

Chinese Women and Modernity

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Please note that all terms appearing in **bold** are included in the glossary.

Abstract

This three-class unit explores the conceptualization of women's roles in modernizing China during the 1920s, a critical decade of reform for China. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, China experienced internal rebellions, imperialism, repeated defeat at the hands of the Western powers as well as Japan, various reform efforts, and political revolution. While intellectuals hoped for a new start for China, many of them despaired of that hope, because they saw the nation as mired in tradition. The revolution of 1911, which ended the dynastic system, proved unable to bring change beyond the political structure. Without a break from tradition in the form of a cultural revolution, China could not experience modernity. In the view of Chinese intellectuals, one of the keys to achieving modernity was the formation of a national citizenry. The Chinese people had to be politicized and rallied to the cause of Chinese survival in the modern world. All energies needed to be harnessed for the sake of the nation. Women were absolutely essential to this process, for they were seen as the keepers of tradition, the keepers of the home, and the source of half of the nation's power and energy. However, women who answered the call of the nation were caught between the expectations of traditional society and their own desire for a more independent modern existence. This unit explores the roles and expectations for Chinese women positioned at the intersection of modernity and nationalism during the 1920s.

1. Themes and Goals

Women's place in society and nation is often viewed as a gauge of modernity and tradition. This was certainly the case in early 20th century China. As China struggled to find national unity and fight Western **imperialism**, the topic of Chinese women became politicized as

women came to be viewed as the glue of a traditional society that was preventing China from advancing towards national strength and modernity. Much attention, therefore, was paid by intellectuals (predominantly male) to “the woman problem”—how to make traditional women modern citizens who could contribute to the cause of nationalism. Women, too, looked for new ways to define their roles, through participating in new opportunities for education, expressing their views in literature, practicing sexual liberation, or simply by trying to have a say in the selection of their future spouses. Traditional structures and traditional gender roles, however, were hard to break away from, and many young women who aspired to a modern identity encountered structural and cultural obstacles.

This unit explores the debates swirling around the roles, identities, and opportunities of women in 1920s China. In order to understand why the struggle between tradition and modernity was such a dilemma, students need to understand the background of nationalism that framed the debate on women. This unit is designed to highlight the links between nationalism, women’s issues, and women’s identity as they evolved in revolutionary China, and the struggles individual women encountered. Students should come away with a good understanding of the key role women played in modernizing China and building a new society, the struggles of Chinese women of the era, the strength and realities of tradition and gender roles, and the relationship between nationalism, women, and modernity in China. They should see that intellectuals thought that women had to become more independent if China were to become more independent. Women’s fate was tied to China’s fate. They will also see the disjunction between the vision of a modern woman and the realities of society.

This unit primarily focuses on women’s ties to the state and the perceptions of women formulated by intellectuals and those concerned with the state, rather than on a woman-generated woman’s movement (though some of the materials here address this). The development of a feminist women’s movement is a separate subject.

Because the subject of Chinese women is so foreign (culturally, historically, and visually) to many students, a variety of materials that highlight the struggle between modernity and tradition are presented here, including a movie, essays, and a short story. The major assignment is an essay written for one of the many journals that explored “the woman question” during the 1920s.

Three or four classes (depending on whether you show the movie during class time) are needed for this unit. The first class (class A) could be a discussion of traditional society and women in the form of lecture and discussion of readings. The second (class B) would be a discussion of *Raise the Red Lantern* and women and modernity, and the third (class C) would focus on women and the nation and the woman problem. If you have only two classes, you could choose either classes A and C or classes B and C.

The materials presented in the unit encourage students to think critically about how the link between women and modernity in the early 20th century helped reshape the identity of Chinese women, in both the political and domestic realms. In addition, students should see how gender equity became politicized and tied to nationalism (this tie later presented problems for Chinese women interested in a women’s movement independent of state needs). Students will

be able to analyze the Chinese primary sources and the movie in the context of the **May Fourth Period**, and if presented in a class with a comparative aspect, see how the experience of Chinese women resonates with and departs from that of other women's movements.

2. Instructor's Introduction

China, as a result of both domestic and foreign challenges to its social and political order, experienced a political revolution in 1911. This revolution resulted in the abdication of the Qing emperor in early 1912 and the establishment of the Republic of China. The political revolution, although it succeeded in overthrowing the system of **dynastic rule** by emperors, did not fix the social and economic, or even the political, problems that plagued China. Intellectuals looking for solutions for China's ills started to identify China's culture as holding it back from achieving strength and modernity. They identified tradition as a shackle that prevented China from progressing. As the 1911 political revolution seemingly proved, if China wanted to solve its problems, both political and social, it needed to change more than just the government; it needed to generate a **New Culture**. The **New Culture Movement** and **May Fourth Movement** of the 1910s and 1920s focused on ways of nurturing new outlooks based on modernity rather than on tradition. The May Fourth Movement took its name from the massive popular protest that took place in China in May 1919 in response to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which transferred Germany's territorial rights in China to the Japanese. The movement advocated the modernization of China by moving away from traditional culture and political models and building a new socio-political culture that embraced the energy of science and democracy. Advocates promoted uprooting the traditional family system in favor of egalitarian individualism in order to build the nation. They spread their message through the many May Fourth journals that sprouted throughout China. Part of the mission of the New Culture and May Fourth Movements was to build a modern Chinese citizen; in order to do this, goals had to be voiced and heard beyond the circles of intellectuals in the major cities. Journals of the era, in response, promoted the use of vernacular Chinese. Up until this point, literary or classical Chinese, discernible only to the most educated, had been the written form of the language. With the New Culture Movement, the less exclusionary vernacular form of the written language was adopted, helping to spread the message of cultural change.

As is made clear by the many May Fourth essays focusing on the topic, women were identified as key to this process of cultural change. Although the energies of all of China's people were needed for cultural transformation, women played the critical role in the transformation because they were considered to be the keepers of tradition. Without changing women and their roles within the family, there was no way to change China. As long as women as keepers of the hearth perpetuated the family system, China would continue to be tied to tradition. In addition, traditional practice of keeping women inside the home and out of the labor force outside of the home meant that female labor was an untapped source of productivity for an emerging modern nation and its economy. A new woman had to be created, a woman who would be a citizen and contribute to the state and the nation.

3. Instructor Readings

- *** Most important
- ** Recommended
- * Optional

- *** ONO, Kazuko. “Casting Off the Shackles of the Family.” Chapter 5 in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, edited by Joshua A. Fogel. Stanford University Press, 1989. Pages 93-111.

This chapter covers the post-1911 Revolution period and Chinese reform focusing on the family. Not only does this chapter provide good background information on **Confucianism** as it relates to the family, it also includes discussions of the three assigned **LU Xun** pieces and of Nora. The section entitled, “Freedom in Love” covers issues pertinent to “Miss Sophia’s Diary.” The final section provides historical background to the **May Fourth Period** and the reforms that ensued. A definite must-read for instructors.

- ** ONO, Kazuko. “Between Footbinding and Nationhood.” Chapter 2 in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, edited by Joshua A. Fogel. Stanford University Press, 1989. Pages 23-46.

In this chapter, Ono provides background for reform efforts in the late Qing dynasty (which ended in 1911). The non-China specialist might initially be thrown by the abrupt start of the chapter and the many Chinese names, but will soon discover the chapter is not only manageable, but also very useful. Ono begins with the end of the Taiping Rebellion, a vast rebellion that lasted fifteen years and involved rebel occupation of about a third of China and resulted in the deaths of some 20 million people. The cumulative effect of the rebellion, long-term demographic changes, and the **Opium War**-instigated unequal treaty system caused Chinese officials and intellectuals to search for ways to stabilize and strengthen China. “Between **Footbinding** and Nationhood” focuses on the participants in the reform movement of 1898 (the Hundred Days of Reform), especially KANG Youwei, LIANG Qichao, and TAN Sitong. Ono highlights reforms focusing on women, especially the anti-Footbinding movement and the role women were to play in strengthening China. This reading is not among the readings assigned to students, but it could be. If it were, then any one or all of the three reformers (Kang, Liang, or Tan) can be used in the discussion exercises and for the paper.

- *** KO, Dorothy. “Introduction: Gender and Politics of Chinese History.” In *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. Pages 1-10.

This will be a useful introduction for the instructor for the material covered in class A, an overview and discussion of traditional society and women. Ko’s introduction addresses a number of important issues. First, she succinctly explains the link between Chinese women and Chinese nationalism. And she briefly discusses **LU Xun** (“New Year’s

Sacrifice”) and the traditional “victimized” Chinese woman in the process. Second and more important, she discusses how the portrayal of Chinese women as trapped by the family, **Confucianism**, and the political system is rooted in the **May Fourth Period**, the period examined in this unit. The resulting political construction of Chinese women as victims is tied to 20th-century concepts of modernity and, therefore, time specific and not to be applied to all of Chinese history. Ko wants to shake, if not overturn, the hold of the May Fourth Period view of women in Chinese history, because of its limitations in understanding the history of women pre-May Fourth. Instead of seeing women as victims, Ko argues for adding women as agents to history, thereby replacing the view of women as victims of men and patriarchy. Ko’s introduction reinforces the links between women and modernity and women and tradition during the May Fourth Period that intellectuals of the period highlighted. Her discussion adds depth to the view presented in this unit.

- *** (Instructors); ** (Students) JUDGE, Joan. “Citizens or Mothers of Citizens? Gender and Meaning of Modern Chinese Citizenship.” In *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, edited by Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Pages 23-43

Judge explores how the concepts of modern Chinese citizenship were tied to gender and women in the late Qing dynasty (roughly 1895-1911). Conservatives, reformists, and radicals alike all stressed the need for female education, as ignorance of China’s women was seen as one of the main sources of China’s national weakness. However, there were deep divisions among the late Qing elite concerning the proper place of women in the state-building endeavor. By focusing on the position of moderates who proposed that women assume the role of “mothers of citizens,” Judge demonstrates the tension present between the traditional Confucian values of family and the modern, Western-influenced emphasis on the nation, and how the conflict between these ideals influenced Chinese ideas of female citizenship. In this conception, women occupied a key position in the formation of a new nation and a new citizenry, though not as full citizens themselves. Motherhood, rather than female citizenship, was emphasized for the sake of the state. As “mothers of citizens,” women could be politicized and mobilized for the cause of the nation while maintaining the Chinese family system. Readers should note the top-down emergence of citizenship, rather than a grassroots emergence, as well as the role of **Social Darwinism** and concerns about national extinction. In China, “citizens” emerged as a collective; Chinese men and women alike needed to be forged into citizens to protect China within the international arena, and the idea of “citizen” and nation were inexorably linked. This formation of citizen contrasts with that of the West, where “citizen” is linked to the idea of the individual and his/her rights vis-à-vis the state. Even within these parameters, the assuming of the roles of citizens or “mothers of citizens,” provided women with access to new arenas, and women’s consciousness expanded as a result.

- ** GILMARTIN, Christina K. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Pages 19-96 (chapters 1-3).

In the first of these chapters, Gilmartin draws attention to the role of **May Fourth** feminist categories in shaping the male-dominated discourse on gender issues in the early Communist movement. Chapter 2 focuses on early women's action programs of the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**. Gilmartin demonstrates how early female communist activists encountered obstacles to gender equity, despite the rhetoric of egalitarianism within the Party. Chapter 3 explores the experience of XIANG Jingyu, a key female figure in the early CCP and one of the authors included in the student readings, and how she struggled to find a meaningful role within the Party as she worked to reconcile contradictions between gender and class in theory and in practice.

- * WOLF, Margery. "Uterine Families and the Women's Community." In *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972. Pages 32-41.

This chapter provides a helpful view of the Chinese family system, one which focuses on the formation of uterine families within the overarching patriarchal framework. From it, the instructor will gain a better understanding of a set of survival strategies for women and an alternative framework for explaining the Chinese family.

4. Student Readings

The readings for Class A explore the traditional family system and the problems it presented for women within traditional society and for China as it searched to modernize. From the readings for Class B, students should get an idea of the opportunities for women, as well as the mixed messages about those options women received. In the readings for Class C, students should be able to see that intellectuals felt that China's women had to become more independent if China were to modernize and be strong and that the fate of women was tied to the fate of China.

Ideally, one should use all the readings listed below. To assign a smaller amount of reading per session, choose readings according to the star* system:

- *** Most important
- ** Recommended
- * Optional

Class A

If the students have no background on China, then this class should cover the basics of the Chinese family system—that it was **patriarchal**, **patrilineal**, and **patrilocal**. Ko's (see Instructor Readings) and Gallagher's (see Student Readings) introductions to the subject will be

useful for the instructor. Also, Wolf's chapter (see Instructor Readings) on the uterine family would be useful for providing background to the instructor and students. Once the basics of China's family system are covered, the instructor should briefly go over the challenges China faced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries — challenges that threatened the existence of China: the **Opium Wars, imperialism, Social Darwinism**. This sounds like a lot to cover in one class, and it is, but just highlight the main themes. Through the discussion of the readings the students will be able to pick up much of this.

- *** GALLAGHER, Mary. "Women and Gender." In *An Introduction to Chinese Culture through the Family*, edited by Howard Giskin and Bettye S. Walsh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001 Pages 89-105.

This is a brief introduction to the topic of women and family in the Chinese context. Gallagher outlines the traditional family system, which was **patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal**. She then proceeds to review succinctly the roles of women in imperial times through the twentieth century. After reading the article, students will better understand the political and ideological context of women's lives in the traditional period. Students will find the glossary at the end of the article useful.

- *** LU, Xun. "My Views on Chastity" and "New Year's Sacrifice." In *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook*, edited by Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999. Pages 8-18, 51-72.

These two readings explore the power — or lack thereof — of woman over her own destiny; they attack the traditional family system and the system of thought supporting it. In "My Views on Chastity," **LU Xun** challenges virtue associated with female chastity. Objecting to the call for chastity from women while the chastity of men is not required, LU Xun rejects the double standard. "New Year's Sacrifice" depicts the tragic fate of a widow forced into a second marriage. The young and educated male narrator presents XIANG Lin's wife as a victim of **Confucianism** and Chinese culture. Both readings portray women as caught in the trap of the **patriarchal** family and portray China as lacking in "modern" views toward women. The instructor should consult Ko's introduction (see Instructor Readings) for the time-specific constructs of LU Xun's view on women. Both instructor and students should be aware that LU Xun is the quintessential **May Fourth** writer.

Notes on what to look for in readings:

Introduce **LU Xun** and *New Youth* magazine. LU Xun, perhaps the greatest writer of the **May Fourth** Period, was an essayist, a short story writer, and a philosopher. LU Xun's writings are highly symbolic; students should be able to dissect his writings for all sorts of meanings. Despite his association with the May Fourth Period, LU Xun was rather pessimistic about China's future, though his writings usually have a glimmer of hope for China's children. *New Youth* was perhaps the most influential journal and forum for debate of the **New Culture** and May Fourth Movements; it was edited by **CHEN Duxiu** (a founder of the

Chinese Communist Party). As Chen became more radical, so did *New Youth*; it explored issues of cultural revolution in order to support political change.

“My Views on Chastity” and “New Year’s Sacrifice”:

- These two readings explore the power of woman over her own destiny; they attack the traditional family system and the system of thought supporting it.
- Look for the traditional view on chastity: it had become a female virtue, though it was not originally. A virtuous woman was not supposed to remarry after her husband’s death; a virtuous chaste woman would commit suicide over remarriage; a chaste woman would commit suicide as a result of rape or would die resisting (merely resisting was not enough). Explore how this reflects the moral order.
- Look for how **LU Xun** turns the traditional argument around — why should women not be the moral barometers of society?
- Look for views on second marriage in “New Year’s Sacrifice,” as well as in “My Views on Chastity.” LU Xun shows that many women did not have the luxury not to remarry for a variety of reasons.
- Look for what advocates of “saving the world through chastity” think of choosing suicide over rape or remarriage. How can chastity save the world?
- From the two LU Xun writings, students should get an idea of the restrictions placed on women and the double bind they experienced. They were locked out of political and economic roles; a woman with no man to support her and her children had few options; a woman with no heir had no claims on her husband’s family; women were keepers of morality, but not the determiners of what was moral.

Class B

In this class, students should get an idea of the opportunities for women, as well as the mixed messages they received. Have students compare the situations of Miss Sophia and Songlian. Both young women were seeking a new type of modern existence.

- *** *Raise the Red Lantern*, feature film, 125 minutes, Mandarin Chinese with English subtitles. Directed by ZHANG Yimou, 1991. Have students view film before class, or show it in class if time allows and if you have another class for discussion afterwards — the movie is widely available for rent.

After her father’s death, Songlian finds herself pressured by her stepmother into leaving college in order to find security for the family by marrying 50-year-old CHEN Zuoqian,

the master of a wealthy family. Chen, however, already has three wives. When Songlian enters the Chen family compound, she is surrounded by intrigue and manipulation, as the wives all compete for their husband's attention. The movie is a powerful, if sometimes claustrophobic, look at sex, oppression, and patriarchy in the traditional family that is very much a product of the **May Fourth Period** in which the movie is set. Students should be reminded that this is a fictional account set in the 1920s, but many of the issues confronting Songlian were real. Visually, the movie is spectacular, beautifully filmed in the 250-year-old family compound of a wealthy Qing dynasty merchant (the Qiao family of Pingyao, Shanxi).

Notes on what to look for in the film:

This movie benefits the students in a number of ways: 1) it provides visual imagery of both the time period and the traditional culture, 2) it provides an explicit, if extreme, example of the perceived trap of traditional practices, 3) it demonstrates the 1920s (and later) view that even a young woman seemingly on the path toward a new existence through education was not free of tradition, 4) it demonstrates the Chinese family system in operation, complete with concubines. The instructor needs to stress that the movie is a fictional account. However, the themes fit well with a tradition vs. modernity women's identity unit. Previous to their viewing, give the students a list of questions to help guide their viewing of the movie. Some sample questions are below:

- What is Songlian's background? Why does she join the Chen household?
- Why does Songlian have to bow to the **ancestors** upon joining the household?
- Describe the general structure of the Chen household. Who is responsible to whom?
- The wives often refer to each other as "sister" — are their interactions family-like? Do they represent the ideal of a harmonious household?
- Explain the tension between Songlian and her servant Yan'er.
- What is the fate that befalls the third wife? What kind of response to her fate do you see among other members of the household?
- From this movie, how would you describe the Chinese family system?
- Do you see evidence of the May Fourth debate on the "the woman question" in the Chen household? (You probably won't be able to discuss this until the students read the excerpts from the *Women in Republic China Sourcebook* for the next class.)
- What does the movie say about the general relationship of men and women in traditional China? Is the system of gender relations one of outright domination or is it mutually mediated?
- Who are the various women in the movie? What do they have in common and how do they differ?

- *** DING, Ling. "Miss Sophia's Diary." In *I Myself am a Woman: Selected Writings of DING Ling*, edited by Tani E. Barlow with Gary J. Borge. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. Pages 49-81.

DING Ling has her protagonist Sophia, a young woman of the 1920s, explore her sexuality and in doing so, questions the social mores of the day, in terms of both literary topics and female behavior. By asking "What is love?" and resisting traditional interpretations of the question, Sophia provided a model of behavior that reflected modern young women's struggle against norms and the political structure that enshrined them. Significantly, DING Ling borrowed many conventions from the West in her literary style and her portrayal of Sophia. First published in 1927, the story's themes and content caused debate and consternation among conservatives and liberals alike.

Notes on what to look for in reading:

Tani Barlow has written a brief and useful introduction to the story that appears immediately before it in *I Myself am a Women* (see pages 49-50 for introduction and pages 50-81 for the story itself). Students should explore why Sophia presented such a challenge to society.

Class C

In this class, women are tied to the nation more explicitly. Chinese intellectuals of the 1920s saw greater gender equity as the key to solving the shackles of traditional society. Use the small group discussion assignment below and then bring the class back for a large discussion. Have each group report on its findings. Students should be able to see that intellectuals felt that China's women had to become more independent if China were to modernize and be strong, that the fate of women was tied to the fate of China. They should also conclude that in order for women to become independent, social structures had to change: women needed educational opportunities, economic opportunities, and more gender equity within the home.

- *** *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook*, edited by Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong. Pages 125-130, 141-144, 176-181 (LU Xun, "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?" ZHANG Weici, "Emancipating Women by Reorganizing the Family;" WANG Jingwei, "Thoughts on Women;" and XIANG Jingyu, "A Plan for Women's Development").

These readings are from a sourcebook that contains essays written between 1919 and 1922 by individuals active in the **May Fourth Movement**. Primarily composed of newspaper and journal articles, the sourcebook seeks to present both the commonalities and the conflicts present in the ideological composition of this influential movement.

Notes on the readings:

LU Xun, “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?”

- --“What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?” was originally delivered as a speech at **Beijing University** in December 1923. **LU Xun** discusses what might happen if China’s own version of Henrik IBSEN’s Nora from “**A Doll’s House**” left home.
- LU Xun has a rather pessimistic view of Ibsen’s Nora and her liberation. He warns of what might happen to such a woman in a society that offered her no psychological support and no means of financial support. He argues that women must have economic freedom before they can leave the cage of home. Plenty of other readings in *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook* support his stance. See YE Shengtao’s “Is This Also a Human Being,” HU Shi’s “Biography of Li Chao,” and CAI Yuanpei’s “Words Spoken at Miss Li Chao’s Memorial Service.”

ZHANG Weici, “Emancipating Women by Reorganizing the Family”

- ZHANG Weici was a professor of political science at Beijing University and an associate of CHEN Duxiu and other members of the faculty; he contributed to *New Youth* magazine in its earlier stages.
- In “Emancipating Women by Reorganizing the Family,” ZHANG Weici argues that women must be self-sufficient before experiencing emancipation. However, he writes that women’s temperaments are different from those of men, and women should not try to change their natural temperament or assume the male temperament. Instead of taking on male roles, a woman should be politically involved through her influence on and her guidance of the education of her children.
- Focus on why the author focuses on the family and why reorganizing the family can emancipate women.

WANG Jingwei’s “Thoughts on Women”

- WANG Jingwei was an associate of the revolutionary Nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen. Wang served in various Nationalist government posts throughout the 1920s and 1930s, although he later collaborated with the invading Japanese forces by heading the puppet government in Nanjing.
- In “Thoughts on Women,” WANG Jingwei emphasizes turning the traditional self-sacrifice of women toward the nation and the building of a new society. He believes that women’s schools must be reformed and that the reformation of schools should serve as a catalyst for a general reformation of society.
- Focus on the role of education and schools and the differences WANG sees for men and women. The emphasis on turning the traditional self-sacrifice of women toward the nation and building a new society is of note.

XIANG Jingyu's "A Plan for Women's Development"

- XIANG Jingyu was an early feminist activist, and a leader of the women's movement within the early Chinese Communist Party. In fact, she was the most prominent female Communist Party member of the era. She became the first female member of the party's Central Committee in 1922, at which time she was also appointed director of the party's Women's Department, a post that she held until 1925.
 - In "A Plan for Women's Development," XIANG Jingyu claims that women have a responsibility to help transform the world and advocates education as the means to do so; in addition, coeducation, in her view, is the best way to improve women's education.
 - Focus on Xiang's emphasis on co-education for women as the best way for women's emancipation and society's progress. Also note the evangelical role Xiang proposes for Sister Yi — to spread the word of education and emancipation. Co-education is the first step towards gender equity in Xiang's view.
- ** (Students); *** (Instructors) JUDGE, Joan. "Citizens or Mothers of Citizens? Gender and Meaning of Modern Chinese Citizenship." In *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, edited by Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Pages 23-43

Judge explores how the concepts of modern Chinese citizenship were tied to gender and women in the late Qing dynasty (roughly 1895-1911). Conservatives, reformists, and radicals alike all stressed the need for female education, as ignorance of China's women was seen as one of the main sources of China's national weakness. However, there were deep divisions among the late Qing elite concerning the proper place of women in the state-building endeavor. By focusing on the position of moderates who proposed that women assume the role of "mothers of citizens," Judge demonstrates the tension present between the traditional Confucian values of family and the modern, Western-influenced emphasis on the nation, and how the conflict between these ideals influenced Chinese ideas of female citizenship. In this conception, women occupied a key position in the formation of a new nation and a new citizenry, though not as full citizens themselves. Motherhood, rather than female citizenship, was emphasized for the sake of the state. As "mothers of citizens," women could be politicized and mobilized for the cause of the nation while maintaining the Chinese family system. Readers should note the top-down emergence of citizenship, rather than a grassroots emergence, as well as the role of **Social Darwinism** and concerns about national extinction. In China, "citizens" emerged as a collective; Chinese men and women alike needed to be forged into citizens to protect China within the international arena, and the idea of "citizen" and nation were inexorably linked. This formation of citizen contrasts with that of the West, where "citizen" is linked to the idea of the individual and his/her rights vis-à-vis the state. Even within these parameters, the assuming of the roles of citizens or "mothers of citizens," provided women with access to new arenas, and women's consciousness expanded as a result.

- If you are using this unit for a class on women in the 19th and 20th centuries, you could also assign Henrik IBSEN's "**A Doll's House**," so that students can assess Nora's situation in Ibsen's play and in her Western situation and then how she is used in China. **HU Shi** translated "**A Doll's House**" into Chinese in 1918 and published it in *New Youth*, a journal dedicated to creating a new generation of citizens with a **New Culture**. He also published an article entitled, "Ibsenism" (1918) in the same journal in which he portrays Ibsen more as an ideologue, rather than as a dramatist or artist. "Ibsenism" attacked the traditional Chinese family system because it shackled individuals. Thus, HU Shi, through Ibsen, defended individualism as the way to escape tradition and achieve modernity. In China, Nora became a symbol of romantic individualism. She has the will to shape her fate. She becomes the antithesis of traditional female ideas. She jumps from one extreme to the other in an effort to find the right path and find self-actualization. Many intellectuals use her to discuss the problems of Chinese women — what happens to Nora after she walks out the door?

5. Student Activities

These activities are to be used in conjunction with the classes above and, in the case of the paper, as a final assignment for the unit.

1. Class Discussion. Discuss roles of women in traditional Chinese society and how the challenges of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the fear of national extinction resulted in an emphasis on channeling the energies of the entire population, including women, toward building the nation. (Class A)
2. Discussion activity. Have the students break into small groups. Give each of the groups a particular role. Some ideas are below. (Class C)
 - a) You are a study group at **Beijing University**. You were participants in the **May Fourth**, 1919 demonstrations; thus, you are quite politically aware — partly because you are avid readers of the most influential journal of the day, *New Youth*. As earnest activists, you are familiar with writers like **LU Xun** and XIANG Jingyu. Today you are gathered to discuss how to radicalize society and create a cultural revolution. Your discussion should be informed by the major societal issues of the day as discussed in class and by the assigned readings.
 - b) You are a study group at **Beijing University**. Although you are familiar with *New Youth* magazine, you are not sold on its interpretation of society and its problems. You are more convinced by those who argue that a thorough return to "family values" will stabilize and strengthen China. With this leaning, you are trying to counter the arguments presented by the promoters of a new society as the solution to current societal and political problems. You are gathered today to discuss the buzz that IBSEN's "**A Doll's House**" has created in intellectual circles, and especially to address **LU Xun**'s article, "What Happens after Nora leaves home?"

c) You are a group of women all belonging to the same family compound (à la the Chen compound in *Raise the Red Lantern*) who gather occasionally after dinner to discuss literature. You feel the everyday pressures of the Chinese family system and are somewhat aware of the political events around you. However, you have not been stirred to action outside of the home. You have all just read **DING Ling**'s "Miss Sophia's Diary." Discuss your reactions to the story and its implications for society at large and for your own lives. Are the ideas in the story threatening or liberating?

3. Writing Activity. Have students write an essay for a 1920s journal—one similar to the ones in which the *Sourcebook* articles appeared. It is important to stress to the students that they should be familiar with both sides of the argument before taking a stance. A sample topic is below.

It is the 1920s, and you are a young Chinese adult. Your friends are starting a journal that is going to be devoted to addressing social issues, and they have asked you to write a 4-5-page essay on the place of women in China. **LU Xun** is one of your favorite intellectuals, although your family is quite conservative. Because of your family, you are familiar with and understand the arguments against change. Write an essay that argues what you think the role of women in China should be. Your friends' journal is rather academic—the readership is quite informed, so you will need to provide evidence and citations. Your argument should be informed by the readings for the class. The readings from *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook* will prove to be especially helpful.

6. Further Reading

- CHANG, Jung. *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- CHANG, Pang-mei Natasha. *Bound Feet and Western Dress*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
- GILMARTIN, Christina Kelley. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- IBSEN, Henrik. "A Doll's House." In *Four Major Plays*, translated by James McFarlane. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pages 1-88.
- KARL, Rebecca E. "'Slavery,' Citizenship, and Gender in Late Qing China's Global Context." In *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China*, edited by Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002. Pages 212-244.
- ONO, Kazuko. *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*. Edited by Joshua A. Fogel. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

7. Glossary

- **“A Doll’s House”**: Written by the Norwegian playwright Henrik IBSEN in 1879, it was translated into Chinese by **HU Shi** and printed in a 1918 issue of *New Youth*. At the end of the play, Nora, the main character who feels trapped by her family life, leaves her husband and family with the intention to live an independent life. In China, Nora became a symbol of individualism. The example of Nora was used to address problems that faced modern Chinese women whose position in Chinese society was radically changing.
- **Ancestor Worship**: Refers to the practice of venerating familial ancestors and the belief that the ancestors could intercede on the behalf of their descendants and help bring prosperity to the family. Living members of a family were accountable to both their ancestors and their descendants, making the family an entity that spanned generations in a corporate manner. After marriage a woman would venerate the ancestors of her husband’s family. Ancestor worship reinforced and was reinforced by the **patriarchal**, **patrilineal**, and **patrilocal** nature of the Chinese family system.
- **Beijing (Peking) University**: One of the most influential educational institutions in China, the university became a center of progressive intellectual life during the **New Culture Movement** and **May Fourth Movement** of the 1910s and 1920s. The first female students were admitted to Beijing University in 1920.
- **CHEN Duxiu (1879-1942)**: An influential figure in the **May Fourth Movement**, Chen founded the journal *New Youth* in 1915. He was dean of **Beijing University** from 1917 until his resignation in March 1919. Chen was one of the original founders of the **Chinese Communist Party** (1921) and served as the party’s secretary-general until 1927.
- **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**: Founded in 1921 by **CHEN Duxiu** and LI Dazhao, the CCP joined forces in its early years with the **Guomindang** (GMD) in a united front against Western **imperialism**; this tactic ended in disaster for the CCP when the Guomindang turned its forces on the CCP in 1927 during the Northern Expedition. Initially the CCP, under the guidance of the Comintern, adopted an urban strategy; this proved unsuccessful, especially in light of the GMD purge of radical labor and the CCP in 1927. The CCP recovered by focusing on the peasantry rather than urban workers and by distancing itself from Comintern influence during the Long March. Committed to expelling the Japanese, the CCP fought the Japanese during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). Subsequently, it defeated the Guomindang during the Chinese Civil War. Since its victory against the GMD in 1949, it has been the governing party of the People’s Republic of China.
- **Concubinage**: A system that allowed for polygamy in traditional China. Only the first wife was considered the principal or legal wife at any given time, but concubines could be brought into the household as secondary wives. The position of a concubine within a household was tenuous, especially until she produced a male heir. All children born in wedlock were legitimate, with their seniority in the household based solely on birth order

and gender. The moral justification for concubinage was the perpetuation of the male line of descent and the need for the birth of many sons (female children were not considered heirs).

- **Confucianism:** A philosophical school with the writings of Confucius (ca. 551- ca. 479 BCE) at its core that provided the ideological framework for imperial China. The Confucian Classics and commentary written about them throughout the centuries served as the basis of traditional China's family and governing systems. Confucianism stresses social harmony and morality. The family system serves as the core unit of society, and the relationships within the family are the building blocks of society outside of the family. Five bonds frame Confucian behavior: father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, ruler-minister, friend-friend. With the exception of the last, all are hierarchical, and all imply mutual obligations. The imperial governing system, with the emperor at its apex, can be seen as the Confucian family system writ large; that is to say, the ruler was to act as the benevolent father to the people, with his rule based on Confucian morality. Thus, the family and governing systems reinforced each other. For both, an understanding of righteousness and ritual (*li*) were imperative for achieving moral behavior. A strong family system, sincere ancestor worship, filial piety, and correct Confucian education were all necessary to achieve societal harmony based on morality and the Way. The hierarchical nature of Confucianism and its emphasis on the family system reinforced women's place in traditional society; thus, when women were called upon to serve the nation in the early 20th century, Confucianism was perceived as a barrier to their active participation in state-building, because of the prescribed roles for women. Confucianism came to be identified with traditional China and one of the root causes of China's troubles.
- **DING Ling (1904-86):** A female writer, DING Ling embraced feminist issues in her works. Her most famous piece, "Miss Sophia's Diary," (1927) portrays a young woman of the 1920s who explores her sexuality and in doing so, questions the social mores of the day. DING Ling joined the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** in 1932, was arrested by the **Guomindang** in 1933, and traveled to Mao's stronghold of Yan'an in 1936. She expressed her concern over women's treatment in the CCP in her "Thoughts on March 8," leading to her becoming a target in the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature in 1942.
- **Dynastic System:** Prior to the February 1912 abdication of the last Qing emperor and the subsequent founding of the Republic of China, China had been ruled by a succession of dynasties since approximately the mid-16th century BCE. At the head of the dynastic government sat the emperor, a position passed down from one generation to the next through the male lineage, meaning that each dynasty represented a single line of imperial descent.
- **Footbinding:** This custom involved the reshaping of the female foot through a long and painful process of tightly binding a young girl's feet to inhibit growth. The extremely small size (an ideal of three inches) and deformed shape of feet produced by this process was considered both beautiful and erotically pleasing and greatly contributed to a woman's marriage prospects. No one knows the exact origins of the practice, but it dates

back to the Song dynasty (960-1279) and slowly moved from elite circles to most, if not all, socio-economic groups. Although some minority groups did not practice footbinding (notably the Qing dynasty's ruling Manchus), the majority of the population did by the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). The practice was formally banned in 1911, but it continued to be commonly practiced until at least the 1920s and into the 1930s. Efforts to modernize China and change the status of women in Chinese society generated a powerful anti-footbinding movement, beginning in the late 19th century.

- **HU Shi (1891-1962):** One of the most important Chinese intellectuals of the twentieth century, HU Shi was a professor at Beijing University and an active participant in the **New Culture** and **May Fourth Movements**. A proponent of the vernacular movement (an effort to move the written Chinese language away from classical forms and towards a vernacular form that mirrored spoken Chinese), Hu founded a number of magazines to promote his reformist agenda. Although he was not a radical like his colleague **CHEN Duxiu**, Hu was a contributor to Chen's influential *New Youth* magazine in its early years. Hu advocated building a new China through educational and cultural reform, tackling China's problems one at a time, rather than through overarching political revolution.
- **Imperialism in China:** Starting with the **Opium War** (1839-42), first Western powers and then Japan gained rights in China at the expense of Chinese sovereignty. England, France, and the United States were the main Western powers that asserted their interests in China both economically and culturally. The Treaties of Nanjing (1842), Tianjin (1858), and Shimonseki (1895) collectively form the main pillars of what came to be called the unequal treaty system. Through this system, the Chinese government lost the right to set its own tariffs, had to extend extraterritoriality to foreign residents of China, paid large indemnities, and granted the most-favored-nation clause to all treaty signatories. This last treaty right made it impossible for China to negotiate individual terms with individual countries: the clause demanded any right gained by one signatory be extended to all treaty signatories; consequently, China found it could not escape the weight of the unequal treaty system. While the brunt of the treaties was in the economic realm, they also affected the social realm; the treaties established missionary rights, setting the stage for cultural imperialism. China was not able to escape semi-colonial status until the mid-20th century. Economic and cultural imperialism brought gains to treaty signatories but fueled hostility toward foreigners and stoked nationalist sentiment on the part of the Chinese population.
- **Guomindang (GMD) (also written Kuomintang or KMT):** Also known as the Nationalist Party, the Guomindang was led by SUN Yat-sen until his death in 1925. In 1928, CHIANG Kai-shek (JIANG Jieshi), who had taken over leadership of the party, became President of the Republic of China. Although the Guomindang was officially the governing party of the Republic of China from 1927 until 1949, its actual power during this period was limited due to the Japanese invasion and occupation of China (1937-1945), as well as because of the civil war brewing between the GMD and the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**. After the CCP defeat of Guomindang forces in 1949, the GMD fled to Taiwan, hoping to one day again reclaim Mainland China. To this day, Taiwan's official name is the Republic of China.

- **LU Xun (Lu Hsün) (1881-1936):** One of modern China's most famous and influential authors and the most important author of the **May Fourth Period**, if not the 20th century. LU Xun wrote short stories, poetry, and essays that critiqued traditional Chinese culture and addressed problems faced by modern Chinese society and government. His works mocked the traditional order and the ineptitude of the Chinese people and promoted the cause of revolutionary change.
- **May Fourth Movement/Period:** Refers both to the protests on May 4, 1919, as well as the cultural and political developments that followed. The actual protest was sparked by anger over the terms of the **Treaty of Versailles**. Roughly 3,000 students amassed in Tiananmen Square to voice displeasure over the Chinese government's (the **warlord** government of DUAN Qirui, then ruling Beijing) plan to sign the Treaty. The Beijing students' actions resulted in sympathy demonstrations around the country and the call for a general strike. As the activism spread to other sectors of society and a strike threatened to economically paralyze Shanghai, the Beijing government met the students' demands and did not sign the Treaty of Versailles. The successful political activism inspired students, intellectuals, and many concerned with China's future to pursue cultural and political change through activism. The goals of the **New Culture Movement** remained, but they were now more directly politicized and directed toward building the nation. The May Fourth Movement continued to advocate New Culture goals of removing the shackles of traditional China, but did so for more nationalistic reasons and in more nationalistic ways. The May Fourth Movement included the tackling of the question of women and their place in the nation, the radicalization of labor, and mobilization of students to the nation's cause.
- **New Culture Movement:** An intellectual movement during the 1910s that challenged China's traditional social system. In response to the incomplete nature of the 1911 Revolution, intellectuals and activists determined political revolution was not enough to change China; cultural revolution had to precede political revolution for a new political system to benefit China meaningfully. The period saw the proliferation of newspapers, journals, and associations that proposed different visions and values for China's modern future, all based on the development of a *new* culture and a rejection of **Confucianism** and systems based on it. **CHEN Duxiu**, **LU Xun**, and **HU Shih** played important roles in this movement. The movement shifted towards political mobilization after the protests of May 4, 1919 and the **May Fourth Movement** held sway.
- **New Youth:** **CHEN Duxiu** founded this influential journal of the **New Culture** and **May Fourth** movements in 1915. From 1917 on, it was published in the vernacular instead of classical Chinese, which allowed it to reach a much wider audience and become one of the main tools of the New Culture Movement. **LU Xun**, **Hu Shih**, and other prominent intellectuals contributed articles, essays, and translations of Western works to the journal.
- **Opium War (1839-42):** Fought between China and Britain, the war was triggered in 1839 by the Chinese confiscation of British opium in Canton. Britain defeated China, and China signed the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 to end the war. The treaty effectively

ended the old Canton cohong system of trade and established the treaty port system, thereby ushering in the age of **imperialism** and the unequal treaty system. The Treaty of Nanjing served as the cornerstone of the unequal treaty system, which grew in scope over the course of the next hundred years. With the establishment of the unequal treaty system, Western signatories (and later Japan) had access to treaty ports, extraterritoriality, most-favored-nation status (which granted any treaty signatory the rights gained by any other treaty signatory), control of tariffs, and various indemnity and reparation payments. The initial treaty, The Treaty of Nanjing, ceded Hong Kong to the British. Thus, the more tangible effects of the unequal treaty system lasted until Hong Kong's retrocession in 1997.

- **Patrilineal:** Refers to a family system in which ancestry is traced through the male line.
- **Patriarchal:** Refers to a family system in which the oldest male is recognized by the state as the head of the family, and property belongs to the males of the family.
- **Patrilocal:** Refers to the custom of a woman leaving her own family's home and moving to the home of her husband's family after marriage.
- **Social Darwinism:** The application Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to the actions and motives of human society. Often associated with Herbert Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest," Social Darwinism proposed that in the struggle for societies to survive, stronger cultures would thrive and dominate weaker cultures. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this theory was often employed to justify imperialist aspirations. Fear that China was not one of the "fit" motivated Chinese reformers to search for ways to strengthen and modernize China so as to avoid cultural extinction.
- **Treaty of Versailles (1919):** This treaty to end WWI allowed Japan to take over the special rights that Germany had formerly held in Shandong Province. This, along with the decision not to include a racial equality clause, greatly disappointed and angered the Chinese public and triggered the May 4, 1919 protests.
- **Warlord Period:** One of the most chaotic periods in China's modern history, the warlord period came about with the death of YUAN Shikai (the Republic of China's first president) in 1916. With Yuan's death, the promise of national unity following the 1911 Revolution, which overthrew the **dynastic system**, quickly dissipated. Regional military leaders all scrambled to control their own areas and compete with one another for control over Beijing, which brought nominal recognition as China's central government. China dissolved into semi-autonomous zones, roughly the size of one or two provinces, run by these military leaders or warlords, who issued their own currencies and maintained their own militaries. Although Beijing remained the nominal center, the country became increasingly decentralized from 1916 until 1928. The period officially ended when CHIANG Kai-shek, the leader of the **Guomindang**, unified China during the Northern Expedition