

THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF SEXUAL EQUALITY AND MARRIAGE REFORM IN CHINA

SYBILLA G. DORROS

Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of man to himself as a social, i.e., really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. Communism as fully developed naturalism is humanism and as fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution.¹

Implicit in this definition of communism by Karl Marx is the assumption that there is a fundamental "contradiction within the very essence of things." These contradictions — or conflicts, antagonisms or struggles — propel history forward. For Marx, all nature, "from the smallest thing to the biggest, from a grain of sand to the sun . . . to man, is in . . . a ceaseless state of movement and change."² Change is

¹ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, quoted in Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), pp. 277-228.

² Quoted in Samuel E. Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 427.

not mere growth but the emergence of new structures: it is the quantitative alteration of things which leads to something qualitatively new.³

This dialectical development, in which each stage creates the "germs of its own destruction," can be delayed or accelerated but not prevented. History, according to Marx, must follow a lawful and necessary pattern that advances inevitably from phase to phase. These phases he identified as: (1) primitive, (2) slave, (3) feudal, (4) capitalist, and (5) socialist/communist. In each given phase, except the last, society is based on the antagonisms between the oppressing and oppressed classes. In the final phase, however, the contradictions between classes would be resolved and a classless society would emerge.

Within each phase of history described above, the character of each society is determined by the "mode of production" of that age, i.e., the way people satisfy their material needs. The "mode of production" in turn contains two components: the "productive forces" which include such things as available technology, skills, material resources, and sources of energy; and the "productive relations" — that is, the relationship between people engaged in producing material goods. According to Marx,

. . . the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society . . . the real foundation on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.⁴

Within this theory of economic determinism, the key to the relations of production is the status of property or its ownership. The relationship between the owners of the "means of production" and those under the direction of these owners is the basis for the division of society into "classes" through the various phases of history — slave and slave owner, serf and lord, worker and capitalist. As long as the means of production remains in the hands of a few, class struggle will continue inexorably until the contradiction is resolved. For this reason, and as stated in Marx's definition, the first goal of communism is the abolition of private property.

³*Ibid.*

⁴ Karl Marx, Preface of 1859, quoted in Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (rev. ed., London: Watts & Co., 1961), p. 51.

In order to abolish private property under capitalism — where the classes have been reduced to two basic ones, bourgeoisie and proletariat —, Marx believed that it was necessary to emancipate the workers. Their emancipation was not alone at stake because “the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation — and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relations of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation.”⁵

Thus at the core of the abolition of private property is universal human emancipation. Marx believed that with the establishment of socialism the history of humanity would enter a new phase and, as earlier indicated, the era of classes would be put to an end. This new society would be free from exploitation. Man would freely join with others to better the lives of all men. As he states in *The Communist Manifesto*, “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”⁶

I

Included in the exploitation of one part of society by another is the exploitation of women, the relationship between the sexes. As Engels has stated, “The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male.”⁷ Thus, in Communist ideology, all women — whether they belonged to the exploiting or the exploited class — are oppressed by men in class society.

Although Marx considered relations between the sexes necessary and spontaneous, he also termed them “other-oriented,” i.e., man’s need for a partner in the sexual relationship makes his own satisfaction depend upon another person’s satisfaction.⁸ This relationship has to be

⁵ Karl Marx, *Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844*, quoted in John H. Randall, Jr., *The Career of Philosophy*, Vol. II, *From the German Enlightenment to the Age of Darwin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 408.

⁶ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, quoted in Arthur P. Mendel, ed., *Essential Works of Marxism* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 33.

⁷ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 75.

⁸ Avineri, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

reciprocal because if it were unilateral it ceases to be a relationship, degrading the other person to the status of a mere object. In Marxist theory, it was the emergence of private ownership which contributed to the unilateral character of the relationship between the sexes. According to Marx, the nineteenth-century bourgeois world made even the limited reciprocity of family life impossible: "The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production."⁹

Since "the modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the women . . .,"¹⁰ the first step in the emancipation of the women is a change in the family system. Indeed Marx had little respect for the traditional family structure which he dismissed as "bourgeois claptrap." He believed that the bourgeois family had been romanticized and that society should not be constructed on the model of the family. He envisioned the transformation of the whole social structure as the recognition by men of the universal dependence of man on man, thus making it a conscious principle of human conduct. This possibility was based, according to Marx, on the correct understanding and subsequent transformation of the system of production.¹¹

Changes in the family system which would ultimately emancipate women thus depended on changes in the economic structure and, specifically, on women's participation in economic life. In the words of Engels:

Here we see already that the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree.¹²

This belief was reiterated by Lenin who felt that housework "crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades women, chains them to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes their labor on barbarously unproductive, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery."¹³ Ac-

⁹ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, quoted in Mendel, *Essential Works . . .*, p. 30.

¹⁰ Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹¹ Avineri, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹² Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹³ *Union Research Service*, XIII (October 14, 1958), p. 45, quoted in Lowell Dittmer, "The Chinese Marriage Law of 1950, A Study of Elite Control and Social Change" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Chicago, 1967), p. 72.

According to Lenin, in order to emancipate women from this "domestic slavery," it was necessary for the national economy to be socialized and for women to participate in common productive labor¹⁴ To this end, he envisioned the "setting up of model institutions, dining-rooms and nurseries, that will emancipate women from housework."¹⁵

Thus, only when women are liberated from their role as domestic slaves and are no longer regarded as objects by men, can the fundamental antagonism between man and women be resolved. This resolution is communism itself: "the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man" and, it could be added, between man and woman.

II

These and other basic Marxist tenets were introduced in China during the New Culture and May Fourth Movements. Marxism was particularly attractive to the Chinese intelligentsia because it seemed to have succeeded in changing Russia, with the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in 1917. In the *New Youth* of November 1918, for example, Li Ta-chao celebrated the anniversary of the October 1917 Revolution and hailed "The Victory of Bolshevism." In May 1919 he edited that journal's issue on Marxism. By mid-1920 both Li Ta-chao and Ch'en Tu-hsiu had wholeheartedly accepted Marxism-Leninism and set up various study groups on socialist theory.¹⁶ Despite the appeal of Marxism to Li Ta-chao, Ch'en Tu-hsiu and other Chinese intellectuals, their understanding of "Marxism" was undoubtedly somewhat limited at that time.

The actual founding of the Chinese Communist Party took place in Shanghai in July, 1921 at a meeting organized by Li Ta-chao and Ch'en Tu-hsiu. The first Communist organization in Shanghai and its various branches elsewhere had been established with the help of an agent of the Third or Communist International, Gregory Voitinsky. His successor, Marin, had assisted at the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. These and other Comintern agents assisted in developing the Chinese Communist Party apparatus and a Communist-led

¹⁴ Quoted in Li Chen, "Women Take Part in Productive Labor," *Peking Review* (March 22, 1974), pp. 17 and 21.

¹⁵ Quoted in Liu Chao, "Safeguarding Women's Interests," *Peking Review* (March 29, 1974), p. 15.

¹⁶ John K. Fairbank, *et al.*, *East Asia: The Modern Transformation* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), pp. 670-671.

labor movement.¹⁷ Thus, during this period, Chinese Communist ideology was strongly influenced by the leadership in Soviet Russia, to the extent that the first leaders of the Chinese Communist Party were convinced that the Chinese Revolution would follow the Russian "model."

It was not until later that Chinese Communist ideology developed its own individuality, a development often referred to as the "sinification" of Marxism-Leninism. This ideology developed out of the "concrete conditions" which existed in China in the late 1920's. These conditions included the "split" between the Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Communist Party, and the realization by some of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party that its success depended not on gaining control of the urban centers but on amassing support among the peasantry. The first Communist-led peasant uprising in China, the unsuccessful Autumn Harvest Uprising led by Mao Tse-tung, represented a turning point in Communist political and military strategy.

Mao Tse-tung's strategy for revolution in China is revealed in his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (March 1927), in which "the main strength of the revolution" is identified not as the city workers but as the poor peasantry. This strategy is expounded in his later writings and is succinctly expressed in the following quotation:

As every schoolboy knows, 80 per cent of China's population are peasants. So the peasant problem becomes the basic problem of the Chinese Revolution and the strength of the peasants is the main strength of the Chinese revolution.¹⁸

The importance which Mao placed on the role of the peasantry was to prove successful in China, but it was attacked again and again by elements within the Chinese Communist Party, even after the Communists had gained political power. Although Mao's unorthodox methods were not endorsed by Moscow, and he was virtually without power within the Chinese Communist Party from 1927 until 1935, his strategy proved so correct as to make him the indisputable leader of the Chinese Revolution.

Given this leadership position in the Chinese Communist world, the ideology of Mao Tse-tung is, in a sense, "Chinese Communist ideology." In fact, at the present time, the total ideology of the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

¹⁸ Mao Tse-tung, "On the New Democracy," *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 367.

Chinese Communist Party is officially described as "Marxism-Leninism and the Thought of Mao Tse-tung."¹⁹ Thus, in any discussion of the Chinese Communist ideology of sexual equality and marriage reform, it is necessary to refer to the writings of Mao Tse-tung to discover the evolution of this ideology.

III

In his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," Mao Tse-tung states:

A man in China is usually subjected to the domination of systems of authority: (1) the state system (political authority) . . . (2) the clan system (clan authority) . . . and (3) the supernatural system (religious authority) . . . As for women, in addition to being dominated by these three systems of authority, they are also dominated by the men (authority of the husband). These four authorities — political, clan, religious and masculine — are the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants.²⁰

It is obvious from these statements that Mao Tse-tung considered women to be the most oppressed of the Chinese people; not only were they dominated by the three authorities which oppressed all Chinese, they suffered an additional domination, namely that of the male. This belief is reiterated in his other works, e.g., "Under feudal domination, marriage is a barbaric and inhuman institution. The oppression and suffering borne by woman is far greater than that of man"²¹ and "We are peasants . . . We are workers . . . We are students . . . we are sunk even deeper in a sea of bitterness . . ."²² For a Chinese woman

¹⁹ Franz Schurmann, "Ideology," *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 23-24.

In the Party Rules adopted at the Seventh Party Congress (April-June 1945), the preamble states, "The Chinese Communist Party takes the theories of Marxism-Leninism and the unified thought and practice of the Chinese Revolution, the thought of Mao Tse-tung, as the guideline for all of its actions." In contrast, the preamble of the Party Rules adopted at the Eight Party Congress (September 1956) states: "The Chinese Communist Party takes Marxism-Leninism as the guideline for its action . . ." Since the latter part of the 1950's, the dualism originally stated in the 1945 Party Rules had been revived, but in stronger form: "Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao Tse-tung." — *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁰ Mao Tse-tung, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," *Selected Works* . . . , Vol. I, p. 44.

²¹ Mao Tse-tung, "Decree Regarding Marriage," quoted in Stuart R. Schram. *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 228.

²² Mao Tse-tung, "The Great Union of the Popular Masses," quoted in Schram, *Political Thought* . . . (rev. ed. 1969), p. 241.

to be emancipated meant the breaking of the three "ropes" (political, clan and religious authorities) as well as the fourth "rope" (the authority of the husband).

In this context, and consistent with Marxist ideology,²³ the emancipation of the Chinese women becomes an aspect of the class struggle for Mao. The theory of class struggle constitutes the essence of the Chinese Communist world outlook. Although the Chinese Communists have often departed radically from classic Marxist definitions of class, they have consistently regarded all conflict, whether internal or external to China, as of a class nature. Whether a "struggle" between poor and rich peasants in a village, or one between socialism and imperialism, any "struggle" is consistently defined as class conflict.²⁴

In this case — the emancipation of women — the struggle is against the authority of the husband as part of the "whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology." The patriarchal family represented the mainstay of traditional Chinese society and was, in effect, a feudal institution within a feudal society.²⁵ For Mao, it was thus imperative to transform the entire family system in order for China to evolve as a socialist society. And, as the long-range goal of Chinese Communism is the achievement of a classless society, the emancipation of women may be viewed as an aspect of the class struggle and as a decisive factor in determining the success or failure of the Chinese revolution.

²³ Mao dates his acceptance of Marxism to 1920, seven years before he wrote "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan": "By the summer of 1920 I had become, in theory and to some extent in action, a Marxist, and from that time on I considered myself a Marxist." — Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 155.

²⁴ Schurmann, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁵ Nida has demonstrated a parallel development of serfdom with the strengthening of paternal power within the family, following Marx's dictum that the family "being related from the beginning to agricultural services contains in germ not only slavery (servitus) but also serfdom." The need for a son to obtain permission from his father to set up a separate household is, for instance, equated with the lack of freedom of residence of the tenant-serf. The control of the father and the husband over the family property, the whole status structure within the family, correspond to the control by the landlord over property and freedom of the tenant; the status relationship of the father and son corresponds in some respects to that of the landlord and tenant. — M. J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971), p. 36.

IV

The struggle of the Chinese women is thus directly related to their economic emancipation. Not only do women have to be emancipated economically in order to succeed in their ideological emancipation, the economic participation of women is also essential to the development of China. This view is expressed in the passage from Mao Tse-tung quoted earlier: "Women comprise half of the population. The economic status of working women and the fact of their being specially oppressed prove not only that women urgently need revolution but also that they are a decisive force in the success or failure of the revolution."²⁶

The "whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology" retards economic growth and marriage reform is thus an economic as well as a political necessity. In the words of Ch'en Shao-yu, drafter of the 1950 Marriage Law:

The marriage system is the basis of the social cell — the family institution. It seriously affects the development of the productive power of society. The breaking down of the old family basis, and the introduction of the new mode of life, are urgent and necessary "especially to promote the growth of the productive power of society."²⁷

It is evident that Mao Tse-tung recognized the economic imperatives for putting his ideology of sexual equality and marriage reform into practice. In one of his essays, Mao argues strongly in favor of making women available for productive labor: "China's women are a vast reserve of labor power. This reserve should be tapped and used in the struggle to build a mighty socialist country."²⁸

Economic development in China, then primarily an agricultural country, meant agrarian reform, especially in the initial stages. In the passage from "Report of an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," Mao Tse-tung for the first time establishes the relationship between the reform of production relations in the field of agriculture, and family reform.²⁹

²⁶ Quoted in Hsu Kwang, "Women's Liberation is a Component Part of the Proletarian Revolution," *Peking Review* (March 8, 1974), p. 14.

²⁷ S. L. Fu, "The New Marriage Law of People's China," *Contemporary China* (Vol. I: 1955), ed. E. Stuart Kirby (Hong Kong University Press, 1956), p. 120.

²⁸ Mao Tse-tung, "China's Women are a Vast Reserve of Labor Power," quoted in Schram, *Political Thought . . .* (rev. ed. 1969), pp. 338-339.

²⁹ Meijer, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Mao, accepting the dichotomy of the Marxist view of society, expounded on the relationship between productive forces and production relations and between the base and the superstructure. In his work, "On Contradiction" (August 1937), Mao states:

True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. When it is impossible for the productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production then the change in the relations between the relations of population plays the principal and decisive role . . . When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also — and indeed must — recognize the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base.³⁰

In other words, in Mao's view, there is a constant mutual interaction between the productive forces and the relations of production, and between the base and the superstructure. Growth in the productive forces induces a corresponding change in the relations of production. Accordingly, the establishment of new relations of production promotes a tremendous growth in the productive forces.³¹ It is this constant mutual interreaction that propels society to move, develop and progress.

Given the dialectical relation between the base and the superstructure, the need for simultaneous change in both aspects of society becomes evident. Otherwise the active development of one and the slower development of the other will cause the latter to retard the growth of the former. Thus, in the case of agrarian reform and marriage reform, both had to occur simultaneously in order to propel, rather than retard, the outcome of the other.

This relationship is confirmed by Keith Buchanan in his evaluation of the economic development of China when he states that social change,

³⁰ Mao Tse-tung, "On Contradiction," *Selected Works* . . . Vol. I, p. 336.

³¹ Felisa Uy, "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: A Study of the Socialist Development in China" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of the Philippines, 1974), p. 9.

and notably land reform, made possible the shaping of a new environment but, at the same time, the very process of re-modelling the environment itself stimulated further institutional change.³² And in the words of a Chinese writer whom he quotes, "As men transformed nature their own way of thinking was transformed too."³³

In this way, land reform constituted one of the first stages in the transformation of China, both as a means of developing the country economically and as a means of destroying the "whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology." However, it is important to emphasize at this point that Mao Tse-tung, in keeping with the Marxist concept that "change is the condition of life," believed in the necessity of a continuing revolution. Based on this theory, China must go through the stages of development step by step and, regardless of its achievements, there will always be room for further changes.

V

In deciding what direction to take in the initial stages of the Chinese revolution, the leadership was faced with three options: It could follow the Western pattern of free-enterprise development, it could follow the Soviet model of development or, it could pioneer a "Third Way," drawing on the experience of other countries but modifying these models in the light of the social and economic conditions specific to East Asia.³⁴ For obvious reasons, the option of the "Third Way" or what has been called the "Chinese Way" in the field of economic development was shown.³⁵ Thus, as in the realm of political ideology, a similar "sinification" of Marxism-Leninism took place in the economic realm. The Chinese Communists used the model based on the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, i.e., the mobilization of all energies and resources of the country to achieve a single goal — the wiping-out of poverty through the building of a socialist state.³⁶ But, once again, this model was adapted to the "concrete conditions" of China.

These conditions, including an agricultural economy and a peasant population, lead to one solution: agrarian reform. However, in keep-

³² Keith M. Buchanan, *The Transformation of the Chinese Earth* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1970), p. 124.

³³ Yang Min, *Peking Review* (October 21, 1958), quoted in Buchanan, *Transformation . . .*, p. 124.

³⁴ Buchanan, *Transformation . . .*, p. 105.

³⁵ Gilbert Etienne, *La Voie Chinoise* (Paris, 1962), quoted in Buchanan, *Transformation . . .*, p. 107.

³⁶ Buchanan, *Transformation . . .*, p. 108.

ing with the relationship between the reform of production relations in the field of agriculture and family reform, this was accompanied by the simultaneous introduction of marriage reform. It has been observed that whenever and wherever the Chinese Communists established themselves, they promulgated both a marriage law and a land reform law.³⁷ This happened in the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1931, in the Border Areas and after the establishment of the People's Republic. In fact, land reform provided the basis for the marriage law, because it gave the woman property rights to land. It therefore made it possible for her to divorce her husband without losing her economic independence. This was evident in Chao Chen village in Shensi where many women said, "When I get my share I'll separate from my husband, then he won't be able to oppress me any more."³⁸ The ownership of land also gave the wife equality with her husband during marriage. The fact that even children were allotted land and that a wife at the time of divorce could take the children with her if she wished, provided her with a strong position *vis-a-vis* her husband. For all these reasons, land reform had a profound influence upon the legal relations within the family.

It is interesting to note, in this context, that the Land Reform Law was promulgated only one month after the Marriage Law, on June 2, 1950. The Marriage Law was actually banded together with the Land Law, as is expressed in a pamphlet which was issued together with the English translation of the Law:

As the agrarian reform sets free hundreds of millions landless and land-hungry peasants from oppression by the feudal landlords, so the Marriage Law marks the emancipation of the Chinese women from the feudal marriage system under which they were utterly bereft of any rights.³⁹

The Land Reform Law, aimed at the redistribution of land, had performed its function when the land had been redivided, by the middle of 1953. But the connection between agrarian reform and marriage reform continued, such as in the establishment of the communes in 1958. Each stage of agrarian policy had its repercussions in the interpretation of the Marriage Law.

³⁷ M. J. Meijer, "Marriage Law and Policy in the People's Republic of China" (unpublished manuscript), p. 1.

³⁸ William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 397.

³⁹ Franz Michael, "The Role of Law in Traditional, Nationalist and Communist China," *The China Quarterly* (January-March 1962), p. 139.

This relationship between agrarian policy and marriage policy has led many writers on the subject of Chinese women to conclude that the Chinese Communist ideology of sexual equality and marriage reform is highly flexible and therefore inconsistent. Examples of these criticisms include the following:

The regime has not been totally consistent on the issue of the role of women. At some times since 1949, women have been urged not to shirk or be dissatisfied with domestic burdens, and publicity has been given to model housekeepers; at other times, this emphasis on the domestic roles of women has been branded as a deviation.⁴⁰

Policies towards women are one aspect of the overall attempt to transform China. Each change in general policy (the mass line) has engendered a concomitant change in the mass line on women . . . Top party leaders have never been united by a common approach to this issue; it has been regarded as subordinate to the primary problems of political control and economic development, and the official policy toward women has therefore fluctuated wildly.⁴¹

The Chinese Communist view of sexual equality and marriage reform, however, has not fundamentally changed in the last fifty years. The policy of the Chinese Communist Party toward women has always followed this view consistently, though the degree to which this policy could be successfully implemented depended on the existing economic conditions. For example, during the period of the Great Leap Forward, women were encouraged to participate in agricultural production. But, because of the economic difficulties encountered in the subsequent years, they were later encouraged to stay at home. This was not a reversal of official policy nor of ideology, but only the accommodation of that policy to existing circumstances.

Thus these apparent "shifts" in Chinese Communist policy toward women represent little more than temporary stages in the overall Chinese revolution. These stages have not been as erratic as the above writers would lead us to believe but have followed the step-by-step development in China's "continuing revolution." Moreover, as successful as has been the Chinese Communist ideology in changing the status of women, this movement — in keeping with Mao's acceptance of "change as a condition of life" — is in the process of continuous transformation.

⁴⁰ Martin King Whyte, "The Family," *China's Developmental Experience*, ed. Michael Oksenberg (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 182.

⁴¹ Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Emancipation of Chinese Women," *World Politics* (October 1973), p. 56.