help women achieve independence. He urged men to realize their self-interest in women's emancipation, lest men be hypocritical in advocating women's emancipation. He told a story of his friend who gave many lectures calling for women's emancipation, but who kept a concubine and beat his wife. See Li Renjie, "Nannü jiefang" [Men's and women's emancipation], in *Zhongguo funü wenti taolunji* [Collected essays on Chinese women's problems], ed. Mei Sheng (Shanghai: Xinwenhua chubanshe, 1929), 1: 68–88.

comrades, there is no need for any conventional form."⁵⁴ Resisting tremendous social pressure, she lived with Lu Xun even though she knew that he would not divorce his legal wife, whom he viewed as "the victim of old customs."⁵⁵

In their ten years together, Xu served as Lu's secretary and homemaker. Many times, this new woman tried to involve herself in public activities or find a career of her own. But each time, Lu Xun vetoed her decision. About her attempt to run a women's periodical, he would say, "What is the point of doing something so inconsequential that it brings no pain, not even a scratch?" About her job opportunities, he would say, "My two articles will bring me the same amount of money that you labor for a month to earn. Plus you have to watch your boss's face. It is better that you stay at home to help me and let me write more."⁵⁶ For Lu's sake, Xu forsook her dream of an independent career. The only thing she would not let go of was the three hundred silver dollars that she had saved from her teaching salary before she began to live with Lu Xun. In case she and Lu Xun ever separated, that amount of money would sustain her for a few months until she could find a job.

It was often painful for a new woman like Xu Guangping to consciously sacrifice everything for the sake of the man she loved. As she wrote, "His work is great. But I am just being a housewife!" The thought caused her deep agony but did not change her pattern of self-sacrifice. She knew perfectly well the cause of her internal conflict: "I think I may be a combination of old and new ideas. This combination may be satisfying to some people, such as my spouse. But I am not satisfied; instead, I am often depressed.

54. Xu Guangping's letter to Xu Shoutang, who was writing a chronology of Lu Xun after Lu's death in 1936. The quote is from Zen Zhizhong's *Sanren xing* [A journey of the three] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1990), 391–392. In this biographical work, Zen uses historical documents to reconstruct Lu Xun's private life and his relationships with his legal wife, Zhu An, and his common-law wife, Xu Guangping.

55. See Tang Si (Lu Xun), "Suiganlu shishi" [Informal essay, no. 40], *Xin qingnian* [New youth] 6, no. 1 (1919); reprint, in All-China Women's Federation, *Wusishiqi funü wenti wenxuan*, 200–201. Written in 1919, this article expressed Lu Xun's pain in a loveless marriage as well as his moral obligation toward his legal wife. Because she, too, was a victim of the old custom, Lu Xun at that time felt he had to sacrifice his own happiness to accompany her forever. And even after he began to live with Xu Guangping, he continued his financial responsibility to Zhu An. For an understanding of Lu Xun's changing views on pursuing love and of the relationship between Lu and Xu, see also Lu Xun, *Liangdishi* [Letters between two places] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973).

56. Zen Zhizhong, *Sanren xing*, 356–357.

When I am guided by the new ideas, I am discontented with the status quo. When I am restrained by the old morality, I am contented with things as they are.”⁵⁷

It is a telling observation that the combination of old and new in a woman satisfied the needs of men like Lu Xun. Championing the cause of women’s emancipation, not all the New Culturalists were ready to give up their male privileges in the patriarchal society, privileges that could only be maintained through women’s self-sacrifice. Though new women such as Xu Guangping were inspired by the principle of gender equality, they were at the same time burdened with the Confucian morality deep in their unconscious. As a woman, especially a junior woman, facing the demands of a senior man in a prestigious social position, it would be immoral and selfish for her to assert her equal rights and equal treatment. The “new” principle of equality was in direct conflict with the “old” principle of hierarchical differential social relations and obligations. And the “old” principle, in Xu’s case, gained the upper hand in the new woman’s personal life. In a sense, the Xu-Lu relationship, the young student and the senior teacher, the emancipated and the emancipator, embodied the relationship between the new women and the male champions of the May Fourth era. The historical burden of the new women was a blessing for the May Fourth men. The male champions’ sense of superiority as well as their cultural entitlement to privileges were unchallenged but sustained in an age of unprecedented agitation for women’s emancipation.

57. Ibid., 357–358.

2 A Case of Circulating Feminism *The Ladies’ Journal*

Feminist theorist Chris Weedon has observed that “in order to have a social effect, a discourse must be at least in circulation.”¹ What made the New Culturalists’ efforts at women’s emancipation decisively different from Kang Youwei’s effort was not that the ideas of New Culturalists were more radical, but that their ideas were *circulated* much more widely than Kang’s. Rapidly expanding women’s education in the early twentieth century prepared a growing number of female recipients for new ideas. The May Fourth student movement further turned many female students into active promulgators of New Culture ideas. With both men’s and women’s involvement, women’s magazines and women’s columns or forums in newspapers sprang up like mushrooms after the May Fourth Incident in 1919. *The Ladies’ Journal* [Funü zazhi] was the most influential and had the widest circulation, the most subscribers, and the longest life of the mainstream women’s magazine that followed the New Culture fad. As such, it best illustrates the process of popularizing the New Culture feminism.

THEMES BEFORE THE MAY FOURTH INCIDENT IN 1919

The Commercial Press in Shanghai published *The Ladies’ Journal* in January 1915, the same year that Chen Duxiu started *New Youth*. As the most successful publishing house in China, the Commercial Press had bookstores in twenty-eight Chinese cities, as well as in Hong Kong, Macao, and Singapore. *The Ladies’ Journal* was thus able to reach women across a wide geographical area, unlike most women’s magazines, whose influence was

1. Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987), 110.