

# WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND GENDER OBLIGATION EQUALITY IN URBAN CHINA: WORK/FAMILY EXPERIENCES OF MARRIED INDIVIDUALS IN THE 1950s

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State-orchestrated feminism in Maoist urban China (1949-1976) has generated much controversy among gender studies scholars. Disappointed with the persistence of gender inequality in paid and domestic work as well as the subordination of women's issues to state agendas, western feminists see the top-down women's liberation and gender-equality campaigns as externally imposed, masculine in orientation, instrumentally implemented and therefore, an empty victory (Croll 1978, 1983; Andors 1983; Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983; Wolf 1985; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Evans 2003). Perplexing to western feminist scholars, however, is that in the early years after the revolution, urban women endured much more inequality in paid and un-paid work, and yet had (and still have) a stronger sense of liberation than do younger women who enjoy nearly equal status in all respects but prefer the husband to be the primary breadwinner and the wife, the primary housekeeper (Rofel 1995; Zuo 2003). Women's liberation and women's experiences of this in early Maoist China challenge western feminist perspectives, which fail to address female heterogeneity produced by the Chinese communist revolution (Rofel 1999). Attempts have been made to historicize women's multiple subjectivities concerning "liberation" and "gender equality" by placing them in the context of spatial desegregation of the

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<sup>1</sup> My study suffers from a small, non-representative sample and likely bias. For that reason, the arguments raised in this analysis are tentative and hopefully serve as useful material for further dialogues on the subject of women's liberation and gender equality in contemporary urban China.

gendered workplace, of nationalist movements, and of proletarian internationalism (Rofel 1999; Chen 2003). Yet the question remains as to whether Chinese women in the Mao era achieved liberation or gender equality on their own behalf.

There is no doubt that Chinese women's liberation campaigns have always been instrumental in serving nationalist movements, communist revolution and socialist projects. But this does not necessarily suggest that Chinese women have failed to achieve their own liberation. To fully understand Maoist women's self-positioning, one must capture the multiple meanings of women's liberation and of gender equality created by historical processes that shaped Chinese state-society relations (Evans et al. 1985; Scott 1988; Barlow 1989). In the industrial West where feudalism or colonialism is said to be a thing of the past, liberal democratic political systems, at least by law, opened the door for personal freedom and individualist, rights-based equality. Accordingly, the term women's liberation refers to women's achievement of equal rights, freedom, and opportunities with men, and hence is tantamount to gender equality (Evans 2003).

In contrast, long suffering from semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism, China had engaged itself in creating a strong, independent, modern nation state (Rofel 1999). Influenced by international proletarian movements in the early twentieth century, Chinese nation building took the form of Marxian socialism favouring the eradication of private ownership and of class exploitation. Women's liberation projects were thus not only intimately intertwined with, but also served nationalist and Marxist class movements. In fact, until the recent post-socialist transition, women's liberation campaigns in China had never been about women's individual liberation (Thornham 2000) (e.g. claiming of natural rights, pursuit of personal freedom, individual fulfilment); instead, they were an integral part of national movements of modernity (Rofel 1999; Wang 1999). On the other hand, through increasing the legitimacy of women in transgressing gender boundaries and becoming patriotic heroines, and more importantly, by ending imperialism and class oppression which Lisa Rofel (1999) coins "double marginalization," the subordination of women's movements to larger causes paradoxically heightened women's sense of liberation instead of diminishing it.

Dominated by collective orientation and intimately interwoven with women's fulfilment of their obligations to nationalist and class emancipation, China's double marginalisation rendered the process of women's liberation as both multi-layered and phased. For example, during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945), women were freed from the family patriarch to participate in the war. Similarly, in the heyday of socialist transformation (the 1950s), women were mobilised for socialist construction and thus given opportunities for equal education and employment.

The mutual embeddedness of women's rights and obligations also derived from the leader-and-follower relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and women. Women's collective rights achieved through the CCP-led revolution signified women's common interests with the CCP, despite their persistent discrimination against women, and strengthened women's sense of obligation to the collective (Hershatter 2004). Finally, the persistence of Chinese collectivist culture

also encouraged women's (as well as men's) obligatory behaviour at the expense of their personal autonomy and freedom.

Under these circumstances, the western notion of rights-based gender equality gave rise to the Chinese project of gender obligation equality, the equal obligations of women and men in the 1950s. By gender obligation equality I mean both women and men were expected to fulfil their national duties on an equal footing. Unlike rights-based gender equality, which often refers to the same rights and opportunities for both genders and advances individuated interests (e.g. equal work equal pay, equal status), obligation equality was assessed mainly by the extent of the efforts women and men made to enhance collective well-being. Although Chinese gender obligation equality was derived from women's equal legal rights with men through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it often disrupted the latter due to its emphasis on "give" rather than "take," making the meaning of "gender equality" depart somewhat from that of "women's liberation" under state-socialism. Given that gender was situated in broad and multifaceted social hierarchies in pre and socialist China, male/female binaries were not only fluid, contesting and intersecting with other forms of domination, but also failed to claim a central position in understanding the gendered lives of Chinese people, as some western feminists would argue. In fact, under state socialism, both men and women tended to be subjugated to the state. It was the political categories of class that mainly determined one's economic and social locations, not gender (Watson 1993; Grapard 1997; Brownell and Wasserstrom 2000; Diamant 2000). Consequently, the lives of women and men in socialist China might share more similarities than differences: both had experienced collective emancipation at multiple levels, but ultimately neither achieved individuated liberation.

This paper explores married people's experiences of women's liberation and gender obligation equality in the 1950s in urban China in the realm of work/family relations. It moves away from a state centred approach to examine the interactive processes between state, family, and individuals. Particular attention is given to the ways in which married individuals, as social agents, vigorously constructed their national identity and obligatory relations with the state. It asks the questions: What did liberation mean to Chinese women? How did women's (un)liberation stories reconcile with their narratives of achieving obligation equality? How did women and men negotiate their gender identities with hegemonic socialist gender discourses? In what ways did men's experiences resemble or differ from those of women? How did historical, institutional and cultural forces shape women's as well as men's experiences with women's liberation and gender equality? In addressing these questions, my data reveals tremendous inter-gender differences and cross-gender similarities.

## **Sources of Data**

My data comes from two sources—textual documents and oral histories. Textual material includes memoirs and secondary sources. My primary data source is narratives from married individuals of the revolutionary generation. The purpose is

not to discover “truer” life stories of this generation but to understand the ways in which individuals construct knowledge about the past (Rofel 1999). The life histories presented in this study therefore, go beyond the recorded memory of those who told the stories to reach individual subjectivities that were simultaneously transformed by the socialist state, while transforming that very state.

In the summers of 2000 and 2003, I interviewed 80 married individuals, who were all above the age of seventy and living in the city of Beijing. The sampling was accomplished using three strategies. I started by working with four neighbourhood committees in three different urban districts in Beijing, who recommended and introduced prospective informants. In the meantime, I obtained interviews through relatives, friends and acquaintances. The last strategy I used was to approach prospective informants by myself in neighbourhoods and parks in Beijing. With each strategy, and to ensure the quality of interviews, official interviews were preceded by casual conversations that acted as part of the screening process (Everett 1992; Berney and Blane 1997; Ransel 2000). Finally, I obtained a similar number of individuals through the strategies that I employed (27 from the first two and 33 from the last one). The sample also covers a wide spectrum of demographic, geographic, and socioeconomic attributes, which are summarised in Appendix One. To minimise possible biases revealed in a small non-representative sample, I rely on existing literature to provide the historical background in which the oral histories took place. I also use published memoirs to strengthen my data gained from interviews, and situate the personal stories of interviewees in broader historical, institutional, and cultural contexts.

All interviews obtained through the assistance of neighbourhood committees, acquaintances or relatives were conducted in informants’ homes; interviews that I pursued were completed either in a public place or in informants’ homes. When a couple was selected, separate interviews were arranged for each spouse. Follow-up interviews were scheduled when additional information was sought or clarification of data was necessary. The average length of each interview was around 3 hours, and the average number of interviews for each person was about 2.5 times. Tape-recording, with permission, was the primary data-recording device. Note-taking supplemented tape-recording whenever necessary.

## **Discussion of Results**

### ***Nationalism-induced women’s liberation and gender obligation equality***

Advocacy for women’s emancipation existed long before the birth of the CCP. This was first initiated by men and then facilitated by large-scale nationalist movements involving the New Culturalists, feminists, and peasant rebels. However, the main goal was to strengthen the Chinese race in order to save the nation from western imperialism, rather than enable women to seek liberation under the conditions of their own making (Wang 1999). Therefore, from day one women’s liberation was closely tied to Chinese nationalist movements. For example, Guomindang (GMD—the

Nationalist Party) state making led by Jiang Jieshi, which, through excessive taxation, resource monopolies, rampant corruption, and bureaucratic ineptitude, exacerbated the devastation of the nation in the 1930s and 1940s (Thaxton 1997). Demanding that, like men, women should also sacrifice themselves for the nation, Chinese social activists and revolutionaries launched nationalist campaigns that stressed women's equal obligations with men to sacrifice themselves for the nation.

Comrade Liu, a female high-ranking government official (rank 13), illustrates this point. Originally from rural Hebei Province, she joined the CCP at age seventeen:

Before the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, few women worked outside the household, especially the bride who was not even allowed to make an appearance outside the household. Over 90% of village women were illiterate. Even if women had education, they would still be housewives. The CCP-run Women's Nation-Saving Association (*fujiu hui*) went door-to-door to mobilise women: "We must get out of the household, and fight the Japanese like men do. Don't let men look down upon us. We, too, have the courage, strength, and wisdom." In the meantime, we advocated for women's equal rights; we launched attacks against arranged marriage, trading of child-brides, and wife abuse. The Association set up the Improvement Department (*gaishan bu*) to handle legal cases of familial conflicts in order to protect female victims of domestic violence. As a result, village women were all galvanised and played an indispensable role in the war... Tens of thousands of women were captured by Japanese invaders, and many were killed. But they died with honour—better to die than to be conquered. (Interview, 13 June 2000)

It must be pointed out, though, that the subordination of women's liberation to nationalist campaigns was not merely by the initiative of men or the projects of revolutionaries; it resonated with ordinary women's desire to end colonialism and class oppression, and to increase social space for themselves. Once women were mobilised, they consciously combined their liberation with fulfilling their obligations to the nation along with men. Ms. Liu, a peasant from Hebei Province, endured mistreatment by her mother-in-law, and finally joined the CCP so she could take part in the War of Resistance in the 1940s. Her mother-in-law, though still hostile to her, had to respect her social participation outside of the household due to her heroic "patriotic deeds."

In the mobilisation of state resources and promotion of an independent Chinese state, it seems that educated women have always fought alongside their male counterparts. My data supports Wang Zheng's (1999) findings that educated women in the New Culturalist Era vigorously participated in nationalist and/or class movements, rather than being wakened by men or saviours of any kind. For example, comrade Cao, a high-ranking state official, was from a wealthy family in Shanghai, whose father was a doctor of western medicine. To ensure a comfortable independent life from men, Cao's parents built her and her two sisters eight houses in the city of Hangzhou, southwest of Shanghai. Cao was influenced since childhood by her parents' feminist ideals and eventually obtained a college degree. Cao could have

achieved individual freedom, given her good education, her feminist stance and economic independence, but she joined the CCP at age fifteen in order to emancipate all the Chinese:

My mother was very kind, sympathising with poor people and giving them food. But things eventually got out of hand: beggars lined up at our doorstep every day—just too many poor people that my mother could not handle. I thought it would be more effective to join the CCP-led communist revolution to completely transform the society. (Interview, Ms. Cao, government official, rank 11, July 2000)

Her determination to pursue broader goals of national and class emancipation was prompted by the presence of “double marginalization,” standing in the way of her own freedom from patriarchy and ultimately, individual liberation. She felt compelled to identify herself first and foremost with the nation and the proletariat and placed her obligation to the collective well-being above the pursuit of her own feminist inspired goals. Nonetheless, by engaging in broad nationalist and class movements, Cao inadvertently not only reached a rank and social status equal to her husband, who as an underground CCP member posed as a capitalist in the 1940s, but also empowered her so that she did not have to kowtow to her parents-in-law as other daughters-in-law were required to do.

The success of the CCP-led revolution is in a large part due to the efforts of insurgents based in the countryside, as well as their international allies. The CCP itself was a product of the twentieth century international communist movement, which attempted to tap into widespread insurrection and insurgency in China. However, a crucial factor in the public’s widespread support of the CCP was the grass-roots orientation of the party, which saw the creation of policies that favoured the masses. It was the grass roots orientation of the CCP, combined with their political and military strategies and pro-proletariat propaganda, which ultimately led to their victory in China’s civil war (Johnson 1962).

To be sure, the CCP regime followed historical models of centralised leadership rather than forming a coalition government as it initially promised. At least three factors accounted for this. Firstly, the CCP continued its pro-people policies that did indeed improve people’s lives. My urban informants recalled vividly when the CCP first took control over the cities. The party helped the poor meet their basic needs, banned drugs, shut down brothels, provided free medical and job services to prostitutes and those with STDs, restored social order, and attacked epidemic diseases. People’s lives were immediately improved as a result of these actions. This was especially so for women who were kept at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Ms. Wang, a housewife and the wife of a small businessman, recalled the following story, which happened during the early 1950s:

One day, my blood was gushing out due to abortion. My family members carried me to Xiehe Hospital. The medical staff gave me first aid and a blood transfusion without asking who I was or whether I had the money. I stayed in hospital for eight days. When the hospital learned that I was from a poor

family, they did not charge me a penny. In the past thirty years or so, I have always volunteered my time for our neighbourhood committee work, and I taught my kids to be Party followers. (Interview, June 2000)

Ms. Xu, a kindergarten teacher, told her story:

I am from a poor family in Tianjin. At age fifteen, I lost all six of my brothers and sisters. My father lost his job when the Japanese invaded our country. To save my life, my mother married me to the son of a capitalist family. My mother-in-law always mistreated me because I was poor. My husband was a college student and seldom came home. In 1952, after liberation, my husband and I got a divorce. I then came to Beijing to take literacy classes and training in kindergarten teaching, and I finally landed a job teaching kindergarten, which I kept until I retired. (Interview, June 2000)

Secondly, the CCP maintained a relatively equal standard of living with the masses during the early years of liberation. Mr. Du, an electrician from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (later called the Ministry of Economics and Trade), said: “In the early 1950s, we all wore the same cotton-made uniforms, including Yao Yilin, the Minister” (interview, July 2000). Comrade Liu, whom I mentioned before, was a Police Chief in the early 1950s and her husband worked with Liu Ren, General Secretary of CCP Beijing Branch. She recalled:

We did not have our own housing at the time. Therefore, we slept separately in our own offices at night. But we had no complaints. Neither did Liu Ren have housing. The Party had warned us before we moved into the cities not to seek privileges, not to fall for our enemy’s sugar-coated bombs. We had a stingy life—even GMD police officers we kept on were paid more than us. (Interview, June 2000)

The relative equality that the masses enjoyed with CCP members substantially enhanced the legitimacy of the CCP and their right to rule. Mr. Jia, a Beijing University student from Henan Province during the early 1950s, commented:

My uncle, an extremely wealthy landlord, was executed by the CCP. My mother also had over 1,000 *mu* [165 acres or 67 hectares] of land. The land was confiscated by the CCP after liberation. But the CCP back then was honest, uncorrupted, saving the country and the people. Its equality theory and practices were also very appealing, especially to us hot-blooded youths. I thought it was a good ruling party. Both of my two brothers and I broke up with our family. One of my brothers volunteered in the Korean War in 1950... I joined the Communist Youth League at a young age. (Interview, Mr. Jia, high school teacher, August 2000)

Finally, as a result of state domination and semi-colonialism the age-old weak Chinese society (*vis-à-vis* state) pushed the Chinese to continue to seek a strong state for protection, who in turn demanded charismatic leaders like those of the CCP, and this practice enabled the CCP to form another authoritarian-based leadership movement and claim the citizens’ loyalty. For example, despite CCP policies and

their often hostile and repressive treatment of intellectuals, the overwhelming majority of intellectuals showed their strong support for the CCP. Chased by the GMD for their participation in anti-GMD campaigns, one student couple ran off to a liberated area (*jiefang qu*), so that they could join the revolution. The couple were often distrusted, discriminated against, and even criticised by some CCP leaders. Yet, this never affected their loyalty to the CCP prior to market reforms. Speaking of this, Mr. Zheng said:

I was concerned when Beijing citizens shouted “Long live Chairman Mao”... as they welcomed the CCP entering the city in 1949. This sounded reminiscent of our imperial past. I hoped that we would establish a democratic political system instead of returning to old China. But, in the meantime, I believed that the CCP was the only party which could lead us at the time. In the subsequent years, I was vigorously engaged in self-criticism when challenged by the Party for my heterodox thoughts, and seldom cast doubt on the Party (see also Wei 1998 for similar accounts).

### ***Socialist-system-induced women’s liberation and gender obligation equality***

Following in its own footsteps, the party-state continued to push for women’s liberation during the socialist era, which was characterised by public ownership, a centrally-planned economy and the relatively equal distribution of wealth. The new constitution recognised women’s equal rights to men in economic, educational, social and political activities. The 1950 Marriage Law outlawed arranged marriage and polygamy (Diamant 2000). The CCP launched literacy campaigns between 1952 and 1958 that lifted 16 million women above illiteracy (Wei 1995). Moreover, following Engels’ assertion that only through participation in social production could women achieve emancipation, the CCP pursued various policies in the urban area to encourage women to join the paid labour force, such as implementing measures to protect women during the “four periods” (menstruation, pregnancy, lactation, and menopause) and offering paid maternity leave. In the meantime, by the end of the 1950s kindergartens and nurseries flourished and became widely accessible in workplaces or neighbourhoods (Chen and Gao 1994). Although the high unemployment rate in the early 1950s prevented many women from getting a job, the Great Leap Forward campaign, which commenced in 1958, provided ample employment opportunities for them. According to recent statistics, the number of jobs created for women increased from 3.286 million in 1957 to 12.087 million in 1960 (Jiang 2001).

The deliberate efforts of the CCP to minimise gender inequality proved effective. The first twenty-seven years after 1949 saw the demise of arranged marriages and polygamy, closed gaps between girls and boys in educational attainment, increased the number of women who entered the labour force, and gender parity in paid employment in urban areas (Whyte and Parish 1984; Tan 1993; Du 1995; Jiang 2001). The combined efforts of the party-state in transforming gender structures produced liberalising results for married women. For most women,

employment outside the household provided them with new avenues to elevate their social status and enrich their lives. Depending on their social location, women derived pleasure from work for different reasons. For female party members and state officials, employment constituted an integral part of their lives and one of their main sources of pleasure. Family work and childcare, on the other hand, became somewhat burdensome and was left to others. For example, other people raised the children of all seven middle to high-ranking female government officials. In times of role conflict, they put work ahead of their family. The aforementioned Police Chief Liu, who had to sleep in her own office when first entering Beijing, had two young children at the time. She sent her older child to a kindergarten, but carried her infant daughter to work for she could not afford a babysitter. She worked around the clock, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week until 1953 when Sunday became the official weekend. She said that she was not used to spending Sunday at home, for she never had one before.

Those who had never worked outside the home found that employment enriched their lives and broadened their social circles. Ms. Li, a worker from a neighbourhood-run tailor shop offered the following account: “I only did needle work inside the house after marriage with no idea what it would be like working outside the house. I like working—you talk and laugh with your sister co-workers” (interview, Ms. Li, factory worker, June 2002). This was especially true for those women with a large number of children who often got tired of looking after them.

For many women, paid employment also made them equal partners with their husband. As a housewife, Ms. Zhang, a co-worker of Ms. Li, often deferred to her husband’s opinions. However, her paid work presented her with some freedoms, for example, sometimes she would work until midnight in order to complete bookkeeping tasks at the tailor shop. Her husband, who had a higher literacy level, not only strongly supported her work but also often assisted her with bookkeeping.

Women from low-income households took advantage of paid work to help support the family. No longer did they feel disgrace for working outside the home because the state encouraged women to participate in the paid labour force and above all glorified it (Rofel 1999). Ms. Zhao, a food processing factory worker, said: “We used my earnings to pay for staple food. ... I also have higher social status because of my employment. This made me so happy that I still had energy left to make shoe soles and do other chores after work” (interview, July 2000).

Similar to the pre-1949 period, the CCP’s intentions towards the liberation of women was to mobilise them and increase their participation in socialist projects, which were guided by Marxist class theory, influenced by Soviet-led international communist movements, and pressed by the need to defeat capitalism in the Cold War. Women’s liberation, therefore, became a yardstick of Chinese progress and modernisation, and more broadly, of the strength of socialism (Rofel 1999; Chen 2003). For that reason, the CCP’s discourse of women’s liberation did not emphasise women’s individual rights but asked women to “raise class consciousness,” “increase social skills,” “overcome the backward thought of unwillingness to work or reliance on men for support,” and “become producers of social wealth” (Tan 1993:342). In the

area of employment, despite significant improvements since the founding of the People's Republic, gender inequality remained pervasive in the 1950s. Once again, top-down women's liberation campaigns became a means that served socialist agendas. On the other hand, for most of the 1950s, socialist transformations continued to improve the lives of the Chinese, including the lives of women and their families, and hence, overshadowed existing gender inequalities.

With victory in the civil war, the CCP underwent a series of administrative measures designed to stimulate the flagging economy, curb rampant unemployment and inflation, and stabilise the price of daily necessities (Jin 2002). Additionally, administrative power saw the CCP take over all private industrial and financial firms, develop and implement a planned economy, and redistribute economic resources. Public ownership and centralised economic decision-making achieved some desirable results during the early years of liberation when majority of the Chinese were devastated. For instance, runaway inflation prior to the revolution was soon brought under control. From 1949 to 1957, 16.7 million jobs were created, of which nearly one-third were created by the state and this significantly reduced unemployment rates (from 23.7 to 5.9 percent) (Zuo 1986; Bian 1994).

In the following years, with the exception of the Great Leap Forward (1958),<sup>2</sup> state policies concerning employment evolved from state intervention to state assignment. Conducive to state ownership and a centrally-planned economy, a unified state/collectively owned work unit (*danwei*) system was created, directly connecting the state with individuals in the urban society. Through the *danwei* system, the state controlled and allocated economic and labour resources, carried out economic plans, organised economic activities, did away with class exploitation and differences, and thus ensured the basic livelihood of all urban families, albeit only at the subsistence level.

As state cells, the *danwei* performed all-encompassing functions for urban employees and their families. It guaranteed employment for the majority of able-bodied urban citizens and provided them with job security and labour insurance. To prevent growing gaps in income, the party-state adopted an almost egalitarian approach in adjusting wages of state employees. The *danwei* system provided for its employees and their families health care and welfare benefits and services, such as low-cost meals, day-care, transportation, funerals, housing, loans, and income subsidies. In large state enterprises they also ran bath-houses, schools, entertainment centres, barbershops, cinemas, clinics, hospitals, and so on (Whyte and Parish 1984; Walder 1986; Bian 1994).

To be sure, the CCP's version of socialist ideals was fulfilled through the elimination of all private organisations and the establishment of a highly centralised state-owned *danwei* work system. This precluded the growth of a civil society in which individuals enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and personal freedom in the

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<sup>2</sup> During the Great Leap Forward, the party-state launched a massive steel-making campaign with the slogan "Everyone has a job and no household has an idle person" (*ren ren you huo gan, hu hu wu xian ren*). In this campaign an overwhelming majority of housewives were mobilised to work in different levels of state or collective work organisations in which no quotas or direct state assignments were necessary (see Bian 1994; Jiang 2001).

public sphere that is separate from state control (Habermas 1991). The authoritarian structure of centralised CCP leadership demanded the obedience of the masses, and men and women alike, became reliant on the *danwei* system for their livelihood, which created their complete dependence on the CCP as well. The consequences of this were twofold: on one hand, the *danwei* system guaranteed stable employment and basic individual and family well-being; but on the other hand, it suppressed personal freedom and autonomy, including that of women.

However, such suppression was not only imposed from the top but also grew from the bottom (Rofel 1999; Chen 2003). In urban areas, women's own yearning for a unified and strong nation subdued any temptations they may have held for personal freedom. Many female informants said: How could my family possibly survive without the strengthening of our country? Moreover, in the 1950s when the entire nation was struggling to restore economic and social order, women's sense of security and satisfaction stemming from the *danwei* system far exceeded their desire for individual or familial autonomy. In fact, women personally identified with the *danwei* and felt themselves as the owners (*zhuren*) of the country: "I did not feel tired working—it was just like working for myself."<sup>3</sup> Women's collective identity and a sense of ownership encouraged them to fulfil their obligations to the nation, rather than pursue their own individual rights. Ms. Zhang, a tailor shop worker, offered the following account:

I was married in 1945 in Tianjin. My husband was first a bus conductor and then a clerk for a newspaper. There was no job security at the time, definitely no jobs for women. Life was hard. We often went hungry. I remember one time the whole family was anxiously waiting for my husband to bring his pay cheque home. I then rushed to the grain store to get some cornflour as soon as I got the money. But I fainted at the doorsteps of the store due to hunger. My oldest son almost lost his life, for we had no money to send for a doctor when he fell ill. My second son was still unable to stand at the age two because of long-term starvation. After liberation, the government got my husband a permanent job and our family an apartment. In 1958, I found a job in a neighbourhood tailor shop. Because we were a low-income family, we were entitled to all kinds of subsidies appropriated by my husband's *danwei*. My husband's *danwei* even paid for my father-in-law's funeral. I would not have achieved what I have today without the Party. Everyone in our neighbourhood knows that I have worked wholeheartedly for socialism. (Interview, June 2000)

To Ms. Zhang and many other working-class women, the CCP-led class-oriented social transformation also enhanced their well-being as poor women, and thus constituted some, if not all, elements of women's liberation. This seems to suggest that although the *danwei* system did not allow women to pursue their own individual rights or personal freedoms, it ensured collective rights for women, particularly for poor women.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, during interviews Ms. Qian, Liang and Liu claimed to have identified with the *danwei* system in this way.

In terms of class emancipation, it should be pointed out that men shared similar experiences and interests to women. According to Mr. Du:

The capitalist only paid me one meal a day when I was an apprentice, but I had to work around the clock. I was not only scolded at times but also hit by the capitalist. I earned very little even after I graduated from my apprenticeship ... Under the CCP leadership, we enjoyed a safety net: Everyone could feed themselves despite our low-wage system. There were small discrepancies in income, housing, and other benefits between officials and rank-and-file workers. The leaders would visit you when you felt ill. The *danwei* would provide assistance if our family needed help. ... During the three-year economic hard time [1959-1962], every *danwei* unit ran its own production base, where the *danwei* raised animals to improve food supply. All the employees had the same quota regardless of their ranks—we were truly liberated (*fanshen*). I worked tirelessly. I would have felt guilty had I not worked hard. (Interview, August 2003)

Even small businessmen supported the publicly-owned *danwei* system. Mr. Ma, who owned a bakery, said: “I was eager for joint public-private ownership (*gongsì heyìng*). I felt making gains from it since large stores were doing the same thing. I made 80 yuan a month—enjoying a stable wage and carefree living” (interview, July 2003).

Through ensuring people’s livelihoods and the relatively equal distribution of income, the *danwei* system heightened the common interests of men and women and worked to diminish women’s overall sense of gender inequality. It also enabled men and women to form alliances with each other in the transition to a socialist, centrally planned economy. Moreover, because both gender and class transformations were accomplished through the highly centralised CCP leadership, individuals responded to their collective emancipation by showing loyalty to the Party and engaging in what was viewed as obligatory activities to the nation.

The most prominent phenomenon in the 1950s was the devotion of urban workers’ to their workplace even at the expense of their own families’ well-being. However, there is no observable difference between women and men. For example, one non-CCP couple that worked in providing catering services for the state went to work at around 6 am and did not come home until 7 pm. In the case of overtime or meetings, they would not get home until 9 pm or 10 pm. The wife recalled:

Most workers usually arrived at our workplace before 5:30 am. Occasionally we had to start working around 3 am, and there was no overtime pay. And yet, we all were happy. I earned only 6 yuan a month for the first three months, but I was satisfied, because that was still much better than living in the old society. (Interview, Mrs. Wang, temporary worker, June 2000)

Pressed by heavy demands from their workplace, this couple gave up much of their domestic chores and even childcare. Both of their daughters, one in elementary school and the other in day-care, ate all their meals in a public dining hall near their home. Their daughters often went to bed by themselves before they came home and woke up in the morning after they had gone to work.

This was typical for many urban-based workers in the 1950s. Ms. Fang, a university administrator, told a similar story:

Just one month before my oldest daughter was born, the Party sent my husband to study in the former Soviet Union with the expected length of five years. I was too busy to raise her alone, so I sent her to my mother in Sichuan province when she was only one and half years old. She was still smiling at me at the train station without knowing that she would leave her mother in a few minutes. Tears rolled down my cheeks ... I did not bring her back home until her father returned from the Soviet Union three years later ... At that time, it never occurred to me that I would put my family interest first. (Interview, June 2003)

As I have already said, during the Great Leap Forward (1958), the party-state called on all urban women to participate in steel making in order to meet its ambitious plan of industrialisation (Tan 2003). This was reflected in the popular saying: “We [women] also have two hands and should not eat unearned food by staying home” (*wo men ye you yi shuang shou, bu zai jia li chi xianfan*), meaning that women should be like men and contribute to socialist production. An additional four million urban and rural women entered the labour force in urban areas, a one hundred and thirteen percent increase compared to 1957 (Tan 2003). Some of my informants recalled that they felt guilty staying home. Except for a few women who had large numbers of young children by 1958 all the housewives in my study began working outside the home. Many of them, however, worked in neighbourhood-run factories, shops, or served on residential committees, which offered little to no wages. But women felt liberated and proud of themselves for no longer “eating unearned food.” Here, the idea of “liberation” reflected women’s combined feelings of empowerment for stepping outside of the domestic realm, and more importantly, for becoming men’s equals in contributing to the nation. The notion of “gender equality” here was embedded in women’s own sense of obligation rather than in their rights, again reminiscent of women’s liberation during the earlier decades of nationalist movements. The only difference was that women acquired a new sense of womanhood by disciplining their bodies in socialist, as opposed to nationalist, projects.

Consequently, the interaction between top-down institutional transformation and bottom-up cooperation of the proletariat moulded both women and men into “state persons” (Tan 1996:75). Their well-being was widely imagined to be contingent on the success of the socialist state, and in this way, fulfilling their obligations to the nation continued to be important to many people. Hence, the operation of the Chinese state socialist system blurred behavioural differences between women and men, and thereby enhanced the notion of gender obligation equality.

## ***CCP role modelling and gender obligation equality***

In the 1950s gender obligation equality was further promoted through CCP role modelling. Most research on this period tends to focus on the authoritarian and repressive aspects of China's late leader Mao Zedong and the CCP, neglecting their extraordinary mobilising abilities, built on the idea of mutual obligation. As a result, party-people relations are reduced to simple transactional exchanges following the market-based principle of self-interest. For example, Andrew Walder sees party-people relationships as a "network of patron-client relations" in which party branches relied on loyal clients who exchanged loyalty and support for career opportunities and other rewards (1986:6). While a market-like reciprocity might ring true to a limited extent during the final years of state socialism, this certainly was not the case in the 1950s. Missing from Walder's writing were party-people non market-based social exchanges that grew out of shared ideals inspired by a sense of mutual obligation under the charismatic leadership of Mao (Lee 2002).

The rise of charismatic leaders in China has its roots in late nineteenth-century imperialist oppression and economic and social crises (Weber 1947[1924]). More importantly, this was due to the leaders' own vision of change, their exceptional ability to mobilise resources, personal role modelling, and willingness to commit self-sacrifice during the early years of the communist revolution (Jacobsen and House 2001). This is not to deny unequal power relations between the CCP leadership and ordinary people: disloyal behaviour was intolerable within the *danwei* where individuals were located. However, power based on charismatic leadership, in general, tends to be group serving, non-exploitive and, thus, is often perceived as legitimate (Jacobsen and House 2001). As early as the 1940s, Mao emphasised aligning party agendas with people's interests, rather than using material rewards as instrumental measures for support. Mao argued that "our duty is to hold ourselves responsible to the people. Every word, every act and every policy must conform to the people's interests" (1961:16). Accordingly, after the founding of the People's Republic, the CCP renewed efforts to promote collective interests and create exemplary behaviour of self-sacrifice. Due to the CCP's class orientation, role-modelling efforts tended to be gender blind, which further contributed to promoting similarities between men and women in China's socialist system.<sup>4</sup> For example, during the second wage reform in 1956, the party-controlled State Council increased the wage levels of both female and male personnel in non-administrative sectors, as within the state apparatuses attention was given to narrowing down the range of income disparities across the board. During 1957-1960, the State Council reduced the salaries of high-ranking officials, men and women alike, three times in order to reduce salary gaps between the highest and lowest paid party officials (from 17.6 to 12.3 percent) (Yang et al. 1993).

In addition, many male and female party members passed on their own opportunities to lower-income co-workers. Among my informants, at least six (four male and two female) party officials and one (male) head carpenter (also a party-

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<sup>4</sup> Gender blind policies do not suggest the absence of gendered impact. This will be discussed in a later section.

member) did this in the 1950s. Differing from Walder's findings, those who received the "favour" were not necessarily party activists. Instead, they were people whose salaries were lower than those with the same qualification, from low family incomes, or people who protested to management against what they considered as unfair treatment. Many of my informants said that it was common for party members to pass up salary-adjustment opportunities to non-members.

The overwhelming majority of my informants agreed that party members were generally able to "take on onerous tasks ahead of others, but enjoy material benefits after others" (*chi ku ze qian, xiang shou ze hou*). Ms. Wu, a cloth-making factory worker, offered this:

We emphasised "our factories, our homes" (*yi chang wei jia*),<sup>5</sup> and "cadres taking the lead" (*gan bu dai tou*). I was the head of a working team. I usually arrived in the factory around 6 am to get ready for my shift beginning at 8 am. We officially got off work at 5 pm, but I would check on machines, discharge the electricity ... stayed until 6 pm. The head of the factory was usually the last one to leave the factory. (Interview, July 2003)

Comrade Chen, a high-ranking male government official (rank 13) from the State Council, recalled that "back then it was often the leading cadres who worked overtime or were on duty during holidays. A deputy secretariat of the State Council practically worked seven days a week" (interview, June 2000). In the people's collective commitment to socialist ideals as being a part of the common interest, the exemplary role of CCP leaders helped motivate followers to transcend their own self-interests and derive intrinsic satisfaction from this (Jacobsen and House 2001). Thus, the 1950s became the decade of workers' unprecedented zeal and devotion to their work, regardless of whether they were men or women.

### ***Collective culture and gender obligation equality***

Ideologically, China's party-people obligatory exchange relations in the 1950s were grounded in Mao's interpretation of Marxism. Following Marxist doctrine, the proletariat would only attain ultimate liberation through the liberation of all human beings. Mao wrote: "The individual is an element of the collective. When collective interests are increased, personal interests will subsequently be improved" (cited in Woo 1995:290). To reach his goal of liberation, Mao emphasised the cooperative efforts of both the party and the people. While Mao called on people's "utter devotion to others without any thought of self," he also urged CCP members to be role models for the masses, subordinating themselves "to the interests of the nation and of the masses" (1967a:337). Moreover, Mao spoke to the nation about the qualities of "selflessness, working with all one's energy, a whole-hearted devotion to the public duty, and quiet hard work" (1967b:198).

Chinese Marxist ideology was further bolstered by deep-rooted Confucian traditions, which taught that the interests of the nation should be placed above those of

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<sup>5</sup> See also Ching Kwan Lee (2002).

the family and of individuals, and families and individuals should not shirk their duties to the nation, accorded to them by their social status. Although such statuses were never equal, the status-based system in pre-Communist China nevertheless recognised the mutual obligations between the state and individuals by virtue of their social locations (Fei 1998). For example, Confucian ethics emphasised the benevolence of the emperor (*jun ren*) to his subjects while demanding the loyalty of the latter to the former (*chen zhong*). These mutual obligations were fulfilled through each member's performance of his or her social roles that were prescribed by Confucian norms. A person's rights were thus realised indirectly as people fulfilled their obligations to an individual or to the collective (Hyung 1981).

Although Confucian ethics did not specify the role of women in serving the nation, popular culture abounded with examples of female heroines, such as Hua Mulan and Mu Guiying who fought shoulder-to-shoulder with men on the frontlines (Hyung 1981). Furthermore, foreign aggression and domination during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prompted expansion of the slogan: "A man has a responsibility for his country" to "So does a woman" (*tian xia xing wang, pi fu you ze, pi fu yi you ze*). As early as 1929, similar to its political rival the GMD, the CCP came to realise the indispensable role of women in the Chinese revolution and in the following decades, as the Party repeatedly called on women to fulfil their obligations to national projects (The Women's Federation of China 1978). After 1949, facing economic collapse, poverty, diseases of epidemic proportions and the Cold War, the CCP continued to incorporate women's normative national duties into the collective cultural discourse, as along with male role models, the party-state set up numerous female exemplars in the push for the ideal of gender obligation equality (Chen 2003).

There is no doubt that the discursive power of collectivism and obligation rendered attempts to pursue personal or familial gains as illegitimate and shameful. In response, workers were vigorously involved in learning from and surpassing advanced workers (*xue xian jin, gang xian jin*). Ms. Qian, a temporary female worker, offered her story:

I began working at Beijing Knitting Mill in 1952. At that time, the factory still offered bonuses. I usually won second-prize bonuses. Then, the party called on technological innovation, asking us to find ways to save raw material. I finally managed to save 5.5 [Chinese] inches of cotton thread on each leg of the stockings. Our factory not only awarded me bonuses but also put my name on the honour roll, and praised me for that in factory-wide rallies. Of course, I worked hard not for bonuses; I felt like working for myself. I should answer Chairman Mao's call and try my best. (Interview, July 2003)

In the late 1950s state enterprises no longer offered bonuses. My informants said that advanced workers would at best get a certificate of merit, a pen, or a towel, and yet, people still worked conscientiously for fear of falling behind. Mr. Zhang, head of the carpentry team in Beijing Automobile Factory, said: "People competed for working overtime for no extra pay. The un-chosen ones were often disappointed,

asking me why I did not choose them. I would reply: ‘I will next time’” (interview, Mr. Zhang, carpenter, July 2003). Why was this the case? According to Zhang, section heads usually selected those who demonstrated excellent performance (*biao xian hao*). Therefore, being chosen was an honour and, as outlined by my informants, it was an era of people racing for contributions and honour. Obligation equality was so popular at the time that it became a moral discourse. Attempts to shirk one’s obligation to the nation would be shamed or ridiculed. Ms. Chen, a housewife of a party cadre from Shanghai, talked about an awkward experience:

I was asked to serve on our neighbourhood committee by virtue of my husband’s status as a CCP cadre. I was not interested, for it would be more comfortable to stay home. But sensing that it was not appropriate to think this way, I ended up volunteering my time on the committee. Then we moved to another district. The neighbourhood committee there also asked me to join them. I was once again compelled to serve. (Interview, July 2000)

The obligation-equality discourse was not only popular among those categorised as “people” but also prevailed with people labelled as “problematic” or “class enemies.” There were three intellectuals, one overseas Chinese returnee, and one GMD military officer. They were all either criticised or labelled as “rightists” in 1956 and persecuted in subsequent years. And yet, their determination to serve the nation or be a useful person was rarely shaken. The earlier-mentioned geologist, Mr. Zheng, said:

I was always criticised for being outspoken ever since I joined the revolution in the late 1940s. At the beginning, I was not convinced by those criticisms; but later I wound up doing self-criticism for my bad family ground, bourgeois education, and personal limits. My wife and I had always been loyal to the party and worked hard. Once I said to my supervisor: “You are looking for targets to attack, aren’t you? Attack me if this will make our country stronger.” (Interview, June 2003)

On the other hand, the hegemony of the gender obligation discourse should not be merely interpreted as a cultural phenomenon or manipulation from above by state officials. Rather, it was part of the “cultural negotiations” between China’s long-standing struggling with colonialism and global capitalism (Rofel 1999:279). Historical memories of urban-dwelling Chinese people from this generation might have in fact collectively contributed to the hegemonic nature of gender equality and obligation to the state.

### ***Obligation equality and gendered constraints for autonomy***

The practice of gender obligation equality in the 1950s by no means suggests that women had reached equality with men in opportunities inside or outside the household. As western feminists correctly point out, China’s socialist transformation took place without challenging traditional gender ideals toward family roles; as a result, women suffered from a double burden: work and housework (Croll 1995; Wolf

1985). However, left out of this equation is the role of women as state persons, which complicates gender dynamics. This is because constraints were not imposed just on women but also on men who constituted the other half of “state persons.” The addition of statesmanship to traditional family roles produced *gendered* effects, on both women’s and men’s family-based experiences, that is, both men and women were constrained by the idea of obligation equality, albeit in different ways.

For women, these constraints did not come from their greater share of household chores, but from an imbalance of distributions between state and domestic tasks. Under the hegemonic official discourse: “We also have two hands and will not eat unearned food at home” (*wo men ye you yi shuang shou, bu zai jia li chi xian fan*), many women, like their husbands, entered the workforce in order to fulfil their obligations to the nation. Consequently, domestic tasks lost their appeal and were largely neglected. Working women either relied on their parents, relatives, nannies or kindergartens to take care of their households and/or children, or locked up their children in the apartment until they got home from work. Those who could not find or afford helpers had to do all the housework, including making clothes and shoes in the evenings, sometimes throughout the night. In this case, husbands would share some routine chores, such as grocery shopping and cooking. But husbands usually spent much more time at work or commuted home on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, offering little help around the home. As a result, women suffered from role conflict and poor health. Ms. Zhao, the aforementioned food factory worker, told her story:

My husband got reassigned in another city for a while. I took care of our five kids. In 1958, the neighbourhood committee asked me to work, but I was unable to leave the kids unattended. So my father-in-law did it on my behalf. I started working in 1959, earning only 29 yuan a month. Lacking adequate care, one of my children got pneumonia. I fell ill too, weighing less than 100 *jin* (110 pounds). My husband’s *danwei* sent a representative to assess my family situation and eventually transferred him back to Beijing. (Interview, July 2000)

In addition, the universal employment but low-wage *danwei* system added another dimension to women’s role conflict, between supporting themselves as well as their families and attending to household tasks. Ms. Wu, housewife, said:

My husband was a worker, earning only 53 yuan a month to support a family of four. I began working in a shoe factory in 1959. We had two children at the time. The older one was one and a half years old, and the younger one was less than one year old. Each day I would get up around 3 am or 4 am, putting the two kids in a small cart and taking them to a kindergarten. It cost me 32 yuan a month for childcare, but I was still an apprentice, earning a monthly income of only 18 yuan. I worked so hard that my weight dropped from 120 *jin* to 98 *jin* in one year. I hoped that I could be promoted as a permanent worker in three years. But I did not make it, for there were cutbacks of factory workers due to economic downturns in 1962. I lost my job. Then I had to find a temporary job in a restaurant. (Interview, June 2000)

Some women had to retreat to the household due to tremendous conflicts between paid and domestic work. One housewife did so due to her demanding job that

paid low wages, and her large number of children. To support her family, she contracted embroidering work and did it from home as an outworker (Whyte and Parish 1984).

Women from “bad class” backgrounds, such as capitalists or rightists had to cope with political repression, which often undermined their family’s well being. Ms. Chen, the wife of a large factory owner and Ms. Lin, the wife of a rightist, both lost the financial and physical support of their husband and had to raise young children on their own. Both of them juggled work and family, and both suffered through political turmoil. To them, the notion of women’s liberation made little sense.

While some of the constraints women faced were concerned with performing too many roles, men were faced with doing too few. Like women, men were expected to devote themselves to socialist construction, only to a much fuller extent. Men in general worked longer hours and spent more energy in the workplace than did women due to their primary role in economic and political activities. In the meantime, men still shouldered the role of main provider. Although the burden of providing for their families was substantially alleviated by the state’s comprehensive welfare programs and by their wives’ employment, men’s competency in providing for their family was undermined precisely by the above arrangements. The CCP’s complete control over labour allocation, pay scales and emphasis on selflessness further contributed to the limited abilities of men to meet their obligations to their families. Either under the pressure of, or inspired by the ideal of obligation-equality, men were encouraged to work diligently without asking for material or status gains. Their incomes tended not to hinge on their ability, expertise or education but on equalitarian principles. This was in direct contrast to the situation of women who earned wages by piecework and thus demonstrated their potential as capable providers, albeit secondary ones. On the other hand, by not reducing the demands made of men to contribute to the nation, Chinese state-socialism was yet to allow men to share equal domestic responsibilities with women. Consequently, men sometimes suffered from frustration that they could not relieve their wives from taking on the provider role. Mr. Du, the aforementioned electrician, told his story with some regret:

I first got a job in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, then I had another offer elsewhere, but my *danwei* would not let me go. Because I was on the highest wage scale in my profession (80 yuan), I had no pay rise in the next thirty years. But I had six kids. So, I had to live on state subsidies in order to make ends meet. In 1958, our neighbourhood committee asked my wife to get a paid job, so that we could live off state subsidies. She held a job for a while, then quit due to expensive day care, the demanding nature of her job, and heavy chores. When our kids grew older, the neighbourhood committee asked my wife again to work, and she did. I helped her with some housework, but not much, because I had a two-hour meeting every evening, except for Saturday. My wife retired at the age of fifty in 1980. She soon fell ill due to fatigue and poor nutrition, and died in 1989. (Interview, August 2003)

Demands for men to be devoted to work did not just come from the state but also from their wives. As Ms. Li, an accountant, said: “Of course my husband was the

provider. I only earned about 29 yuan a month in 1950s, less than one-fifth of my husband's salary" (interview, July 2000). Even middle-to-high-ranking female government officials expected their husbands to be more devoted to paid work. The following comment made by Comrade Liu, the earlier-mentioned government official, reflected typical sentiments of female revolutionaries in 1950s: "Men should have a broad [revolutionary] vision instead of being chained to the stove" (interview, June 2000). The unchallenged role of men as providers combined with state limits imposed on men's engagement in domestic responsibilities produced a sense of inadequacy in men who struggled to provide for their families and even cost some of them their marriages. As documented by Neil Diamant (2000), working-class men suffered the most under the Marriage Law introduced in the early 1950s, in which some women left poor men for better economic prosperity. The constant political repression of class enemies launched by the party-state further assaulted men's sense of identity.

Moreover, men's health was similarly placed at risk when they were expected to dedicate themselves to paid work as a "state person." Ms. Qian, temporary worker, recalled:

My husband was a driver for a housing repair company in Beijing, often taking long-distance trips. Many of the vehicles he drove were old imports from the former Soviet Union and often gave him trouble. Therefore, he had to repair the vehicles by himself, which kept him very busy. One day in winter, he was lying on the snow under the chassis of the vehicle doing repair work. Then he fell asleep due to fatigue. He did not feel well after he woke up. He was later diagnosed with thrombus. He died at the age of sixty-two after a relapse in 1984. (Interview, July 2003)

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

My study shows that the liberation of urban women in the 1950s was an integral part of ongoing national and class emancipation, and the attendant freedom from family-based patriarchal structures. However, women's personal freedoms gave way to renewed efforts in nation building and collective class struggle. This suggests that the "postponed" gender revolution should not be merely interpreted as a result of the compromises women made to the party-state but also of women's active participation in pursuing gender obligation equality in order to fulfil their vision of socialism, as such engagements can also generate a sense of liberation. In this regard, women shared similar experiences and sentiments with men. Urban women's and men's engagement in state-based obligations owed much to the interlocking factors of China's semi-colonialist history, the institutional makeup of state socialism, party-people obligatory exchange relations, and the pervasive collective culture of obligation equality.

Contemporary Chinese history demonstrates that the CCP did not simply erase individuality and gender by insisting on the collective. Rather, its interactions with the population dialectically augmented agency in some instances and delimited it in others (Chen 2003). Nor was the party-state an abstract, external construct. It was comprised of various state apparatuses and millions of state officials and party

members who strived to be role models in the promotion of obligation-equality ideals. The nexus of mutual articulation between individuals and the nation state produced hegemonic themes of liberation and gender obligation equality among the Chinese. Given the historically and institutionally situated practice of obligation equality, it is not surprising to see that urban Chinese women failed to develop a sense of injustice from their lower social and economic status and greater share of domestic responsibilities compared to men. Rather, the problem rested in urban women's struggle to fulfil their obligations to the nation and to meet their domestic duties that were largely neglected in the socialist era. Juggling the two was an enormous task, given the burdens of both paid and unpaid work in the economies of subsistence (Hershatter 2004). The low-wage system also necessitated that the majority of urban women should help support their families. The above situation created a *triple burden* on women: to fulfil their obligations to the nation, to help support their families, and to perform routine household tasks.

While women were stretched too thin in playing out these multiple roles, men found themselves caught up in the fulfilment of their national duties and being financial providers for their families. Although men were relieved of the formidable responsibility of being sole-providers, under the Party's distribution systems and welfare programs, their capability to perform the provider role was undermined by the all-encompassing state and the social norm of selflessness. As a result, men often felt that their skills and efforts in paid work were not in proportion with what they were able to earn. It is in this sense that men were constrained in a fashion similar to women.

As my study has illustrated, the experiences of women and men varied according to their economic, social and political locations. For example, women who had no one to help them with domestic chores, whose families were in low-income brackets, or who were in "bad class" categories, tended to voice stronger feelings about the triple burden than other women. Similarly, men who suffered from political persecution or had low-per-capita-income but high-skills were more likely than others to develop a sense of imbalance between their efforts and rewards.

Therefore, under the leadership of the CCP in the 1950s, neither men nor women achieved individual liberation, but both groups were granted collective rights and strove for obligation equality. Gender in urban China was, therefore, generally constructed in many levels and in three-way interactions between the state, family, and individual. At the state level, both men and women were moulded into non-gendered state persons, whereas in the home traditional gender roles remained relatively unchanged. Urban women's and men's extensive experiences with gender obligation equality but limited ones with individual liberation in state-socialist China marked different state-society relations and alternative trajectories for women's liberation and gender equality from that which took place in the capitalist West. Therefore, Western theories need to be modified, so that they capture the historical and social contexts of state-socialist China.

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## Appendix One

**Table One: Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

	Total (80 people)			Females (50 people)			Males (30 people)		
<b>I. Marriages</b>	V(%)*	M**	SD***	V(%)	M	SD	V(%)	M	SD
<i>Marital Status</i>									
Married	47(59)								
Widowed	25(31)								
Divorced	1(1)								
Remarried	4(5)								
Recovered marriage	2(3)								
Length of Marriage		53	8.9						
Number of children		3.8	1.7						
<i>Child Care</i>									
Wife	35(60)								
Parents/daycare	22(37)								
Wife & her mother	2(3)								
<b>II. Individuals</b>									
Age					76	5.1		77	4.2
<i>Ethnicity</i>									
Han				42(84)			27(90)		
Hui				6(12)			2(7)		
Manchurian				2(4)			1(3)		
<i>Education</i>									
Semi-literate				31(62)			10(34)		
Elementary				4(8)			4(13)		
High School				10(20)			10(33)		
College				5(10)			6(20)		
<i>Employment</i>									
Government Officials				7(14)			7(23)		
Professionals				5(10)			6(20)		
White-collar workers				4(6)			3(10)		
State/collective-enterprise workers				8(16)			14(47)		
Neighbourhood-enterprise workers				6(12)			0		
Temporary workers				11(22)			0		
Unemployed				9(18)			0		
<i>Party Affiliation</i>									
CCP				8(16)			9(30)		
GMD				0			1(3)		
None				42(84)			20(67)		
<i>Place of Birth</i>									
Rural				22(44)			14(47)		
Urban				28(56)			16(53)		

\* V=Value  
 \*\* M=Mean  
 \*\*\* SD=Standard Deviation