

# The impossibility of gender in narratives of China's modernity

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Recent cultural histories have gone to considerable lengths to define an 'alternative modernity' for China, going back to the commercial developments of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> As delineated via the complex relationship between dominant Western and 'other' versions of modernity, its general form has been indicated by, for example, Dorothy Hodgson, who notes that 'the "Modernity" of the Eurocentric post-Enlightenment model shares with other colonial and post-colonial modernities a belief in ideologies of progress and improvement, although the meanings and objectives signified by these terms may vary.'<sup>2</sup> Defined through conflict, struggle and cultural contestation with colonial power and its ownership of 'Modernity', the modernity of the 'other' apparently charts an erasure of the authentic 'native', or – more fashionably – the colonised subaltern.<sup>3</sup> Dressed in his Zhongshan suit, the authentically 'Chinese' revolutionary of the early twentieth century betrays cues of both 'tradition' and the 'modern'. Is the cigarette-smoking Shanghai beauty, with her bobbed hair and flapper attire, more Chinese or Western?

Narratives of femininity and masculinity across the different stages of China's twentieth-century modernity similarly evidence the unequal negotiation between competing ideas associated with the West, the global, and the Chinese, charting a shifting political terrain that marks the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion between the past and the future, the 'modern' and the 'traditional'. From the commercialized print culture of Shanghai of the 1920s to the ideological discipline of the Cultural Revolution revolutionary operas and ballets, through to the consumerism of contemporary urban spaces, such a terrain has confirmed familiar expectations of gender while at the same time offering new subject positions to its various explorers. Never just the cultural translation of Western terms and values, nor, on the other hand, simply the product of nativist understandings of gendered difference, how does the

gendered subject of China's modernity depart from the masculinist terms of modern global discourse?

Today, the gendered narratives of its modern history that circulate in mainstream academic and media spaces largely follow the temporalities of the Chinese Communist Party's own historiography of the women's movement, the different stages of which themselves correspond to the essential contours of Communist-led social transformation. According to these dominant narratives, the Communist movement successfully absorbed the liberal, individualist tendencies of earlier 'May Fourth' approaches to women's emancipation into a revolutionary, collective strategy in which the women's struggle was seen as an arm of the national struggle as a whole, and in which the eradication of gender inequalities became an integral part of social revolution. Following the 1950s' period of national reconstruction, in which the entry of vast numbers of women into the social labour force established the basis for their 'liberation', the Mao years are now also commonly perceived, however, as having imposed an artificial neutralization of gender difference that operated as a kind of masculinist straitjacket, denying women agency, as women, by suppressing their essential 'femininity'. The end of Mao's rule and the beginning of market reform are widely heralded today as the renewed expression of essentially 'natural' gender differences, and hence as the rearticulation of desires, aspirations and self-identifications once denounced by the harsh strictures of Mao's egalitarianism. If the reassertion of a naturalized gender difference offered liberatory possibilities for some women, it also, according to this narrative, necessarily led to the reassertion of gender inequalities, some artificially suppressed during the socialist era and others newly produced as a spontaneous and inevitable consequence of the demands for economic efficiency and production. Spurred on by China's engagement with global capital and culture, and the blurring of discursive

boundaries between the 'official', the 'market' and the 'popular', the reformist discourse of gender has supposedly substituted a diversification of femininities and masculinities for the uniform representations and expectations of the Mao era that preceded it.

As an analytical category, the term 'gender' first entered Chinese sociological and political discourses during the 1980s, when it was introduced by scholars and activists working outside the margins of the official women's organization, the All China Women's Federation. Since then, and particularly since the mid-1990s, it has occupied an increasingly noticeable place in critical narratives of China's market modernity: in detailed analyses of patterns of employment, labour migration and education; birth control policy, demographic change and reproductive health; marriage, family and divorce; domestic violence, abduction of girls, prostitution and pornography; rates of HIV/AIDS infection and sexually transmitted diseases; representations in the media and advertising; and so on. Yet, as Zhong Xueping has recently noted, the theoretical language of gender has still not made its mark as a genuinely critical category of *social* analysis either in Chinese academia or in policymaking processes.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, at a time when considerable empirical evidence suggests a widening of poles of gender discrimination in various fields of social practice, there seems to be an institutional disdain of its exponents.<sup>5</sup> Its political implications are apparently too unsettling.<sup>6</sup> The market's 'diversified' representations of femininities and masculinities are thus effectively abstracted from the potentially disturbing *political* meanings of gender, and reaffirm the personal gains – and losses – that result from individual investment in the opportunities of the private market, divesting them of any meaning that might challenge established norms.

In what follows, I want to argue that this current discursive resistance to gender as a critical category in China can be seen as a component of a rather longer historiography – one that ascribes a continuous and non-antagonistic trajectory to the Chinese women's movement, in which gender difference and conflict are seen either as an effect of socio-economic forces or as the expression of Maoist egalitarian imaginings. Dominant narratives of China's modernity in the twentieth century have come to ascribe an *inevitability* to the rejection of the gender egalitarianism of the Mao years, in which the 'liberation' from the straitjacket of the Cultural Revolution frees gendered subjectivities to seek their individual, 'natural' expression in the commercialized opportunities and pleasures of the

global market. If during the revolutionary years and the Cultural Revolution itself, gender differences were largely explained as the effect of the unequal socio-economic structures of a patriarchal system, they are now defined as the necessary and inevitable effect of the deregulated market. This view continues to leave little or no space for the idea that claims for gendered recognition might be carried into structural and relational contexts – of the family for example – not simply synonymous with social-economic relations of ownership and production. The gendered subject has thus been discursively distanced from a conflictual politics, and normalized as a socio-economic entity, whose equality with others is limited by natural, biological structures. As such, gender becomes a key (if underacknowledged) component of what Rebecca Karl has called the broader 'impossibility of politics' in China, generated by the disavowal of conflict, antagonism and alienation in China's engagement with global capital, and an accommodation with a dominant masculinist model of market modernity.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, fissures within, as well as continuities across, the narratives of the three 'big' periods of Chinese Communist modernity that I will briefly outline below interfere with the familiar contours of the CCP's gendered historiography in other ways. Removed from the discursive parameters of what critical sociologists in China have called 'the operational logic of communist civilization' (*gongchanzhuyi wenming de yunzuo luoji*), the temporalities and themes through which women remember their pasts, and through which they identify themselves, may reveal their distance from the officially sanctioned metanarrative of gender in modern China.<sup>8</sup> Backed by institutional and coercive power, dominant gender discourse subjectifies ordinary women and men not as 'docile subjects', but as conflicted subjects constrained by dominant discourse from following through the potential of the diverse gendered subject positions available to them.

In drawing on the term 'gender' to examine narrative formulations of femininity and masculinity through China's twentieth-century modernities, it is not my intention to interpellate the historical emergence of the gendered subject before the presence of the category in the Chinese lexicon actually introduced its possibility. I do not therefore use the term to posit retrospectively a historical and sociological category – the female subject – who identifies herself in the terms associated with its contemporary renderings, as the embodied form of social and cultural meanings. Nonetheless, read retrospectively, the category does

offer an analytical device for identifying normative expectations of what and who men and women were as subjects of the CCP's discourses. And while I do not suggest any simple relationship between the ways in which ordinary women and men identified themselves in relation to those discourses, they certainly constituted – and continue to constitute – a powerful force, backed by coercive power, mediating the practices and understandings of the social subject in China.

### May Fourth and socialist narratives

Mainstream Chinese narratives of the history of gender in the twentieth century begin with the multiple ideological and intellectual influences about women and women's emancipation circulating in China before and around the time of the May Fourth movement.<sup>9</sup> Many of these were formulated by progressive male intellectuals in the pages of the new journals, newspapers and books that mushroomed during this period, and which were largely inspired by liberal 'Western' ideas of individual rights, often translated from Japanese texts, available at the time. Progressive debates about the 'woman question' generally saw the traditional patriarchal family and marriage system as the main barrier to women's emancipation in China.<sup>10</sup> Thus, solution of the 'woman question' was commonly conceptualized as the emancipation of the individual from traditional social and familial constraints, in particular the patrilineal system of arranged marriage. Chen Duxiu, founding editor of the flagship new journal *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) in 1915, and later first general secretary of the fledgling Chinese Communist Party, saw in the 'West' an example of independence and freedom for women which the 'Confucian Way' had for centuries impeded.<sup>11</sup> Famously, when Ibsen's *A Doll House* was performed in Beijing in 1918, it sparked a debate among the predominantly male intelligentsia of the time, who saw in it 'the primacy of individual fulfilment over social restraints, [implying] a wide ranging rebellion against Confucian norms, and [suggesting] new possibilities for China's young, male and female.'<sup>12</sup> Prominent Western exponents of birth control and monogamous marriage talked to eager audiences in China, while sexological, psychological and ethical treatises were translated and disseminated through the new publications.<sup>13</sup> If liberal journals like the *Chinese Ladies' Journal* or the *Ladies' Home Journal* had little sympathy for the radical leanings of many of the more outspoken exponents of women's rights, they, nonetheless, joined too in the clamour for an end to parental interference in young people's marital choices.<sup>14</sup>

The female subject positioned by these debates was, however, as unsettled as were their cultural derivations. The pioneering Marxist philosopher Li Da's 1919 discussion of *nüzi jiefang* (women's liberation) referred to a kind of humanistic reintegration of women into the political demand for 'persons' rights' (*renquan*, also translated as 'human rights').<sup>15</sup> Woman (*nüzi*) was a category whose liberation depended on recognition of her rights as a person endowed with the same rights as all others. In 1923, a member of the Canton Peasant Movement Training Institute, Xiao Chu'nü, called for women's liberation to start with the 'self's essence' (*ziji de xing*), with the 'essential female-ness' (*nüxing*) of women. In an essay entitled 'The Basic Meaning of Women's Liberation', she in fact argued that women should not demand liberation from society in the expectation that society would grant it to them, but should 'take it' (*qu*) through liberating themselves from customary expectations and practices.<sup>16</sup> Li Dazhao, one of the first Chinese intellectuals to declare openly his Marxist credentials, and one of the founding members of the CCP, called, at the same time, for 'great unity throughout the world' (*shijie de da lianhe*) as the condition of women's full liberation.<sup>17</sup> Woman was thus understood as an essentially collective subject, whose agency rested on her participation in full social liberation.

With the founding of the CCP came the formulation of alternate ideas about women and women's liberation that later became the core of the CCP's official discourse of gender. In its Second Congress, held in July 1922, the young Party passed a resolution committing itself to women's liberation as an integral part of the proletarian revolution.<sup>18</sup> The following year, in its Third Congress, it reviewed the development of the women's movement, with a particular focus on women's participation in the burgeoning labour struggle, and called for both the formation of a Women's Committee and the publication of a women's organ.<sup>19</sup> In both congresses, the Party made reference to the need to integrate the women's movement with anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles. The woman of these struggles was thus a collective *political* agent, whose emancipation demanded recognition of women as members of oppressed classes. In contrast, other articulations of woman, inscribed for example in the notion of *nüquanzhuyi* (literally, 'women's power/rights-ism', normally translated as feminism) became identified in Party doctrine with a partial and implicitly divisive approach to the whole notion of persons'/human rights.<sup>20</sup> By 1926, articles began to appear denigrating the gains of the previous

stages of the women's movement. 'Women's activists' (*funüzhuyizhe*) came in for particular attack on the grounds that they were too narrow-minded in their perspective on the 'struggle between the sexes' (*liangxing douzheng*).<sup>21</sup> Henceforth, renewed invocation of 'women's power/rights' (*nüquanzhuyi*) *ipso facto* signalled a challenge to the Party's version of 'liberation', and contestations of the Party's position on women tended to be specific, isolated and short-lived.

The dominant principles of this depiction of women in cultural representations of the early People's Republic were fixed in 1942 when the writer Ding Ling published an essay entitled 'Thoughts on 8 March' on the literary page of the *Liberation Daily* in Yan'an on 9 March.<sup>22</sup> In it she criticized the Party's policy of gender unity and its failure to live up to its claims to liberate women. Women, she wrote, were still subject to contempt and misery, were overworked, were expected to play a double role, and were criticized if they failed in either. The Party attacked her for her 'narrow feminist standpoint' and for ignoring the difficulties in forging new social and economic roles for women. Later, in an interview with Gunther Stein, Ding Ling retracted her position and agreed that the first priority for women and men was indeed to cooperate and work together for the revolution.<sup>23</sup> Yet, crucially, Ding Ling's self-criticism may be read not only as an individual response to sanctions used to silence her; it also demonstrated the impossibility of following through a critique which inscribed a conceptual challenge to the Party's principles of 'woman-work'.

In her influential paper 'Theorizing Woman', Tani Barlow has suggested that the lexical terms for 'woman' – *funü*, *nüxing*, *nüren* – themselves denote what she calls 'epistemological' differences in the modern Chinese conceptualization of gender.<sup>24</sup> *Funü* came to designate the collectivist woman of Maoist ideology, in contrast with both *nüxing*, the essential feminine woman evoked in the previously individualist discourse of the May Fourth discussants, and *nüren*, the subject of humanist principles. In this sense, Ding Ling's challenge to the Party in 1942 indicated that the differences between such terms were those of an incompatibility between contrasting conceptions of what woman – female, feminine, the possibilities of sex and gender – and therefore the requirements of women's 'liberation', signified. As Barlow's analysis of Ding Ling's work and experience suggests, the principles inscribed in the femininities represented by different lexical configurations of 'woman' ascribed profoundly different political meanings to the female subject.

The 1942 rectification movement in Yan'an has often been situated as the moment that confirmed the future fate of challenges to Party ideology. According to such a narrative, Yan'an transformed the CCP from a political movement into what David Apter and Tony Saich term an established 'discourse community', which, through cementing loyalties to shared myths and ideals, maintained methods of discipline (exegetical bonding) and subscribed to a common set of 'cultural, educational and moral forms of power (symbolic capital)'.<sup>25</sup> As such, it also enforced the dominance of the CCP's collectivist approach to the women's movement, and confirmed the *funü* subject position as the only legitimate articulation of 'socialist woman'. *Funü* thus emerged as the political and social subject participating in the liberation of the nation, consolidating the 'unity' of women with men in the processes of women's liberation. Concomitantly, the 'individualism' associated with the *nüxing* position fast became a synonym for selfish, morally suspect, and eventually bourgeois and reactionary tendencies. With the CCP's consolidation of state power in 1949, the parameters of acceptable femininity in the form of *funü* (socialist woman) were fixed by a 'classical' Marxist formula that women's liberation lay in women's equal entry into the public sphere of production and labour. The transformation of gender relations of power depended on women's transformed place in the socio-economic structure. As such, the Party's analysis of the requirements of women's liberation invalidated suggestions that, as *nüxing* or *nüren*, woman could not be acknowledged as a political subject, struggling for a recognition of gendered rights and claims in relational (notably familial and domestic) fields within the socio-economic boundaries of her class position.

These early approaches to the 'woman question' have had, and continue to have, a profound and determining influence on the cultural formation of gender difference in China over the past fifty years or so. Publicly available cultural texts produced during the Mao years envisaged the female subject as a wife, mother, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law and grandmother, who carried out a series of naturalized as well as social obligations.<sup>26</sup> However, she was principally defined through 'class' and 'political' (communist) considerations, and not through domestic, familial, bodily and sexual interests that might suggest other axes of power and difference productive of social inequalities. Meng Yue's discussion of the famous communist play and film *The White Haired Girl* illustrates how communist narratives progressively constructed gender difference in this way.<sup>27</sup> Through

successive revisions between its initial production in Yan'an and those of the 1950s and the mid-1960s, the plot of *The White Haired Girl* moved from an initial story centred on a young peasant girl's rape by a local landlord to one that portrayed her struggle against him as a class exploiter. In the Cultural Revolution version of the play all reference to the initial rape was removed, describing Xi'er as a social and political subject defined by the dominant meanings of class and nation. An affirmative socialist femininity thus ultimately came to refer to expectations of social behaviour and attitude, including struggle and conflict, that could make no reference to any domestic and sexual articulations of gender difference. Though different narratives of the time might frequently have depicted other stereotypically feminine versions of femininity, these functioned predominantly as negative metaphors for individualist and bourgeois behaviour suggesting possibilities of a sexualized and even consumerist notion of femininity that could not be incorporated within CCP discourse.

Between the 1950s and the mid-1970s, the political controls of the Party ensured that public cultural representations of women conformed to these discursive principles fixed in Yan'an. Hence, images of proletarian heroism produced in the 1960s and 1970s erased romantic and sexualized narratives of femininity from public view. Posters characteristically featured images of women workers and farmers, robust reminders of the individual's proper commitment to the collective cause.<sup>28</sup> Rae Yang recalled:

As Red Guards we could not and would not wear skirts, blouses, T-shirts, shorts and sandals. Anything that would make girls look like girls was bourgeois. We covered up our bodies so completely that I almost forgot that we were boys and girls. We were Red Guards, and that was it.<sup>29</sup>

Marilyn Young has used the term 'socialist androgyny' to describe the reworkings of female gender during this period,<sup>30</sup> while Emily Honig has talked of its 'supposedly gender-neutral representation'.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the term used, and whatever political message those forms conveyed, they undoubtedly defined a powerful ideal of socialist femininity, the characteristics of which remained fixed in place throughout the Mao era. A woman's agency as a gendered subject henceforth rested on acknowledgement of her as a member of a collective, class-based struggle, cemented by *unity* between men and women. And, beyond the ideological parameters of *funü*, she was typically vilified for any attempts to exercise a politics of gender with regard to family and domestic matters that might threaten such a unity.

## Market narratives and their discontents

Almost as soon as the curtains fell on the Cultural Revolution, images of a 'sweet and gentle' femininity began to eclipse the 'androgyny' of the Cultural Revolution years, eroding the ideological authority of 'socialist woman'. The Women's Federation journal, *Women of China*, renewed publication with cover images of beautiful women dressed in diaphanous garments of pastel shades. If the Party's ideological controls were still heavily present, in, for example, stories about the benefits of the single-child policy, and (as the 1980s progressed) in the mantra 'to get rich is glorious', new women's magazines appeared with stories and images of romantic bliss and individual expression. As various commentators have observed, a new tolerance in literature and the arts undoubtedly facilitated discussion about issues such as love and sexuality during this period, apparently marking a turning point in recuperating the individual voice from its obscurity in the collective realm.<sup>32</sup> Collections of 'women writers' stories, in particular, were widely heralded as the expression of new voices freed from ideological constraints, simultaneously marking the erasure of the socialist *funü* by a return to the essential femininity of *nüxing*. Indeed, femininity and sexuality rapidly became themes of vibrant public debate, with diverse opinions circulating through magazine editorials, feature articles, interviews and readers' letters about the kinds of attitudes and conduct appropriate to the modern woman. Generally hailed as a liberatory expression of a critique of the Maoist past, the 'explosion' of sex-related representations in Chinese public life also, however, newly put sex into discourse as an explicit object of scrutiny.

The female body represented in these new images was invariably young, fashionably dressed, in good health and sexually desirable. She denoted wealth, social mobility and success, and urban location, all features associated with the individualized opportunities and practices of the reform strategy in China. The metaphorical rewards held out to women for identifying with such images in women's magazines were the material and emotional emblems of commercial success; romantic engagement with wealthy young entrepreneurs, good looks, and exciting social and travel opportunities.<sup>33</sup> Yet, according to a familiar pattern, the female subject of these images was thereby denied the power of agency given to the absent male spectator. As the homemaker, she now consumed the commodities her husband created. As the beautiful and gentle companion, she awaited the guidance and protection of her husband. Surveys about ideal marriage

partners confirmed a conventional binary of the active, successful and productive man, and the gentle, supportive and passive woman, who depended upon the implied presence of the male for her ‘completion’. While stories of the ‘strong woman’ (*nü qiangren*) – invariably the successful entrepreneur – hailed the benefits that the market could bring, they increasingly took second place to the visual prominence of the young and yielding beauty. A respondent and dependent femininity, defined simultaneously by her biological ‘nature’ and by her access to consumer commodities, affirmed Chinese masculinity as the creator of China’s economic success, and as the inspiration to China’s market modernity.

As I have already observed, these market narratives have commonly been associated with the idea that the 1978 ‘turning point’ – introducing ‘open door reform’ to China – signified a rupture with the artificial gender practices of the Mao era, making way for the spontaneous and – for many – liberatory recuperation of an essential gender difference. From this perspective, market forces are, more generally, ascribed an evolutionary power to define the shape and meaning of gender practices and relations in what is a stereotypical teleology of development. The diverse movements of gender appear as the effect of biology and the economy, and are divested of their specific political meaning. The new subject positions represented in the current diversity of gender representations are thus explained as the effect of individual position and potential within socio-economically defined relationships, with little bearing on issues of power and hierarchy present within other relational structures of authority – including those of the family and marriage – always inflected by but not synonymous with socio-economic differentials. The diverse possibilities of a politics of gender are thus absorbed into a continuous narrative consistent with the explanations of socio-economic transformation, in which the ‘masculinization’ of women in the Cultural Revolution now appears as a brief and artificial interruption to an otherwise naturalized process. In this sense, while the ‘before and after’ Mao approach of dominant Chinese narratives of China’s recent history may have a very general value for identifying key macroeconomic and ideological shifts framing the practices of day-to-day life, it also functions as a kind of block on alternative conceptualizations of gender. As a potent form of historical intervention, it constructs a past of gender that legitimizes the modernizing teleology of the present.

Nonetheless, one can find various disruptions of this teleology. Narrative representations of women during

the Mao era give evidence of a non-conformity to the standard discourse of class-based gendered egalitarianism. They represent an uneven fluctuation between women’s social capacity to change – to do as men do – and women’s fixed association with childcare and domestic work based on a biological and reproductive definition of femininity. Socialist discourse expected women, as well as men, to devote their energies to the collective and the state, but it also endowed women with ‘natural’ responsibilities to the domestic sphere that the rhetoric of male–female equality failed to shift. Women repeatedly appear in the (official) women’s and youth journals of the 1950s and early 1960s as more passive and dependent than the male, and



reproductively designed to make a greater contribution to childcare and family welfare than their husbands. If young women’s naturalized interests in romantic and materialistic matters were repeated metaphors for the bourgeois and the individualist, at the same time they could also serve to boost policy priorities when need arose. During the mid-1950s, coinciding with rising pressure on the urban economy under the effects of large-scale migration to the cities, the slogan ‘let’s be pretty’ already encouraged women to make the best of ‘returning home’. A new legitimacy given to permed hairstyles and floral printed skirts appeared as a reward for withdrawing from the urban labour market. Interior domestic spaces depicted in posters of the early 1970s were inhabited by women and children, and very rarely by men.<sup>34</sup> The imaging of women as young mothers of bouncy colourfully clad babies reinforced the naturalized association between femininity, domestic responsibilities and reproductive care. Images of revolutionary heroines might give a ‘manly spirit’ to the female body, but ideological correctness

could not always disguise from their spectators the ‘voluptuous appeal and ... beauty’ of the feminine body.<sup>35</sup> The transformative possibilities of femininity by the operations of class were limited by women’s ‘natural’ capacities, responsibilities and interests.

Contrasting narratives suggest a celebration of the ‘neutralizing’ meanings of gender that dominant discourse urged. Autobiographical narratives of the period reveal the freedom that distance from stereotypically feminine associations often offered young women in their self-identification as political and social subjects. For Xiaomei Chen, for example, ‘the androgynous play between the manly woman and the womanly man’ during the Cultural Revolution created an ‘ambigu-



ous space’, giving her a sense of what she describes as balance and freedom.<sup>36</sup> Rae Yang acknowledged a similar experience in her *Spider Eaters* memoir, cited above, in which she describes how her simple ‘uniform’ of the Red Guards gave her a sense of self as a political subject that was undisturbed by concerns with gendered appearance. Far from being a constraint on a naturalized femininity, the grey and green colours and the simple lines of her clothes, she writes, gave her confidence in her status as an equal actor alongside other women and men of her age and outlook.<sup>37</sup> ‘Socialist woman’ (*funü*) in these accounts was neither the defeminized entity of post-Mao erasures nor the docile subject of egalitarian revolutionary discipline.

Other fields of representation also complicate the simple gender binary of the early market narratives, with evidence of an increasing diversity of masculinities and femininities that reject, blur and diffuse the binary associations of heteronormativity. Lesbian sexuality in contemporary fiction, constructions of masculinities in China’s cultural tradition and global-

ized present, the queer representations of sportswomen and martial arts practitioners, the interrogation of gender in performance art, and the use of the Internet for the exploration of alternative sexual identities are some of these new themes.<sup>38</sup> From the ‘bad girl’ image of the teenage rock star, the oiled muscularity of the female body builder, the androgynous appearance of male performance artists, and the feminized masculinity of the television pop idol, contemporary images of gender now demonstrate a new range of influences and meanings, reasserting hegemonic forms at the same time as they contest them.<sup>39</sup>

Importantly, scholarly research in China itself is similarly disrupting the analytical strictures of dominant gender narratives, not necessarily to ascribe political potentialities to alternative narratives of gender, but certainly to contest the gendered assumptions of dominant discourse. In recent anthropological research, for example, concepts of womanhood have emerged that challenge the familiar binaries of the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern,’ the ‘socialist/Chinese’ and the ‘market/Western/global’ embedded in hegemonic versions.<sup>40</sup> Yan Yunxiang describes women’s changing subjectivities within ‘a unique context where the survival of traditional culture, the legacy of radical socialism, and global capitalism, are competing with each other.’<sup>41</sup> Guo Yuhua, a Beijing-based anthropologist, with lengthy experience of village life in China’s north-west, suggests that women’s life histories reveal gendered memories of ‘revolution’ and ‘liberation’ that depart from the temporalities of Party history. While men narrate their experiences of revolution through the dominant framework established by the party-state’s main political campaigns, women, she has argued, chart their lives through a bodily temporality – a ‘body-time’ – of childbirths, sickness and food, with significant if unspoken implications for their self-identification as gendered and political subjects.<sup>42</sup> The narratives of Guo’s informants provide, at any rate, subjective evidence of formulations of femininity that the dominant historiography of gender has largely hidden from the record.<sup>43</sup> In doing so, they show that the inventions and interventions of Party historiography of gender may have become fixed categories, repeatedly rehearsed in individual, popular and official discourses, but they cannot entirely obscure shifts and ambiguities within mainstream narratives of Chinese gendered modernity, any more than they can erase different readings of them.<sup>44</sup> As the likes of Arjun Appadurai have emphasized, the globalization of cultural forms and images can never simply be one of homogenization; repatriation of image and

its re-presentation in local contexts produces diverse dialogues in local contexts that disturb the unitary force of the global.<sup>45</sup> In a parallel vein, subjective identifications in response to pervasive discourses of gender experiences produce meanings embedded in individual conduct and relationships that disturb the authority of the dominant.<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, the image of the fashionable female becomes much more than the emblem of Chinese consumer modernity. In her presence and absence, she represents possibilities in the formation of female subjectivities that potentially disrupt the stability of party-state and parental authority.

Of course, these brief references do little more than reveal narrative and sociological evidence of understandings of the female subject that do not neatly fit into the terms of dominant discourse. In so doing, however, they also implicitly refer us to relationships and responsibilities in which gender acquires a potential conflictual meaning that cannot simply be mapped onto either class or biology. As I argue in the final section below, many Chinese scholars and activists have been attempting to elaborate a critical language of gender, in a genuinely novel form, so as to address contemporary issues of discrimination. If, nonetheless, the concept continues to have a limited appeal in contemporary Chinese academic and media discussions, this may, in part, of course, be explained as the effect of a lack of familiarity with it. Underlying this, however, I want to suggest, is a more profound institutional resistance to taking on gender as a social and analytical category, because of the disruptive political potential that the concept embraces once it is applied beyond biological and socio-economic structures of power.

### The academic politics of gender

The initial impetus to give critical attention to gender as a category of analysis came from Chinese scholars working outside or at the margins of the Women's Federation, who pioneered the establishment of women's studies programmes in key universities and colleges in the 1980s.<sup>47</sup> The 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women was a 'watershed' in these developments, and subsequent years saw the establishment of many more centres and courses in China. Through the work of such scholars as Li Xiaojiang, Tan Shen, Li Yinhe and others, the elaboration of 'gender' as an analytical construct facilitated analyses of the social relationships between women and men that did not attribute inequalities and injustices only to imperfections in the socio-economic system, narrowly understood. Though

scholars differed, sometimes greatly, over the interpretation and value of gender as a category of analysis, as was also commonplace in gender studies in Europe and America at the time, the articulation of women as social rather than biological beings influenced the establishment of large numbers of gender studies training programmes, workshops, and women's NGOs, whose energies went into challenging the gendered hierarchies of social and cultural practice.<sup>48</sup>

A key issue in the early days of its appearance in the critical vocabulary of mainland scholars concerned the correct terminology (*xingbie*, *shehui xingbie*) to use to distinguish the term 'gender' as a social and cultural construct from the normative connotations of binary sexual difference. In many ways this debate intersects with the critical revisions of the concept in anglophone contexts. Both indicate the impossibility of reading into it any fixed definition. Gender becomes a mode of identification of historical and contemporary subjectivities through the meanings we ascribe to it. Although, as in Western discussions, these debates have frequently focused on the analytical distinction between gender and sex, these have not been a replication, much less a simple cultural translation, of Western terms and interpretations. A number of Chinese scholars, most notably Li Xiaojiang, have argued that the sex/gender distinction that emerged in second-wave Western feminist theory is a product of post-Enlightenment European thought, and cannot be mapped onto China. Until the arrival of Western medical and sexological ideas in China in the early 1900s, social gender took precedence over anatomical sex in defining the male and the female. Li Xiaojiang has thus convincingly argued that if Chinese conceptualizations of male and female referred to social practice, 'it would be redundant to introduce the notion of gender (*shehui xingbie*, literally social sex difference) to the Chinese language, since *nü* [woman/female] and *nan* [man/male] are already understood as social and not natural beings.'<sup>49</sup>

The Women's Federation has been responsible for much of the recent research on women's inequality in Chinese society. Indeed, as the organization with the national authority to speak about and for women, it could not fail to address the issue. Many key individuals in the research, provincial and other sections of the organization have been active and tireless internal lobbyists for the acknowledgement of gender as a critical space of articulation in China. At a central policy level, however, the Women's Federation continues to put forward a narrowly socio-economic analysis of gender inequalities. In line with CCP analysis



in general, it approaches the current ever-widening gender polarities in economic and social life as the inevitable consequence of the greater complexity of Chinese society and culture under the impact of the global market. Through the Women's Federation, the Party's prerogative over defining the meanings and tasks of women's liberation has thus had a profound and limiting effect. In part, this can be explained with reference to the history of the Party's imposition of a fixed ideology of gender equality. Li Xiaojiang and Zhang Xiaodan have argued that the shortcomings in achievements of gender equality in the first period were the necessary effect of an understanding of women's liberation as something to be bestowed or imposed by the Party authorities, and not as a process formulated in autonomous spaces defined by women themselves. The 'stumbling block in Chinese women's progress toward their own emancipation, in fact, has been that many Chinese women have been wholly passive in the liberation process.'<sup>50</sup> For it suggests that while the Party consistently defined the principal aims and processes of the women's movement, and stressed the importance of women's agency in accordance with its strategic identification of the goals and processes of the revolution as a whole, its 'bestowal' of policies and practices defined as furthering women's interests in their own liberation did not, fundamentally, construct women as agents of their own transformation.

Zhong Xueping, a Chinese scholar working in the USA, maintains that the discursive influence of the Party's definition of women's liberation has also prevented the entry of gender into general academic debates. As she observes, gender and feminist theory is notable for its absence from the interdisciplinary and self-reflexive theoretical approaches of the social sciences in contemporary China. In contrast with the male intellectual's concern for women's liberation during the May Fourth period, contemporary intellectuals tend to approach gender equality as a matter of the past, resolved with the radical transformation in women's social position over the previous decades.<sup>51</sup> Mainstream academia's relegation of an interest in gender to low status 'women's studies' scholars has confirmed its isolated position in critical discourse. As Louise Edwards has pointed out, the compartmentalization of 'women's issues' (*funü wenti*) by and within the party-state has served to hinder any sustained analysis of social issues as gendered in recent scholarship.<sup>52</sup> In a political and social environment in which the Women's Federation is still seen as the legitimate voice on women's issues, and in which debates about gender have largely been sustained in underfunded

and vulnerable women's studies programmes, the critical possibilities of gender have thus effectively been thwarted.

## The impossibility of gender

Rebecca Karl has argued in the pages of this journal that in the contemporary configurations of China's culturalist accommodation of global capital,

the historical incommensurability among experience, politics and the past is recuperated as a symmetrical desire for a continuous anti-political, non-antagonistic path of modernization. The impossibility of politics in China is hence founded upon the repudiation of politics as a disruption of or distraction from a desired unity among state capital and the intellectual/technocratic and cultural producing classes.<sup>53</sup>

A discussion about the cultural narratives of gender in modern China is, as I have suggested, much more than an academic one. It is through such narratives that gender comes to be understood as an axis and principle of social organization, differentiation and contestation – in other words, of practices and representations that function as markers of inclusion and exclusion, access and marginality. The discursive rendering of gender through the dominant periodization of China's social and political transformation in the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries subjectifies ordinary men and women in accordance with the temporalities of Party history. Through its commanding position in the production and dissemination of cultural texts, the Party continues to reject the general possibilities of gender as a contradictory, even conflictive, category of self-identification, and has absorbed it into an ideology of the naturalized integration of China onto the world stage of global capital. This version of gender sustains a view of Chinese modernity that is defined by and operates according to a projected Western/global teleology of development and progress. In its rewriting of the experiences and politics of the past, such a teleology erases the possibilities of the political from the historical narrative, and retrospectively imprisons the multiplicity of gender within what Karl calls the 'naturalised economism' of the market.

Against this, the local fissures in modern narratives of gender in China have repeatedly demonstrated alternative possibilities of practice and self-identification that challenge the validity of this universalizing rendering of modernity. Some of these can be discerned in the plural readings of contemporary images and texts that question the characterization of the essentially feminine woman naturally re-emerging from the

coercions of Mao ideology. Others are seen in local knowledges and memories of gender as lived experience that diverge from the dominant temporalities of Party history. These fissures are the cultural spaces of difference in which ordinary social subjects demonstrate their distance from the terms of the party-state. It is these that indicate the contradictory, fractured and messy realities of gender that women, and men, live out in their relationships with family, locality and state.

From online discussions to attempts at activist organization, there is ample evidence to suggest that many women and men are pushing the boundaries of heteronormative definitions of gender and sexuality in their individual practice. Yet the diverse forms of the gendered body in China's contemporary social and political transformation still tend to function discursively to sustain an individualist ideology of market socialism that shores up a particular vision of social stability and unity. Detached from a critical language of articulation to address hierarchical relations between men and women, the diversity of current narratives is dissociated from the broader issues of power and injustice, within the domestic as well as public arenas. At root, one might argue that the Party's continuing resistance to acknowledging gender as a category of analysis that is not interchangeable with either the biological or the narrowly socio-economic corresponds with a desire to safeguard the stability of the family as a social and economic unit, the success of which derives from individual effort and competition. The 'impossibility of gender' could thus be interpreted as a fundamental repudiation of gender, understood as a potential disruption of a desired unity among men and women as the basis of the reproductive and heteronormative family in China.

Academics, enlightened policymakers, documentary film-makers and journalists frequently refer to the widening poles of gender inequality. Though individual Chinese women have clearly succeeded in attaining the wealth and status that many male authority figures enjoy, and many have undoubtedly negotiated important shifts in their practice of gendered relationships, evidence concerning employment and income differentials, domestic violence and marital conflict, differential access to education and health, and child neglect and abandonment, actually suggests an acceleration of gender discrimination and gender conflicts.<sup>54</sup> To acknowledge a politics of gender would signify moving discussions about injustice and discrimination into the sphere of the personal and familial, as well as broader social relationships and institutions. To embrace the

language of gender in accounts of Chinese modernity would necessarily locate analysis of the factors producing sexual violence, the violation of women's bodies under the birth control law, or the vulnerability of women to abuse and disease through the operations of the sex market, within the frameworks of domestic, family, marital and sexual relations. It would therefore be to approach the ascription of gender as marker of inclusion and exclusion, access and marginality, privilege and disadvantage, defined not only by the market, but by the full range of social relationships between, and among, men and women. Even though alternative perspectives may be obscured by the normalizing power of the party-state to erase the differences of its past and its present, they are nonetheless a living reminder of the potential of local cultural narratives to challenge the subjectifying terms of dominant renderings of the modern in contemporary China.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999.
2. Dorothy L. Hodgson, ed., *Gendered Modernities: Ethnographic Perspectives*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, pp. 8–9.
3. Rey Chow, 'Where Has the Native Gone', in *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993.
4. Xueping Zhong, 'Hou funü jiefang yu ziwo xiangxiang' ('Post-women's liberation and self reflections'), *Dushu*, November 2005, pp. 13–20.
5. Though women's studies programmes are now offered in a number of universities in China, the mainstream centres of sociological research tend to discount these for their lack of academic rigour. Few academics working in such centres are required to teach 'gender' at either undergraduate or postgraduate level, and, indeed, evidence I have acquired over years of association with academics in various large cities in China suggests that there is little recognition of any need to take it seriously either as a category of analysis or as a topic of research. While these comments come from personal interviews and experience, they are backed up by Zhong Xueping's argument, as cited above.
6. At a recent conference on Sexualities in China, organized by the Sociology Department of Beijing's Renmin University (16–18 June 2007), one eminent sociologist commented during a discussion with me that the detachment of contemporary debates about sexualities in China from their gendered implications was precisely because of the potentially conflictive implications of ascribing political meanings to changing sexual practices. It is maybe significant in this context that under official pressure the title of the conference had to be changed to 'Sexual Civilization in China', and that the conference proceedings have to be published in Taiwan.
7. Rebecca E. Karl, 'Joining Tracks with the World: The Impossibility of Politics in China', *Radical Philosophy*

- 131, May/June 2005, pp. 20–27.
8. The concept of ‘communist civilisation’ formulated by Shen Yuan, one of a small group of sociologists and anthropologists at Beijing’s Tsinghua University, refers to the range of ‘institutional dispositions’, forms of economic and social organisation, and their intersection with, and presence in, individual modes of action and belief that characterize the complex totality of social life under the Communist Party. As such, it is developed as a key term informing a new research strategy for Chinese sociology proposed by Shen Yuan and his colleagues Sun Liping and Guo Yuhua. See Aurore Merle, ‘Vers une sociologie chinoise de la “civilisation Communiste”’, *Perspectives Chinoises* 81, January/February 2004, pp. 4–15.
  9. For key works in English on women and gender at the period, see Christina Kelley Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995; Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1999.
  10. See Christina Gilmartin’s *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 24–30, for a discussion about the male activists in the early stages of the Communist-led women’s movement. A number of the early essays of these male participants are included in volume 2 of *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao* (Materials on the history of the Chinese women’s movement), Renmin chubanshe, Beijing, 1988; and in *Wusi shiqi funü wenti wenxuan* (Selected documents on women’s issues during the May Fourth period), Zhongguo funü chubanshe, Beijing, 1981.
  11. Chen Duxiu, ‘The Way of Confucius and Modern Life’, *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), December 1916, quoted in Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978, pp. 82–3.
  12. Carolyn T. Brown, ‘Woman as Trope: Gender and Power in Lu Xun’s “Soap”’, in Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writings and Feminism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 1993, p. 74.
  13. These included the American exponent of birth control Margaret Sanger, and Ellen Key, the Swedish advocate of a child-centred approach to state support of motherhood. Translated works included those of Havelock Ellis, Bertrand Russell, Sigmund Freud and many others.
  14. Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, p. 89. Many of these magazines are available through a website the German scholar Barbara Mittler set up in 2004 on ‘Women’s Magazines from the [China’s] Republican Period’, at [www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/womag/](http://www.sino.uni-heidelberg.de/womag/).
  15. Li Da, ‘Nüzi jiefang lun’ (‘On Women’s Liberation’) (1919), in *Li Da wenji* (Li Da’s Writings), vol. 1, Renmin chubanshe, Beijing, 1980, pp. 9–11.
  16. Xiao Chu’nü, ‘Nüzi jiefang’ de genben yi’ (‘The basic meaning of women’s liberation’), *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, vol. 2, pp. 98–101.
  17. Li Dazhao, ‘Xiandai de nüquan yundong’ (‘The Modern Women’s Movement’), *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, vol. 2, pp. 49–52.
  18. It also stipulated a series of laws concerning women’s economic, social and educational rights. See ‘Zhongguo gongchandang di’erci quanguo daibiao dahui guanyu funü yundong de jueyi’ (‘Resolution of the Second National Congress of the CCP concerning the women’s movement’), in *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, vol. 2, pp. 29–30. See also Lü Meihe and Zheng Yongfu, eds, *Zhongguo funü yundong, 1840–1921*, Henan renmin chubanshe, Henan, 1990, pp. 378–9. For a discussion about the language of women’s liberation in CCP documents of this time, see Harriet Evans, ‘The Language of Liberation: Gender and Jiefang in Early Chinese Communist Party Discourse’, in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, ed., *Twentieth-Century China: New Approaches*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, pp. 193–220; originally published in the inaugural issues of *Intersections*, September 1998. Online at [www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/](http://www.sshe.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/).
  19. See ‘Zhongguo gongchandang di san ci quanguo daibiao dahui guanyu funü yundong de jueyi an’ (‘Decision of the Third National Congress of the CCP concerning the women’s movement’), pp. 68–9.
  20. ‘Guangxi funü lianhe hui chengli xuanyan’ (‘Declaration on the establishment of the Guangxi Women’s Federation’), October 1925, in *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, vol. 2, pp. 408–9.
  21. See, for example, ‘Guangdong funü jiefang xiehui diyici daibiao dahui ji yijue an’ (‘Decision of the First Congress of the Guangdong Women’s Liberation Association’), in *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, vol. 2, pp. 672–5; and Yang Zhihua, ‘Zhongguo funü yundong zuilian’ (‘The Errors of China’s Women’s Movement’), in *Zhongguo funü yundong lishi ziliao*, vol. 2, pp. 555–61.
  22. For a rigorous analysis of Ding Ling’s feminism, see Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, Duke University Press, Durham NC and London, 2004.
  23. See Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, pp. 212–24; Delia Davin, *Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976, pp. 36–9.
  24. The distinctions between these terms also overlap with Barlow’s discussion about the different terms in Chinese for ‘women’. *Nüquan* refers to concepts of women’s rights, whereas *nüxing* leans more to an essentialist gender position for women, according to which notions of womanhood are grounded in basic, natural gender differences. See Tani E. Barlow, ‘Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating’, in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, eds, *Body, Subject and Power in China*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, pp. 253–89.
  25. David Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1994, pp. 300, 66–7.
  26. This constitution of ‘woman’ during the socialist era is frequently obscured by the view that gender difference was effectively overcome, particularly during the Cultural Revolution years. Yet assumptions that woman’s biologically determined ‘nature’ as wife and mother were fundamental to socialist woman were constantly reiterated in narratives of the time. See Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Dominant Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1997.
  27. Meng Yue, ‘Female Images and National Myth’, in Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China*, 1993.
  28. Harriet Evans, ‘Comrade Sisters: Gendered Bodies and Spaces’, in Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, eds, *Picturing Power in the People’s Republic of China:*

- Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD, 1999, pp. 63–78.
29. Rae Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, p. 213.
  30. Marilyn Young, 'Chicken Little in China: Some Reflections on Women', in Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner, eds, *Marxism and the Chinese Experience: Issues in Contemporary Chinese Socialism*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk NY and London, 1989, pp. 253–68.
  31. Emily Honig, 'Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards', in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, eds, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999.
  32. One of the most famous of these was Zhang Jie's 'Love Must Not Be Forgotten', written in 1979 and published in *Seven Contemporary Chinese Women Writers*, Panda Books, Beijing, 1979, pp. 211–28.
  33. See Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980s*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1988.
  34. For a fuller discussion of this, see various discussions in Evans and Donald, eds, *Picturing Power*.
  35. This is a reference to the erotic appeal of the famous painting of Wu Qinghua, the strong and shapely heroine of the revolutionary model ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*. Entitled *Full of Hatred* (Manqiang chouhen) this oil painting was a copy of the stage photograph of the same image from the ballet performance. Writing about her own youthful fascination with the image of her 'handcuffed hands, whipped body, long and braided hair and torn red silk dress', Chen Xiaomei suggested that, looking back, Wu Qinghua's figure had a 'voluptuous appeal and bodily beauty', which though 'securely disguised by the focus on an ideologically correct story and by equipping the womanly body with a "manly spirit", as it was traditionally defined' explained the power her image held. See Xiaomei Chen, 'Growing up with Posters in the Mao Era', in Evans and Donald, eds, *Picturing Power*, pp. 101–22.
  36. Ibid. p. 110.
  37. See also Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng and Bai Di, eds, *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ and London, 2001.
  38. Nancy N. Chen, 'Embodying Qi and Masculinities in Post-Mao China', in Brownell and Wasserstrom, *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, pp. 315–33; Susan Brownell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1995. For a recent collection of essays that explore the diverse gendered, sexualized and cultural meanings of the body in Chinese modernity, see Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich, eds, *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation and Chinese Cultures*, Hawaii University Press, Honolulu, 2006.
  39. For some recent online debates about masculinities in contemporary Chinese culture, see for example 'Zhongguo nanse pu' (Male beauty guide), in le (Time Out Beijing): Beijing: Guoji wenhua chubans gongsi, March 2005: <http://ent.sina.cn.r.m.2006-07-19/17191164407.html>. I wish to thank Derek Hird for these references from his current doctoral research.
  40. With reference to the study of women's lives during the early republic period, for example, Prasenjit Duara has problematized the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' in his analysis of middle-class women who worked for the Morality Society in Manzhouguo during the 1920s. In his view, nationalist patriarchy positioned women as both modern citizens and virtuous subjects responsible for social and familial morality. Subjective accounts of women who lectured for the Morality Society suggest that their commitment to preserving an 'interior space' of tradition, 'an unchanging essence from the past that serves as the subject of a linear history', was accompanied by explicit attachments to independence and social mobility corresponding more easily with a 'modernizing' discourse.
  41. Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life under Socialism*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003, p. 233.
  42. Guo Yuhua, 'Xinling de jiti hua: Shaanbei Jicun nongye hezuohua de nuxing jiyi' (Psychological Collectivisation: The Cooperativisation of Agriculture Through Women's Memories in Jicun Village, Northern Shaanxi), *Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Sciences in China)* 4, 2003, pp. 79–92.
  43. Marilyn Young, 'Chicken Little in China', pp. 253–68.
  44. See, for example, Paul A. Cohen, 'The Post-Mao Reforms in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1988, pp. 518–50.
  45. Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Public Culture*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1990, pp. 1–24.
  46. Shu-mei Shih, 'Gender and a New Geopolitics of Desire: The Seduction of Mainland Women in Taiwan and Hong Kong', *Signs*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1998, pp. 287–319.
  47. The first women's studies courses were pioneered by the 'Four Major Centres' in Zhengzhou, Hangzhou, Beijing and Tianjin. For a survey of the development of women's studies in China, see Du Fangqin, 'Manoeuvring Fate' and "'Following the Call": Development and Prospects of Women's Studies', in Ping-Chun Hsiung et al., eds, *Chinese Women Organizing*, Berg, Oxford, 2002, pp. 237–49.
  48. See articles by Jin Yihong, Liu Bohong and Gao Xiaoxian in Hsiung et al., eds, *Chinese Women Organizing*.
  49. Li Xiaojiao, 'With What Discourse Do We Reflect on Chinese Women? Thoughts on Transnational Feminism in China', in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 262.
  50. Li Xiaojiao and Zhang Xiaodan, 'Creating a Space for Women: Women's Studies in China in the 1980s', *Signs*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1994, p. 146.
  51. Xueping Zhong, 'Hou funü jiefang yu ziwo xiangxiang', pp. 13–20.
  52. Louise Edwards, 'Consolidating Socialist Patriarchy: The Women's Writers Industry and Feminist Literary Criticism', in Antonia Finnane and Ann MacLaren, eds, *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, Monash Asia Institute, Claymore, 1999, pp. 183–97.
  53. Karl, 'Joining Tracks with the World', p. 26.
  54. The opportunities the market economy gives to women do not diminish the 'salience of gender', particularly in issues concerning employment. See Wang Zheng, 'Gender, Employment and Women's Resistance', in Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, eds, *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 81. For recent official news reports, see Xinhua News Agency, 25 January 2007, and *China Daily*, 14 June 2007, both available online at [www.china.org.cn/english/features/cw/197416.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/cw/197416.htm).