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**Wartime Feminists in the City of Ram: Women's Movement in the City of Guangzhou
during the Second World War**

The Second World War, better known in China as the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), fundamentally changed the fate of the country. Faced with this national crisis, two leading parties, the Guomindang (GMD, or the Nationalist Party) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), formed a united front to resist their common enemy, while citizens all over the country were motivated to support the cause of national salvation. People in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong Province in southern China, were no exception. As the center of activism for Chinese revolutionaries and the capital of the Nationalist Party in the early twentieth century, wartime Guangzhou remained the gathering place where contemporary patriots created a war resistance movement and even encouraged local women to participate in the effort of national salvation. However, very few studies have been conducted on the activities and views of local female activists during this significant historical moment. This study examines the national identity of Guangzhou female activists through their war activism and self-perceptions. I first explore the gender identity of Guangzhou women in relation to the state. I argue that although the female intellectuals of this city had actively engaged in the building of a Chinese nation-state and pursued their own liberation since the beginning of twentieth century, during this time of national turmoil, they underwent what Louise Edwards has called "crisis feminism," whereby they were encouraged by the male leaders to step into the societal realm and engage in war relief activities for the sake of national salvation, but expected to return home without acquiring equal

rights with men after the war was won.¹ Additionally, I inspect the group dynamics within the women's community, which was also affected by the differences in women's political affiliation or national identity. Based on the evidence, I argue that universal sisterhood, which can be defined as women's common pursuit of legal rights and freedoms, was largely challenged during the war by their in-group conflicts. Such disputes among different factions of female leaders emerged in the form of political rivalry between members of the GMD and CCP. The split between women elites in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou and those who retreated from the city and joined resistance groups also generated discord within the women's movement. Although war resistance effort had widened the gate of entry for women into social activism, both the demand for women to sublimate their individual interests to the cause of nationalism and their inner group struggles showed the negative aspects of the war, which handicapped women's ability to prioritize their feminist agenda and attain self-emancipation as a unified force.

Historical Development of Guangzhou Women's Movement Prior to WWII

The women's movement in wartime Guangzhou was molded by two characteristics of the city's history: its unique position as the center of cultural exchange between China and the outside world, and its heritage as the birthplace and political base of the Chinese revolution. As a center of international trade long influenced by the outside world, Guangzhou in the late imperial period was able to retain its position at the forefront of social interactions and frequent clashes between China and the West. After a humiliating defeat in the First Opium War (1839-1842) against Great Britain, the Qing state gradually accepted that their country could only be

¹ See Louise Edwards, "Zhanzheng Dui Xiandai Zhongguo Nuxing Canzheng Yundong De Yingxiang: 'Wei'ji Nuxing' De Wenti," in *Bainian Zhongguo Nüquan Sichao Yanjiu*, ed. Wang Zheng and Chen Yan (Shanghai: Fudan Daxue Chubanshe, 2005), 220-226. Although Edwards refers to this phenomenon as "crisis femininity", I change it to "crisis feminism" for clarity of meaning.

strengthened and preserved from imperialist encroachment by learning from the West.² This change of attitude would help encourage the proliferation of Western-style girls' schools and the importation of Western knowledge into the country. The introduction of then-new Western concepts in political science and feminism also raised the social consciousness of local female students and prepared them for greater involvement in public affairs. Through the gradual spread of women's education, a new class of progressive female elites would emerge and enthusiastically participate in several military campaigns in early twentieth century.

Ever since multiple armed uprisings led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen and his Tongmenghui (a.k.a. the Revolutionary Alliance) to overthrow the Manchu rulers in the 1900s³, Guangzhou had been transformed into the capital of political activism; women's participation was strongly encouraged and viewed as inseparable from the strengthening of the nation. After Dr. Sun and his followers established the Republic of China in 1912 but failed to put an end to the rivalry of regional warlords, the rise of GMD and CCP eventually led to the collaboration between these two parties and a National Revolution that aimed to annihilate northern warlordism and unify the country. Under this political alliance, which was also based in 1920s Guangzhou, prominent female leaders in both parties worked together to mobilize local women to support the revolutionary cause and promote women's emancipation.⁴ Nonetheless, these leaders experienced considerable hardships in reconciling their differences in geographical background and political ideology, although they were all working towards the greater good of their fellow sisters. Female elites had

² For a discussion of the war, see Conrad Schirokauer, *Modern China and Japan: a Brief History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 88.

³ The First Guangzhou Uprising was one of Dr. Sun's ten unsuccessful revolts against the Manchu ruler. It was launched by members of Dr. Sun's Revolutionary Alliance who joined and received military training through the New Army, a modernized army established by Qing officials in 1900. The Yellow Flower Mount Uprising, another failed attempt to overthrow the Manchu government, was led by Dr. Sun's revolutionary comrade Huang Xing and resulted in the deaths of 86 martyrs, of which 72 were buried at the Yellow Flower Mount. For a discussion of the two Guangzhou Uprisings, see Harold Z. Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen: Reluctant Revolutionary* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), 139-148.

⁴ See chapter 6 of Christina K. Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

certainly reflected upon universal rights of women regardless of background, a concept that resembles what we might think of today as universal sisterhood, yet internal conflicts prevented them from fully achieving such a common goal. In addition, the fact that female activists were forced to set aside the pursuit of gender equality and prioritize the nation's needs became more manifest, as uninterrupted political chaos kept women occupied with saving the country and left them no time to challenge conservative gender norms. While the legacy of political activism had deeply influenced the consciousness of local women, failure to fight for their equal rights as a group and crisis feminism also shaped the city's gender dynamics and would reemerge during the Anti-Japanese War period.

The Women's Movement in Pre-Occupation Guangzhou, 1937-1938

Dr. Sun's death in 1925 left the leadership position to his student Chiang Kai-Shek (Jiang Jieshi), who would terminate the alliance with the CCP when the Nationalist Revolutionary Army successfully took over Nanjing in 1927. Chiang's purge of the CCP activists in 1927 threw the country back into chaos and resulted in ten years of civil war, until the Japanese invasion of China forced the leaders from both sides to establish a Second United Front beginning in late 1936. Female activists in Guangzhou, whose collective action in the 1920s was brought to an end due to the split between the GMD and the CCP, were again united by this political partnership and therefore able to revive their movement in the context of national crisis. The problem of "crisis feminism," underlined by a sexual division of wartime labor that was promoted by male leaders, had persisted. Additionally, female partisans from GMD and CCP tried to collaborate with each other, but the ideal of universal sisterhood was challenged at times, just like in the former period.

Female activists in Guangzhou were pressured by society to fulfill their citizenship duties and temporarily cease their struggle for equal rights, a predicament that was highlighted by the gender division of labor assigned by government officials. The wartime tasks allotted to women by male politicians were intended to engage female citizens solely in the cause of national salvation without threatening the existed gender structure. One male writer pointed out that “the time has come to a critical moment, and compatriots from all over China, regardless of gender, should have the determination to die and be prepared for national salvation,” a statement that explicitly illustrated his belief in women’s responsibility for the welfare of the nation.⁵ However, when he began to enumerate what he thought housewives should do for war preparation, such as tightening family budgets and encouraging their husbands and children to support national salvation, he seemed to expect these housewives to get involved in war relief activities without learning new skills or changing their occupations. This author was not the only one who, when designating certain wartime tasks to the female population, tended to accentuate women’s domestic skills and reinforce women’s traditional role as the nurturer of their families. Clothes-making, food preparation for the army, fundraising and organizing medical teams were all perceived as the incontrovertible responsibilities of women, as these jobs were thought to be an extension of women’s everyday household chores.⁶ By completing these tasks, women would contribute to their country similar to how they used to support their husbands within the traditional family system, although no promise of equal treatment between the two genders could be expected in return. Women as “crisis feminists” were therefore turned into useful tools of the state in times of war.

During the late 1930s, although the women’s movement in Guangzhou was no longer led by

⁵ Guangdong Sheng Funü_Lianhehui, Guangdong Sheng Dang’anguan, ed., *Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Sheng Funü_Lianhehui, 1991), 6:15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6:34.

the same female leaders due to changes in the local political structure, female partisans from GMD and CCP were still not able to completely support the notion of universal sisterhood. For instance, a CCP woman named Yu Zhen recalled begrudgingly that a GMD female leader, Li Shishan, who was in charge of the military training for female students, forced everybody to study the Three People's Principles and to show respect to Chiang Kai-shek by standing up every time Chiang's name was mentioned.⁷ Of course, the communists were not particularly welcomed because they seriously threatened the Nationalists' authority by infiltrating every major women's organization in Guangzhou and secretly enlisting new members from among students and factory workers in order to enlarge the CCP's share of power in local politics.⁸ Apparently, female activists from these two parties managed to cast aside their feelings of bitterness and to maintain their partnership for the sake of their country and fellow sisters, many of whom were mobilized and actively participated in the war relief effort. Nonetheless, such antagonism that was temporarily hidden would soon erupt in the prolonged struggle against the enemy after the city was occupied.

Women's Activism in Japanese-Occupied Guangzhou and the Chinese-Governed Region of Guangdong Province

After capturing the city in 1938, the Japanese used the strategy of "using the Chinese to rule the Chinese" (*yi Hua zhi Hua*), and established in December a puppet organization named "Guangzhou Public Security Reinforcement Union," which would be replaced by the puppet city government a year later. In 1940, a puppet provincial government was also established by the

⁷ Yu Zhen, "Kangzhan Shiqi Zai Guangzhou Kaizhan Funü Gongzuo De Pianduan Huiyi," *Guangzhou Fuyun Shiliao* 29, (1983): 5. The Three People's Principles (Sanmin Zhuyi), devised by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, were the guiding ideology of the Nationalist Party.

⁸ For information on the female communists' infiltration of major women's organizations in the city, see Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, ed., *Kangri Zhanzheng Shiqi De Guangdong Funü Yundong* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 136. For information on the recruitment of new members, see Liang Qi, "Kangzhan Qianhou Zai Shengli Nüshi He Guangzhou Diqu Funü Gongzuo De Diandi," *Guangzhou Fuyun Shiliao* 18 (1982): 2. Also, see Yu Hui, "Kangzhan Shiqi Zai Shengli Nüzhong Gongzuo de Huiyi," *Guangzhou Fuyun Shiliao* 22 (1982): 1.

Japanese and placed under the administration of the puppet central government in Nanjing headed by Wang Jingwei, initially a follower of Dr. Sun back in the revolutionary years and a GMD leader who surrendered to the Japanese. The Chinese politicians who submitted to the foreign aggressors would govern the city and create a sense of social stability and economic prosperity.⁹

The women's movement from the Pre-Occupation period was therefore interrupted by the arrival of the Japanese army, and later resurrected by two different groups of women leaders, one in the city and the other outside the Japanese-controlled region. The Japanese invaders and the puppet government created a separate women's movement in Guangzhou. The "reinstated" women's organizations held conferences, launched public charity programs, drafted policies and published articles to legitimize the reign of the puppet government and acquire popular support.¹⁰ Meanwhile, female intellectuals active in the city prior to the Japanese conquest were forced to retreat with their government to Shaoguan, a city north of Guangzhou. There they rearranged the women's movement by keeping up their war relief effort to boost the morale of soldiers and convince more women to fight for national salvation and self-liberation.

The ranks of the new women's associations in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou were comprised of the wives of high officials who decided to side with the Japanese invaders. For example, the new puppet mayor's wife Huang Baogang was chosen as the honorary president of the Guangdong Women's Union, whereas the wives of other influential politicians became the honorary members.¹¹ There is also evidence that these women had received an education, since one of them had written an article in the newspaper while others advocated an increase in literary

⁹ Guangzhou Qingnian Yundongshi Yanjiu Weiyuanhui, ed., *Guangzhou Xuesheng Yundongshi* (Guangzhou: Huanan Ligong Daxue Chubanshe, 2002), 225.

¹⁰ I am putting quotation marks around the word "reinstated" because the women's groups in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou, now managed by different leadership, would use the same name as the existed women's groups prior to the Japanese invasion (for example, the Guangzhou City Women's Association), possibly to maintain an illusion that nothing had really changed.

¹¹ Guangdong Sheng Funü Lianhehui, Guangdong Sheng Dang'anguan, ed., *Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao*, 6:185.

training for lower class women.¹² However, these female leaders had been almost invisible in the local feminist circle prior to the Japanese Occupation, either because their husbands were not the favorites among Chiang Kai-shek's political aides, or they had done very little in the past which would make them appear in the news articles.

There is little doubt that women elites in Japanese-controlled Guangzhou were keen supporters of the Wang Jingwei's central puppet government. Phrases like "building a new East Asia" or "calling out for a new East Asian order," which echoed the concept of "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" promoted by the Japanese, were frequently mentioned in the reports of the women's movement and articles written by female intellectuals at the time.¹³ When Wang Jingwei, following the footsteps of his Japanese bosses, declared war on Great Britain and the United States in 1942, female leaders also propagandized his decision and tried to garner mass support from commoners in the city and nearby counties that were under Japanese control.¹⁴

While the Chinese usually depict puppet leaders as evil, devious traitors and selfish panderers to the Japanese because of cowardice, such a blunt assumption fails to acknowledge the profound psychology that was at work behind a Chinese collaborator's national identity.¹⁵ Rather, I suggest that the female elites' shifting perception towards nationalism possibly originated from their belief in the central leader Wang Jingwei as the authentic head of the GMD.

A courageous revolutionary hero who was himself a Guangdong native, Wang Jingwei had always been a loyal follower of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. His influence nevertheless declined after Sun's

¹² The article, titled "Funümen Qilai Canyon Heping Yundong" [All women should rise and participate in the Peace Movement] by an anonymous author, can be found in *Ibid.*, 6:178-181. An example of female puppet leaders' calling for women's education is in *Ibid.*, 6:192.

¹³ The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was a concept created by one of the Prime Ministers in wartime Japan. When this sphere was formed among Japan, China, and other neighboring countries, Japan would become the leader of a self-sufficient and unstoppable empire that could vie against the Westerners. For women leaders' usage of the cited phrases, see for example, *Ibid.*, 6:301.

¹⁴ Guangdong Sheng Funü Lianhehui, Guangdong Sheng Dang'anguan, ed., *Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao*, 6:202-204.

¹⁵ For example, when a female communist Chen Xin was sent to study a university in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou as an undercover agent, she later reported that "big traitors to the Chinese people" and "Wang Jingwei's minions" gathered there and ran the school incompetently. See Chen Xin, "Lunxian Shiqi Zai Guangdong Daxue De Douzheng," in *Guangzhou Lunxianqu De Ririyeye*, ed. Zhonggong Guangzhou Shiwei Dangshi Yanjiushi (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1998), 231.

death and Chiang Kai-shek's successful rise to prominence in the ranks of the Nationalist Party. When Japan's ambition became more and more obvious beginning in the early 1930s, Wang Jingwei, who assumed that China was in no position to win a war against this modernized, military superpower, gradually changed his attitude to that of a pacifist and started what he later called the "Peace Movement," thus losing his popularity in the GMD government dominated by Chiang and other pro-war leaders.¹⁶ Wang remained in the party until the Japanese power agreed to support his Peace Movement and later installed him as the head of the central puppet government.¹⁷

Because of his native background and revolutionary accomplishments, Wang Jingwei might have seemed more preferable in the eyes of local leaders, while Chiang Kai-shek appeared to be the alien, self-interested autocratic ruler who had done much less to contribute to Dr. Sun's cause than Wang. Although Chiang's pro-war strategy was apparently much more noble and patriotic, the faithful backers of Wang would probably argue that their leader was only submitting to Japanese invaders for the time being.¹⁸ These female leaders' national identity, though seriously misleading, could be considered "loyal" to the Chinese state led by a legitimate leader who had temporarily compromised to the foreign invaders yet would still be constantly searching for the revival of their nation.

In regard to their feminist ideals, it could be inferred that female elites in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou were affected by the legacy of the New Life Movement launched by GMD during

¹⁶ For a discussion of Wang Jingwei's Peace Movement, see Ke-Wen Wang, "Wang Jingwei and the Policy Origins of the 'Peace Movement', 1932-1937," in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1932-1945*, ed. David P. Barrett and Larry N. Shyu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 21-37.

¹⁷ This abridged version of Wang Jingwei's biography is based on Lin Siyun, "Zhenshi De Wang Jingwei," Erxiantang, http://www.edubridge.com/erxiantang/library/wangjingwei_linsiyun.htm (accessed January 12, 2008).

¹⁸ Another note must be added, that Chiang Kai-shek was not a persistent Anti-Japanese advocate all along, as he actually ordered the Northeastern army stationed in Manchuria to retreat in the dawn of Japanese invasion in 1931 when citizens in that region were eager to resist the enemy. Under this context, female elites in Japanese-controlled Guangzhou might see no difference between Wang's so-called peace negotiations and Chiang's nonresistance tactic for Manchuria, although Chiang never officially surrendered to the Japanese.

the 1930s as well as Japanese gender ideology.¹⁹ Under the influence of these two philosophies, both of which compelled women to dedicate themselves faithfully to the state without direct interference with public affairs, women were still subject to the recurring phenomenon of crisis feminism.²⁰

Historically, Chinese women were inculcated with the doctrine of “virtuous wife and good mother” (“xianqi liangmu”), which confined women’s sphere of activities to the inner chambers and commanded them to become only managers of the household. The Nationalist government adopted a similar rhetoric for women in its New Life Movement during mid-1930s in order to revive traditional Confucian values in citizens’ daily lives. Under the movement’s conventional gender division of labor as well as strict rules for moral conduct, women who had been fighting for their self-liberation throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century were forced to return to their previous, domestic roles as mothers and wives.²¹ Similarly, in modern Japan, women’s inward role as “good wives and wise mothers” (“ryosai kenbo”), as well as their outward loyalty to the emperor, that in turn could be expressed through serving the family, were first outlined by the reformers in the Meiji period and particularly accentuated by the wartime government.²² Although the documentation is sparse, there is indeed evidence suggesting that the female elites in Japanese-controlled Guangzhou were under the impact of both the New Life Movement and Meiji gender ideology. For instance, in an interview, the president of the City Women’s Association opined that women’s problems such as the indecent habits of extravagance

¹⁹ The New Life Movement, initiated by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek with the assistance of his wife Song Meiling, was intended to transform the corrupted and unclean lives of all citizens with the propagation of ancient Confucian virtues, for the threefold purpose of “militarization, productivization and aestheticization”. In addition, a separate women’s committee was set up under the directorship of Song Meiling.

²⁰ See a brief discussion of Japanese gender ideology in Joan Judge, “Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 771.

²¹ For more information on women’s role in Republican China, see Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1951-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

²² Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 22-23. See also Yoshiko Miyake, “Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women’s Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991),” 269.

and chasing after fashion should be eliminated by restoring traditional feminine virtues and encouraging the spirit of industriousness and frugality.²³ This call for the restoration of traditional gender values appeared to be consistent with prewar gender norms under GMD's New Life Movement and with the government's policy in wartime Japan. Unfortunately, because of their emphasis on traditional feminine virtue, Guangzhou women under Japanese occupation would be forced to submit themselves to the call for nationalism and set aside their feminist pursuits, a fact that might have explained the paucity of sources that have been left behind.

Following the Japanese conquest of Guangzhou, the resources necessary for the general advance of Japanese military had already been depleted, and the Sino-Japanese conflict turned into a strategic stalemate.²⁴ The GMD was able to reorganize its government in Shaoguan, a city north of Guangzhou that was originally the capital of Qujiang prefecture, and concentrate on the mobilization of local peasants, though resettlements caused by additional Japanese attacks were not uncommon. The communists, who continued to work under the directorship of the GMD, were mainly responsible for guerilla operations and sending spies to the occupied city, in order to retrieve more information about the enemy and motivate the oppressed people to rise up against the puppet regime.²⁵

Nevertheless, the alliance reestablished between the GMD and CCP was far from a peaceful collaboration. On the state level, Chiang Kai-shek was convinced that he could achieve both the victory of the war and the termination of communist influence at the same time.²⁶

Chiang's open hostilities towards his communist partners would influence how the GMD

²³ Guangdong Sheng Funü Lianhehui, Guangdong Sheng Dang'anguan, ed., *Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao*, 6:305-306.

²⁴ People's Daily, "War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945)," People's Daily Online, <http://english.people.com.cn/zhuanti/wwii-60/doc2.html> (April 11, 2008).

²⁵ Zhong Qinzhen, "Guangzhou Renmin De Kangri Douzheng," in *Guangdong Kangzhan Shi Yanjiu*, ed. Guangdong Sheng Zhonggong Dangshi Xuehui (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), 100-108.

²⁶ One of the best examples of Chiang's anti-communist intention was the New Fourth Army Incident (a.k.a. Wannan Incident), in which Chiang Kai-shek ordered the GMD army stationed in southern Anhui province to attack the communist-led New Fourth Army later accused by Chiang as disobeying the central government. See Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

partisans around the country, including those female leaders in the countryside of Guangdong, responded to the activities of their CCP colleagues. Though contentions between the two parties were nothing new to the female leaders in this province, the First Civil War must have cast a shadow of hatred among female partisans from both sides.

While GMD and CCP female partisans in Guangdong province found it extremely difficult to sustain their political alliance, CCP women attempted to deal with this problem by avoiding direct confrontation with their colleagues in the rivaling party or by concealing their political identification. Seemingly, their perseverance was essential to the survival of the communist party, which largely depended upon their successful collaboration with the GMD and the triumph of the Anti-Japanese War. Major female leaders in the GMD such as Wu Jufang and Chen Mingshu were also identified by the CCP women as relatively tolerant toward open communist activities such as the enrollment of new members²⁷, thereby proving that some Nationalist women were disposed to try their best to maintain the coalition of the two parties as well. Though the strategic partnership between GMD and CCP female partisans had encountered many technical difficulties, there was never a major dispute that severely injured their working relationship. This should be viewed as the confirmation of these female leaders' patriotism and, more significantly, their willingness to put aside the inconsistencies in their political views in order to create an environment where all women could join together and work toward their eventual objective of female emancipation.

In part voluntary in order to show their patriotism and in part forced by the intensification of the war, female leaders in rural Guangdong continue to prioritize their war relief effort rather than their struggle against gender discrimination. In addition to the wartime activities engaged in by women prior to the occupation of Guangzhou, female leaders in the Chinese-governed region

²⁷ Guangdong Sheng Funü Lianhehui, Guangdong Sheng Dang'anguan, ed., *Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao*, 3:179, 188.

of the province were also in charge of rescuing children and managing war orphanages, since this assignment completely fit the government's gender division of labor that expected women to handle tasks related to the domestic realm.²⁸ By educating the war orphans, an action that was characterized as women's natural obligation, female activists would be able to save the future of the country and prove their patriotic spirit. This line of reasoning found an audience among both male and female leaders in wartime Guangdong. For instance, Chen Mingshu wrote, "[we] women consist half of the nation's population, and children are closely related to women . . . Thus women's responsibility of [looking after] children is an important part of the work for war resistance."²⁹ This argument fortified the established image that women were born mothers and had an inevitable duty of tending to children. Even though it did not mean these women were totally pleased with the limited sphere in which they were allowed to contribute to the national salvation movement, their disinclination to show dissent from this mission led to their transformation into crisis feminists.

Besides child care and other war relief efforts, female intellectuals presented their views on gender issues through their writings, hoping that their radical call for women's rights would soon be recognized by the male leaders after the war. Most of their discussions revolved around work and family, which were two of the biggest concerns for their women readers. Since the war opened a wider gate for women to enter the social realm and take on jobs traditionally attributed to men, the clash between their domestic duties and professions became increasingly evident and allowed female intellectuals to demand action from the government through their writings. The social changes these writers promoted were twofold: women should acquire economic independence through their work, while their burden should be lessened in the household with

²⁸ Wu Jufang, the wife of Li Hanhun, Chairman of the Provincial Government, described in her memoir (which was part of her daughter's book) how she organized the effort to rescue and educate war orphans. See Li Zhen, *Hua Kai Meng Huai*, (Shantou: Shantou Daxue Chubanshe, 2004), 146-147.

²⁹ Guangdong Sheng Funü_Lianhehui, Guangdong Sheng Dang'anguan, ed., *Guangdong Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao*, 8:425.

the help of government-sanctioned social welfare programs. By emphasizing men and women's equal rights and responsibilities in both the public and the private sphere, women intellectuals in World War II Guangdong therefore wanted to revolutionize traditional gender ideology and help women consolidate their footing in the workplace. Even though only some of these problems could be resolved by the wartime government due to financial constraint, the feminist writers wished to make clear the fact that more women were entering the job market and not returning home. The difficulties female professionals encountered during this social transformation needed to be faced eventually, since it was the only way for women to achieve financial autonomy, which would be translated into their psychological freedom and, ultimately, self-liberation in their pursuit of gender equality.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the ironic implications of nationalism in the wartime women's movement. The call for patriotism turned loyal female citizens into crisis feminists, utilized by the government without the assurance of gender egalitarianism. In addition, while the goal of universal sisterhood had never been realized in Republican Guangzhou, it became especially compromised during the course of the Anti-Japanese War.

Historically, female activists in Guangzhou had always been treated by male leaders as crisis feminists. For instance, the need to demonstrate their nationalistic spirit and sacrifice their feminist agenda continued to be a dilemma for female leaders in the women's mobilization campaign in 1920s Guangzhou. Moreover, it was also in this period when conflicts among the female elites began to intensify, since they were divided by political affiliations and could not agree on how to manage their own movement.

At the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, however, Guangzhou women determined to make

national salvation their highest priority, hence their desire to improve their status in society was forced to be abandoned. This phenomenon was also true for the rest of the war on the GMD and CCP side, although female intellectuals gradually became tired of waiting and decided to attack the issues of gender injustice with their own pens. In addition, in spite of the facade of a Second United Front, rivalries between Nationalist and communist women never ceased, and sometimes almost threatened to destroy the sisterhood that was essential in the operation of their movement.

The situation was further complicated by the Japanese occupation of Guangzhou, where a new group of female leaders started their own movement to support their husbands' puppet regime. The conflicting national identity of these women turned them into tools of government propaganda and war relief, while their embrace of traditional gender norms that was possibly affected by prewar GMD propaganda and Japanese governmental policy forced them to sacrifice a feminist agenda and become crisis feminists for the nation's sake.

Although the phenomenon of crisis feminism was mostly associated with a country in chaos, this does not mean that female activists were immediately granted equal rights after the war was over. Women had been denied equal treatment over and over again; when war erupted, the reigning government could raise the question of nationalism to temporarily avoid the issue of women's rights. It is worthwhile to note that even in post-1949 China, in spite of the sacrifices women had made to support the revolution, the CCP government, which was arguably more committed to women's universal rights than the GMD, never actually fulfilled their promise of gender equality.³⁰ Apparently, this phenomenon could take place under the rule of either party and remain even after the political crisis was over. In other words, female activists simply had to

³⁰ This observation made Western feminist scholars such as Margery Wolf, who believed in the CCP's commitment to uplift women's status, extremely disappointed after they were allowed to conduct research in China in the early 1980s. For more information on this topic, see for example, Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985). Also, see Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

accept the reality that war was only one of the excuses used by the conservative governments to subordinate their movement. Given that “crisis feminism” became the norm for elite women activists in Republican China, the question becomes whether Chinese women leaders attempted to challenge the excuses put forth by the male officials in order to advance the feminist movement and acquire self-emancipation. While the female collaborators in Japanese-occupied Guangzhou did not try to alter the status quo of gender inequality, the GMD and CCP women sought to uplift the status of women in society by all possible means, and would therefore lay the foundation of the local feminist movement in years to come.

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