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Women and Class Analysis in the Chinese Land Revolution

Lucie Cheng†

A significant but little known chapter in the history of modern Chinese land reform provides an illuminating glimpse of the relationship between class and gender in Chinese society. During the early 1930s communist insurgents in south central China established a short lived Soviet Republic centered in Jiangxi. There, in the course of putting into effect their program of land reform, three distinct approaches to the distribution of land to women were taken, each with a discernible theoretical basis, each with different implications and contradictions. The experience gained in Jiangxi formed the basis of the Land Reform of the People's Republic of China twenty years later. This article will describe and attempt to explain these events, for the issues presented a half century ago to those Chinese revolutionaries remain a challenge to those who would radically change the position of women in society today.

GENDER, CLASS, AND REVOLUTION

The main targets of socialist revolutions in the twentieth century are class and gender inequalities. Neither Marx nor Engels was able to develop a satisfactory treatment of the relationship between these two goals, but various positions have been advanced by Marxists and feminists in recent years. While few believe the goals inevitably conflict, at times they appear contradictory. Typically, class issues play a dominant role in the revolution, and are the determining factor in the restructuring of economic and political relations in socialist states. Gender equality tends to be put on the revolutionary back burner. This raises a serious question for theoreticians and political activists: Does socialism liberate women? (Croll 1980; Davin 1976; Ho 1976; Johnson 1983; Rowbotham 1974; Scott 1974; Stacey 1983; Stranahan 1983; Walstedt 1978; Wein-

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baum 1978; Whyte 1984; Wolf 1985; Xiao 1984).¹

Current debates on the relationship between class and gender divide those who treat gender inequality as part of the larger class conflict and those who treat gender relations as themselves class relations with women forming a distinct disadvantaged class. The outcome of this debate has important consequences for gender equality. It sets the political agenda by suggesting the kinds of changes in the existing order necessary to bring about gender equality. By describing models for property law and family organization, the debate also suggests the shape of the legal and social structures that can be anticipated after equality is won.

The classic position of the first approach holds that the source of women's oppression is to be found in the mode of production. As capitalism developed, the significance of the household as a unit of production decreased, and women were gradually deprived of their traditional economic role as producers. Largely excluded from wage work, they became economically dependent on men. The drive to incorporate women into the labor force, however, has contradictory effects. It provides women with some economic independence from men even as it subjects them to further and more extensive exploitation by capitalism as low wage workers and as unpaid domestic workers, i.e. housewives. At the same time, not all women are exploited under capitalism. Those women who benefit from the system have an interest in maintaining it, in contrast to those women who are exploited by it (Bebel 1971; Winston 1971). Whether or not a woman is exploited depends on her class position. Therefore, the only road to women's liberation is through the abolition of classes and the replacement of capitalism by socialism.

Other formulations share a similar analysis but differ from the classic position in contending that socialism is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's liberation. Because patriarchy (defined as a system of male domination) has permeated all classes, women are oppressed by men of the same classes. Even when classes have been abolished, people's prejudicial attitudes will continue to thwart the advancement of women. According to this formulation, the struggle against male domination must be incorporated into the struggle against capitalism and should not be postponed until the advent of socialism (Benston 1969; Saffioti 1979).²

The second approach differs fundamentally from the first. Firestone and others argue that patriarchy preceded the advent of capitalism, and that women are oppressed regardless of the mode of production (Firestone 1970; Hartman 1983). Stating that the reproduction of the human species is the most fundamental element in the survival of any society,

¹ Citations follow the American Sociological Review format.
² Similar arguments are found also in the Chinese literature. Cf. Mei 1926, pp. 116-29; Lo 1955.
they argue that relations of reproduction are therefore more basic than the relations of production. The relations of reproduction include both the reproduction of life itself and the maintenance of life. The most radical branch of this approach focuses the debate on sexuality and control of the reproductive capacity of women (Firestone 1970). Arguing that women's sexuality and reproductive capacity have been exploited and controlled by men in feudal as well as capitalist societies, this branch concludes that women form a class antagonistic to men. Women will not attain true equality with men until they have complete control of their sexuality. The less radical branch places more emphasis on the maintenance of life and argues for a fundamental change in family relations (Chodorow 1978). Regardless of the difference in emphasis, advocates of both positions see the locus of inequality in the relations of reproduction rather than in the relations of production of material life. Following their arguments, revolutionary movements that promise equality between the genders must therefore first deal with the relations between men and women as two distinct classes.

This debate underscores the importance of the dilemma between gender and class as an issue not simply of theoretical construction but also of revolutionary politics. Since most twentieth century revolutions have occurred in predominantly agrarian societies, land reform has been the central focus of revolutionary struggle. How revolutionaries distribute land to women—whether according to gender or class—becomes a significant indicator of their priorities with regard to gender inequality.

**THE JIANGXI SOVIET: A BRIEF BACKGROUND**

By the late 1920s the fledgling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had sought refuge in remote mountainous parts of south central China, having been driven from the cities by the Guomindang under the leadership of Chiang Kaishek. The leadership group of the CCP, largely urban intellectuals, had little experience in the countryside. They groped for a program that would unite the dispossessed peasants against their oppressors.

In 1927, the CCP established a revolutionary government in Jinggangshan, Jiangxi Province. This government inaugurated a long process of experimentation and struggle resulting in the institutional configuration we see in contemporary China. By 1931, the CCP was able to consolidate a number of local county, district and village revolutionary governments or soviets into a central body covering parts of Jiangxi and Fujian. The Central Soviet Area, often referred to simply as the Jiangxi Soviet, occupied only about three hundred square miles, and had a population of about a million. Both the boundaries of Jiangxi and its population fluctuated in the course of fighting between the Red Army
and the Guomindang troops. This area was constantly under military siege, and serious disagreements divided the party leaders. Nevertheless, the CCP managed to develop a rather complex system of local and central government apparatus, a set of legal statutes, a sophisticated party structure, and strategies and tactics of class struggle (Butler 1983; Fundamental 1934; Huang 1978; Jiangxisheng 1982; Kim 1973; Lotveit 1973).

In 1934 the Guomindang invaded the Jiangxi region and forced the survivors of the CCP to embark upon the long march that ultimately led them to an even more remote sanctuary in the far northwestern province of Yenan. Here, the struggle would begin that ultimately resulted in the consolidation of power and the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

Throughout the Jiangxi period, a number of laws and regulations were enacted at various levels of the soviet government. These laws marked a break with tradition, reflecting the ideological commitment of the CCP and the influence of Soviet Russia. They "represented a programmatic expression of revolutionary objectives, a normative framework for revolutionary achievements, and a political manifestation of the strategy and tactics of revolution amongst competing groupings within the Chinese Communist movement" (Butler 1983, p. 3). Article 11 of the Constitution of the Soviet Republic promulgated in 1931 spelled out explicitly the Party's position on the Woman Question:

> It is the purpose of the Soviet Government in China to guarantee the emancipation of women; it recognizes the freedom of marriage and puts into operation various measures in the defense of women to enable women gradually to attain to the material basis required for their emancipation from the slavery of domestic work, and to give them the possibility of participating in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the country (Fundamental 1934, p. 21).

Several marriage laws promulgated between 1931 and 1934 gave additional protection to women's rights (Meijer 1971, pp. 42-51). Women who tried to use these laws, however, often met with the resistance of peasant men, who felt threatened, and Party cadres, who were afraid of alienating the men who made up the army (Johnson 1983, pp. 51-62).

The marriage laws gave women freedom to marry and divorce, and the land laws promised women a piece of land, the material basis for exercising their new found rights. These laws were attractive to women. Both were intended to provide women with incentives to support the revolution, and both reflected the vision of gender equality held by Mao Zedong and other Communist leaders.

As armed struggles continued, women's support for the revolution grew in importance. Women were needed to assume farming and other productive activities while men went to war. They were needed to make shoes, clothes, and other articles, and to cook, launder, sew, and carry
food for the troops. They were also counted on to take care of the wounded and to boost the morale of the discouraged. As casualties mounted, women were exhorted to motivate their husbands, brothers, and sons to join the Red Army. Some women themselves enlisted in the army (Chifei 1960, v. 2, pp. 630, 637; Jiangxisheng Funu 1963). In addition to relying on their war efforts, the Party depended heavily on women to uncover hidden property of the landlord and rich peasant families, to “speak bitterness” and make accusations against them at mass gatherings as a means to mobilize the poor. The CCP clearly saw the necessity of gaining women’s support and participation in the war and in the land struggle; however, the Party’s fear of alienating peasant men and its understandable concern for survival limited the scope and depth of the efforts to achieve gender equality (Andors 1983; Johnson 1983; Stacey 1983).

Given that women contributed greatly to the war effort, it is not surprising that they were concerned with their share of the fruits of struggle. In fact, there is every indication that peasant women were just as eager as peasant men to see land redistributed (Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, p. 712). From whom should land be taken and to whom should it be given became the most basic questions in the Revolution.

At least six formally promulgated land laws and more than thirteen regulations and resolutions specifically on the land laws have been identified between 1928 and 1934 in the Jiangxi soviet areas (Hsiao 1961; 1969, pp. 47-77; Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3; Zhonggong 1982). These rules and their applications varied over time and between localities. Some laws were vague while others were very specific; and some were more generous than others in their treatment of landlords and rich peasants. Scholars have explored a number of these differences and their implications (Butler 1983, pp. 77-93; Hsiao 1969, pp. 47-77). But so far, there has been no systematic discussion of the land laws in relation to women.

In this article, I argue that the explanations for some of the changes in land policy may be found, in part, in their implications for women. The implementation of a specific land policy encountered problems and generated undesirable consequences for the Party. The CCP then made policy changes, which in turn had new implications and consequences for women. My approach is based on two premises. First, seeing policy formation as a dialectical process leads me to investigate the dynamic relationship between ideology and realities, between theory and practice. Second, a policy designed to solve one area of problems often has consequences for other areas. Therefore, I suggest that focusing on the various land laws’ different implications for women may provide a fuller understanding of the relationship between women and the CCP.

As is true in the investigation of many questions concerning women in history, my study faces the problem of sources. Although land for
women was an important issue, it received little direct and specific attention in the Party organs or in the memoirs of historical figures, the two sources used most often by China scholars who concentrate on this period of the CCP experience. For this study, in addition to using secondary writings, I have relied on newspapers and magazines published during the Jiangxi period, popular folksongs, and reminiscences of men and women who participated in the Jiangxi land struggles. Unfortunately, among the surviving materials there is little discussion of the motivations for many of the shifts in policy concerning women that occurred as the new soviet pragmatically experimented with various approaches to land distribution. The lack of a systematic body of data on this subject puts a serious limitation on the study and explains the speculative nature of my conclusions. Nonetheless, three distinct approaches to women’s class status can be discerned from the history of the land revolution. For want of better terminology, I shall designate them as “proto-feminist,” “familistic,” and “synthetic.” Each approach has its theoretical and practical bases, and each in turn creates new contradictions.

**WOMEN, CLASS ANALYSIS, AND THE JIANGXI LAND REVOLUTION**

In 1926, before the CCP rose in active armed rebellion, Mao Zedong classified the rural population into eight social classes (Mao 1971-72, v. 1, pp. 153-59). As might be expected, these classes were mainly defined in terms of their relationship to land. Table 1 gives the categories and Mao’s estimate of the approximate size of each.

Although he did not specifically discuss women’s class status, Mao made two references to women. First, in estimating the number of individuals comprising the big-landlord class, he explicitly included the family members of the big-landlords. Since women typically did not hold titles to land, Mao’s classificatory scheme clearly indicated that women whose fathers or husbands were big-landlords were to be considered big-landlords themselves. Mao carried out this procedure of incorporating family members in the class to which the family head belonged in his estimation of the sizes of other classes. The second explicit reference to women was his inclusion of prostitutes in the class designated as *younmin* or “floating population,” sometimes translated as “lumpen-proletariat” (Mao 1965, v. 1, p. 19). In this case, the means of livelihood was considered the source of women’s class status. It is not clear whether Mao saw prostitutes as women without families, or whether he thought their family status was irrelevant since they had an independent source of livelihood. He certainly recognized the plight of women in Chinese society.

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3 Many of these sources previously available only on microfilm have recently been brought together, with many additions, in a series on sources on revolutionary history. So far, twelve volumes have been published.
Table 1. Class Structure Among the Peasant Population in China, 1926*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Category</th>
<th>Estimated Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Landlord</td>
<td>320,000</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Landlord</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-Peasant</td>
<td>120,000,000</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than self-sufficient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just self-sufficient</td>
<td>12,000,000 or 10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not self-sufficient</td>
<td>48,000,000 or 40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi owner-peasant</td>
<td>50,000,000</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share-cropper</td>
<td>60,000,000</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasant</td>
<td>60,000,000</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hired agricultural worker</td>
<td>7,360,000</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; artisan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lumpen-proletariat</td>
<td>20,000,000</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>320,000,000</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


and published a number of essays denouncing the gripping control of patriarchy over women (Witke 1973, pp. 7-31), but he did not explicitly relate women’s oppression to class analysis. The failure of Mao, and other Marxists and revolutionaries before him, to address specifically the issue of women’s class status caused confusion in the practical work of the Party, and sometimes tragic consequences for women.4 Through the land struggle, the CCP was forced gradually to develop a conceptualization of women’s class status and its operational definition.

THE PROTO-FEMINIST APPROACH

The earliest land law promulgated by the Jiangxi soviet government is the Jinggangshan Land Law of December 1928 (Hsiao 1969, pp. 291-93; Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, pp. 361-63). It states that “all men and women, old and young, shall be entitled to equal redistribution,” and denies the private ownership of land after redistribution (Hsiao 1969, p. 291). The Jinggangshan Land Law unambiguously required the indiscriminate confiscation of all land to be redistributed according to the number of population in the area, regardless of age, gender, or class background. All able-bodied persons were required to labor after the

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4 For example, a young woman cadre committed suicide when she was classified as a rich peasant. (Qingnian 1933).
All of the three essential variables relevant to women’s share of land—applicability of class status, individual or family as the unit, and population or labor power as the basis for redistribution—were hotly contended issues among the CCP leadership during the Jiangxi period, although the debate never centered on women. The relevance of class to both confiscation and redistribution was vigorously debated within the CCP even before the establishment of the Jinggangshan base area (Jin 1982). Some Party leaders advocated the confiscation of all land while others favored restricting confiscation to landlords who owned more than a certain amount of land. The Jinggangshan experience made clear the problems posed by indiscriminate confiscation. First, the majority of the population were peasants who owned barely enough land to feed themselves, and they were wary to part with it. These same peasants would be more likely to support the Revolution if they might gain more land without having to give up what they already had. Second, indiscriminate confiscation is inconsistent with the revolutionary ideology of class struggle. These problems led to the promulgation of the second land law at Xingguo in April of 1929 (Hsiao 1969, pp. 293-95; Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, pp. 364-65).

The two laws have different implications for women. While the former requires the confiscation of all land and the redistribution of that land to individuals irrespective of class, the latter calls for the confiscation only of public land and the land of the landlord class, which is to be redistributed to peasants who have little or no land. The Xingguo law does not specify whether the designation of landlord and peasant refers to individuals or to families, and if referring only to the individual, whether family members of landlords are to receive land allotments.

In Jiangxi, as elsewhere in China, legal title of land was traditionally held by the male head of the family, while other members of the family had a claim to support from the land. If the land of the landlord class were to be confiscated, family members of the landlord would be deprived of their means of support. If they then were excluded from the class of peasants who were to receive land, they would be left out in the cold. Given the realities of the Chinese countryside, when the land law

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5 In July 1928, the Sixth CCP Representative Meeting took place in Moscow and decided that the major contradiction in the Chinese countryside was between the tens of thousands of peasants without land or with little land and the class that monopolized land, i.e. the big, medium and small landlords. Therefore, class must be the criterion for confiscation and redistribution (Jin 1982, p. 103). Although the meeting was held before the Jinggangshan Land Law, the results of the meeting and therefore the new directives were not received in Jiangxi until after January 1929 (Jin 1982, p. 104).

6 Within the latter group, the range of acceptable amount varies between thirty mou (approximately five acres) to 200 mou (approximately thirty-three acres).

7 The reluctance of owner/cultivators to support the revolution when the soviets practiced indiscriminate confiscation and redistribution was also observed in other areas (Hunan Shehui 1982, pp. 160-73).
did not specify the criterion for class determination of women, those who belonged to landlord households would share the fate of their male family heads. This ambiguity was corrected by a subsequent land law in February 1930, which stipulated that dependents of landlords might be given suitable allotments of land if they had no other means of subsistence (Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, p. 377). This provision was probably the first formal recognition by the CCP that members of the family were not necessarily of the same class as the head of the family. Although landlords themselves could not receive land allotments, their wives and children could. Indeed, the willingness to distinguish the individual from the family was a major step by the CCP against the traditional feudal patriarchal family.

The Land Law of February 1930 favored women as a group in several other respects. By differentiating the treatment of women from their landlord and anti-revolutionary husbands or fathers, the law made it possible for women to have independent class positions. This independent status benefited women generally. In the Chinese family, women occupied an inferior position and were subordinate to men (Lang 1946, pp. 45-53). The wives and daughters of poor peasants could be considered to have the same or lower class position as their poor peasant husbands or fathers, and those of landlords would be considered to have a class position lower than "landlords." Because a high class position was a liability in the Revolution, it was advantageous for women to be guaranteed as low a classification as possible.

In addition, this Land Law made the use of labor power as a criterion of redistribution much more difficult by subjecting the decision to legal scrutiny. It stipulates that land was to be distributed equally according to population unless in exceptional cases. Only by petition from the village soviet government and by special permission from the district soviet government was land to be distributed by labor power (Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, p. 378). The provision to distribute by population entitled women to receive the same quantity of land as men. Because women's labor, particularly the labor of women with bound feet, often was counted as reduced labor power if it was counted at all (Mao 1971, v. 2, p. 170), distribution by labor power was disadvantageous to women.

Although there is no concrete evidence to suggest that the Land Law of February 1930 was influenced by feminists, it represented feminist interests. Two explanations may be advanced. First, the CCP leadership included many intellectuals, including women, who were deeply committed to gender equality. Their experience in woman-work prior to
this time was limited to urban women. Since the drafters of early land laws had little practical experience, they were guided more by ideology than by practice. The harsh realities of the countryside had not yet forced a compromise of the Party's ideals. Furthermore, land was one of the few guarantees of economic independence for peasant women. Since women were given a chance for the first time to get out of bad marriages, their control of a piece of land provided the necessary material incentive to take the step (Han 1984).

The provisions of the 1930 Land Law that had favorable implications for women were later changed or revised. Existing scholarship has analyzed these revisions in terms of intra-Party struggles over the treatment of the "rich peasant," and has paid no attention to the role that the Woman's Question may have played. I argue that these revisions resulted both from the Party's wish to satisfy the economic need of the peasants and from its recognition that women were not an undifferentiated class. The most significant change was the denial of an independent class status to women.

What were the consequences of implementing the proto-feminist Land Law of 1930? At least three points can be made. Economically, if more persons were to receive land, the amount each received must be reduced. In pre-revolutionary China, the size of family varied with class, and landlord families in general had more members than peasant families. Poor peasants and hired agricultural laborers often did not have the means to marry, while landlords and rich peasants sometimes had more than one wife (Mao 1971-72, v. 2, pp. 185-252). The wealthier classes also had extended families. Thus, adopting the principle of equal distribution of land regardless of class, while retaining the family as the economic unit, would tend to benefit the landlord class. It is interesting to note that Mao has been identified with the equal distribution principle, as opposed to the labor power principle advocated by Li Lisan, primarily because he considered equal distribution more beneficial to poor peasants (Hsiao 1969, p. 19; Zhonggong 1982). I will discuss the implications of the labor-power principle for women later, after suggesting some likely results of various permutations of the principle of equal distribution shown in Table 2.

In Case 1, women are treated as a class, but the family continues to be the economic unit. Women of landlord families are given land and the land is retained within the family. The gain for poor peasant families, including poor peasant women, would be minimal.

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9 A large number of rural investigations conducted by the Land Reform Committee of regional military commissions in the 1940s gave statistics on family size of various classes of the rural population. The positive correlation between class and size of family is observed in every case. For example, see Huadong Nongcun Jingji Ziliao [some materials on rural economy of east China], edited by Huadong Junzheng Weiyuanhui Tudi Graige Weiyuanhui. 3 vols. N.P. 1952.
In Case 2, women are treated according to their men’s class status, and resources of individuals within the family are pulled together as a unit. Women of landlord families do not receive land. However, because poor peasant families would gain, poor peasant women, continuing to be part of the economic family, would therefore also gain.

In Case 3, women are treated as a class, and their land is not part of the family fortune. Women of landlord families receive land but the landlord class is not able to keep its property. Poor peasants would see that the landlord class is destroyed, but that its women are provided a livelihood. Welfare minded poor peasants would support this.

In Case 4, women are treated according to their men’s class status, and their land is their own. Landlord women receive no land, and poor peasant men and women have the most to gain.

Although the 1930 law adopted the equal distribution principle, and individuals were the unit of such distribution, the family was still the unit of production as well as consumption. Using this principle of distribution and allowing women to be treated independently from their husbands’ class label, while retaining the family as the economic unit, was not the best option from the poor peasants’ point of view. The number of persons from landlord families who would be eligible for an allotment of land might be significant in some villages, resulting in a reduction of each peasant’s share to an amount below that needed and expected. This would dampen the peasants’ revolutionary enthusiasm. The Party and the peasants were concerned that the poor obtain as large a share as possible (Zhonggong 1982, pp. 189-90). This could be accomplished by either confiscating more land or by having fewer people share the fruits of struggle, both of which measures were adopted by the CCP. Thus, the decision to deny landlord women a share of land was consistent with Party policy.

Another possible reason to abandon land allotments for women of landlord families relates to the economic activities of the women themselves. Although land was the most important means of production in the countryside, it was not the only one. While women did not own titles to land, some women owned means of production other than land, such as hand looms and spinning wheels. Such small scale household handicraft industries formed a substantial part of village family income (Buck
1937, pp. 289, 297-98; Fan 1950, pp. 12-13; Lo 1935; Zhao 1983), and often determined the line between subsistence and starvation. Their importance as a means of livelihood, though for the most part subsidiary, should not be minimized.

In the Chinese countryside, one could find a variety of looms and wheels that differed in cost and productivity. The quality of the cloth, yarn or socks produced also depended on the type of instrument used. For example, in 1935 it was reported in Jiangsu Province that only women from rich peasant families could afford to buy an iron-wood loom, while middle peasant women could afford a teak-wood loom, and poor peasant women had to settle for an old-fashioned country loom. Only women of landlord families could obtain a western sock-knitter, partly because of its cost, and partly because of their husbands’ connections. The value of products manufactured by each of these instruments differed tremendously. Women from rich peasant families, using the iron-wood loom, wove cloth that would sell for thirty cents per roll; women from middle peasant families, using teak-wood looms, wove a type of cloth that would sell for twenty cents; and women from poor peasant families, using old-fashioned looms, yielded goods valued at only about fifteen cents in an equivalent time (Su 1935, p. 136). In addition, landlord women depended on knitting not to survive, but to obtain dowry and pocket money. They lent their wages or profits to peasants at high rates of interest. On the other hand, peasant women often depended on their income from handicraft industries to survive and perhaps to acquire a small surplus (Su 1935). Even on the criterion of ownership of the means of production, therefore, women could be differentiated along class lines based on the income generated from their own economic activities.

A third probable reason for eliminating the allotment to landlords’ dependents was the identity of interest between family members. While it was true that some peasant women helped landlord women to conceal grain and other property to avoid confiscation (Hongse 1934d; 1934e), it is more common to read about peasant women “speaking bitterness” against landlord families, including their women (Hou 1964; Jiangxisheng Funu 1950; Lianfangjun 1946). Instances of cooperation may indicate some common identity of womanhood, but such identity seems rarely to have transcended class lines. When peasant women shielded landlord women and thereby acted against their class interest, factors other than feminist identity, such as kinship relations, were probably more influential (Zhonggong 1982, p. 320). In fact, it was often reported that landlord women emphasized kinship relations with peasant women when they appealed for help and protection (Hongse 1934a).

A great deal of writing during the Land Revolution paid special attention to the common exploitation of peasant men and women by
landlords and their wives, perhaps to counter the traditional view that gender and kinship solidarities transcended class. The evidence seems in fact to contradict the traditional view. For example, in Henan Province, one of the prerequisites of tenant selection was whether or not the wife of the prospective tenant could provide labor services to the landlord’s family. These services, which included childcare, cooking, cleaning, spinning and weaving, were provided without compensation (Li 1951). In Shandong, female members of tenant families were required to provide sexual services on landlords’ demand (Ji 1952). Tenants were also known to have been forced to mortgage their wives to landlords for two to four years for the explicit purpose of providing children to the landlords (Chen 1972, p. 144; Zhang 1951, p. 26). In the Jiangxi soviet area, women agricultural laborers, in addition to performing field labor, had to be “partial slaves” to the rich peasants, performing all sorts of household work such as cleaning, cooking, and fetching water (Xingguoxian 1930). Thus, both the productive and reproductive labor of poor peasant women was exploited, and this exploitation benefited in different ways both men and women of the landlord and rich peasant families.

Given these circumstances, the peasants were resentful when landlord women were also given an allotment of land after the Uprising, since they were likely to share it with their husbands. In 1931, the Jiangxi Soviet CCP Central Committee criticized the practice of some soviet areas for allotting land to the dependents of landlords in the same way as common peasant women (Chifei 1960, v. 2, pp. 630-31; Zhonghuaminguo 1973, v. 5, pp. 144-45). This may be why local laws in some soviets required that the woman be separated from her landlord husband if she was to receive her allotment (Chifei 1960, v. 3, pp. 927-28). Later in 1933, during the Land Investigation Drive (discussed below), cadres were instructed to find out if landlord dependents received allotments, and if they had, to take them away and redistribute them to poor peasants (Zhonghuaminguo 1973, v. 5, pp. 348-49).

The law that gave landlord women a share of the land had another important social consequence. While interclass marriages involving landlord women and peasant men were very rare before the Uprising or Liberation, there seems to have been a sudden increase of such marriages immediately afterwards (Xinzhongguo Funu 1950, p. 22). No specific statistics are available, but local village reports and popular literature reflect that many landlords and rich peasants tried to marry their daughters or even their wives to middle and poor peasants in order to retain their land and other property (Belden 1970, pp. 197-200; Chen 1972, p. 41; Ding 1952). The continuation of patriarchy allowed men to use

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10 “Uprising” or baodong is a term used by the CCP during the Jiangxi period to refer to the time when the Red Army took control of an area. The term “liberation” or jiefang was used later on.
women to preserve their wealth. This practice led to detailed regulations concerning women of interclass marriages to be discussed below.

**THE FAMILISTIC APPROACH**

The need to satisfy poor peasants' demand for land, and the realization that the landlord and his wife had more interests in common than the landlord woman and peasant woman, led to a different conceptualization of women's class position. This is reflected in the *Regulations of the Jiangxi Soviet Provincial Government for the Confiscation and Redistribution of Land* promulgated between December 1931 and April 1932 (Hsiao 1969, pp. 57-61, 191-98; Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, pp. 464-68). The *Regulations* emphasizes that the wives, daughters-in-law and daughters of landlords should not receive any land in the redistribution. This also applied to those who married poor peasants (Articles 10-11, 14-15). The CCP's decision to specify land allotment rules for landlord women who married out of their class indicates that there must have been a number of these interclass marriages. The importance of this practice and the confusion it has created in land redistribution is reflected in the fact that there was a special “question and answer” item in the newspaper *Red China* (Hongse 1932a; Hsiao 1969, p. 61). Table 3 presents the class positions of married women by their families of orientation and procreation as discerned from the *Regulations*. Several points should be underlined.

Table 3. Women's Class Status by Family Origin and Status of Grooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groom's status</th>
<th>Bride's origin</th>
<th>Landlord/Rich peasant</th>
<th>Middle/Poor peasant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlord/Rich peasant</td>
<td>L/R</td>
<td>L/R</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/Poor peasant</td>
<td>L/R</td>
<td>M/P</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*b Abbreviations: L = Landlord; R = Rich Peasant; M = Middle peasant; P = Poor peasant

First, no change in class position results when women marry men of the same class. Wives of landlords are treated the same as their husbands and are not allotted land (Article 15). Wives of rich peasants are treated

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11 The version that Hsiao used for his translation differs from the Provincial Archives' version in the numbering system. In Hsiao, these Articles are numbered 6-7, and 10-11.
like their rich peasant husbands, in that they are given poor quality land if the rich peasants have not been engaged in anti-revolutionary activities (Article 9). However, for anti-revolutionary rich peasants, although they do not receive the poor land, their wives can, provided they sever relations with their husbands and are not opposed by the masses (Article 3). Here the implication seems to be that a woman who makes a conscious decision to break with her husband should be treated differently, although her class position does not change as a result.

Second, the class position of landlord or rich peasant women is not changed by marriage. This is true whether they marry into middle or poor peasant families or adopted sons-in-law of middle or poor peasant origin (Articles 10 and 11). It was unusual for landlord women to marry outside of their class before the Uprising, and the motives for these marriages after the Uprising therefore were suspect. In some soviet areas, such as Yongxin, and in later land laws, provisions were made to allow such interclass marriages to change the class position of the brides if their marriages occurred before the local Uprising (Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, pp. 524-26, and Zhonghuaminguo 1973 v. 5, p. 87, discussed below). The intent of these regulations was to prevent landlords from using interclass marriages to preserve their property.

Third, no mention is made in the Regulations of the class position of middle/poor peasant women who married outside of their class. This is especially interesting given that in rural areas, young girls, often from poor peasant backgrounds, were married into landlord/rich peasant families at an early age. Apparently, the class position and property rights of these women had not created serious problems for the CCP at this point in the Jiangxi soviet areas. The marriage regulations promulgated in November 1931 specifically forbid the practice of tongyangxi or foster daughter-in-law, and allow an unconditional divorce if requested by the woman. This clearly indicates the sympathetic attitude of the Party toward poor peasant women (Xianggansheng 1931; Zhonghua 1931). Although the Regulations does not specify how the class position of outmarried peasant women is to be determined, it gives some indications that anticipate subsequent specification and elaboration in 1933. Article 12 of the Regulations states that daughters adopted or bought by landlords should never receive allotments of land if their living standard and educational experience were identical to those of the landlords; however, they were to receive allotments of land if they were treated as slaves by their foster parents. Women from poor peasant backgrounds who married landlords were not specifically included in this Article, but later policy (discussed below) indicates that the same criterion, i.e., living standard, was used to determine their class position as well.

12 The version that Hsiao relied on for his translation applies to "children"; the Archives version which I use mentions only "nuer" or "daughter."
The conceptualization of women's class status implied by the Regulations of 1931-32 is more complex than that of previous land laws. Women continue to receive an equal share of land but are no longer treated as an undifferentiated group. For example, those women who benefited from the old social structure, and who therefore enjoyed the result of the exploitation of other men and women, are treated the same as their landlord husbands or fathers. Women of landlord origins continue to be treated as landlords even after they marry out of their class. Since neither duration of marriage nor time of marriage are taken into account by the Regulations, women from landlord families could not rid themselves of the burden of their family status even if they had worked alongside their poor peasant husbands for years. In some cases, peasants were forced by overzealous cadres to divorce their wives of landlord origin (Douzheng 1933). It seems clear that women from rich peasant and landlord backgrounds were bound by the status of their families of orientation.

The 1931-32 Regulations was developed in light of the difficulties encountered in the implementation of the earlier land laws, and as a compromise between proto-feminist ideology and the social realities in the countryside. The rules moved from simple to complex, and from favoring all women towards excluding landlord and rich peasant women, a direction more in tune with the Marxist view that the Woman Question is fundamentally a class question (The Woman Question 1951).

THE SYNTHETIC APPROACH

The land struggle in Jiangxi continued to meet with a number of problems between 1932 and 1933, including the reemergence of the question of class and gender. By this time it was recognized that individuals within a family may have different relations to production and their living conditions may be very dissimilar (Hongse 1933). For individual men, the distinctions between landlord, rich peasant, middle peasant, poor peasant, and hired laborer were relatively clear. Ownership of land and the appropriation of labor power in agricultural work were the basic criteria for class determination. For individual women, however, the distinctions between the classes remained ambiguous. In theory, the same criteria applied equally to men and women, but in practice, the concrete conditions in the countryside simply rendered the theory inapplicable. Women did not own land, nor was it clear how their labor power was perceived. While everyone agreed that men who worked the fields possess labor power, the relationship between type of work and labor power accounting was ambiguous. Mao, for instance, tried to clarify the situation by distinguishing between full labor power and partial labor power. A person is considered to have full labor power if he or she has sufficient
strength to cultivate the land. Those who have partial labor power include persons who tend cattle, cut firewood, cook meals, and do the laundry (Mao 1971-72, v. 2, p. 170). Since these tasks were primarily performed by women, and secondarily by children, it seems reasonable to conclude that many women—and in some areas, most women—like children and the aged, were considered to have only partial labor power. The distinction made between full labor power and partial labor power, which coincided to a large extent with the gender division of labor, seems to be based on the physical requirements of agricultural work. In areas where the majority of women had bound feet, such as Ningdu, this division was clearly not advantageous to women. On the other hand, in certain areas where most women did not have bound feet, such as Yongxin, this distinction would entitle women to receive an equal allotment of land.

These and other problems, aggravated by the scarcity of land for redistribution, led to the Land Investigation Drive in June 1933, which was not intended to protect the middle peasants, but to expose the landlords and rich peasants who had escaped the earlier land struggles (Hsiao 1969, pp. 198-202; Jiangxisheng 1982, v. 3, pp. 477-79). Two important documents, *How to Analyze the Classes* and *Decisions Concerning Some Problems Arising from the Agrarian Struggle*, provided guidelines for correcting past mistakes in class analysis and land redistribution (Hsiao 1969, pp. 254-82; Mao 1971-72, v. 3, pp. 265-68; v. 4, pp. 43-65). These documents, with amendments and additional explanations, were later reissued in 1947 and 1950 to guide the national land reform movement of China (Beijing 1957).

The most significant changes relevant to women are the conceptualization of labor and exploitation and the use of both the individual and the family as units of class analysis. In the 1933 *Decisions* authored by Mao, the previous distinction between full and partial labor power based on physical strength is replaced by a new distinction between essential labor and non-essential labor as applied to individuals, and between labor and supplementary labor as applied to the family. Essential labor means mainly important work in production, such as ploughing, planting, and reaping. It also explicitly includes firewood cutting, load carrying, and other unspecified productive work. Non-essential labor includes helping to weed, helping to plant vegetables, and tending cattle. Clearly, a distinction was being made here between women's labor and the labor of children and the aged. Some tasks performed by women that were previously considered to be partial labor are now considered essential labor. Since essential labor is the dividing line between landlord and rich peasant, the change in the conception of labor is crucial for women. Those who can cultivate land or who perform other essential labor are given labor-land, which is larger than the land distributed according to popula-
tion only (Zhongguo 1958, p. 284). Those women who received laborland reportedly became more enthusiastic in revolutionary work (Yang 1932).

The new conception of labor, which is not solely based on physical strength, has implications both for women and for their families, since the Decisions explicitly uses the family as the unit of class analysis. On the basis of the type of labor its members perform, a family may be classified as engaging in labor, supplementary labor, or no labor. A typical landlord who could show that one member of his family performed essential labor for more than one-third of the year could have his family reclassified out of the category of landlords. Many landlords used this more inclusive definition of essential labor to apply for reclassification to rich peasant or well-to-do middle peasant in order to claim economic and political rights (Cai 1970, pp. 108-10). In the notorious example of Shen-gli County, there originally were 810 landlord households and 766 rich peasant households. During the Land Investigation Drive, zealous poor peasants discovered an additional 196 landlord households and 340 rich peasant ones, or a total of 536 households. But after the 1933 Decisions went into effect, as many as 941 such households managed to change their status upward, which more than offset the gains made during the Drive (Wang 1934). Similar situations were reported in Ruijin, Xijian and Huichang counties (Cai 1970, p. 108; Wang 1934). “Landlords were even counting fetching water and picking vegetables as essential labor” in order to receive a higher and therefore more favorable classification (Wang 1934).

The aggressive manipulation of the 1933 regulations concerning essential and non-essential labor by the landlord and rich peasant classes led to chaos and was at least partially responsible for the replacement of Mao by Zhang Wentian in February 1934. Zhang’s first act after he assumed office was to clarify the definition of essential labor, excluding domestic labor and non-productive labor such as bookkeeping and trade (Wang 1934). He criticized earlier practices as being mechanical, “attempting to replace ‘class struggle’ with ‘class calculation’” (Wang 1934).

The use of labor power as a criterion for land redistribution favored the increase of production. The labor criterion and the definition of essential labor provided additional impetus for greater participation of women in the fields. Both men and women were able to receive more land than they were entitled to on a strict population criterion by showing their ability to cultivate the land. The importance of land as an incentive is underscored by the fact that land was always mentioned as

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13 Note that after the Revolution, class hierarchy is inverted: poor peasants have higher status than middle peasants, and middle peasants have higher status than rich peasants, etc.
the chief reason for women's support for the Revolution. From the CCP's point of view, women's full participation in agricultural work was necessary for the struggle to continue. The shortage of male labor and the prolonged encirclement of the base areas by the Guomindang made it imperative to mobilize women to engage in all aspects of agriculture (Shengwei 1933; Zhonghuaminguo 1973, v. 5, pp. 385-86). According to reports in Red China, a drive to teach women to perform essential labor in agriculture was launched simultaneously in different villages, and within a few months women who did not have bound feet were engaging in productive agricultural activities that they had not participated in before (Hongse 1934b; 1934c; 1934f). Even women with bound feet were learning more agricultural work (Shengwei 1934). In Caixi District, for example, it was reported that there were 1991 women between the ages of sixteen and fifty-six with labor power, whereas only 1095 of the men in that age bracket had labor power. Furthermore, after the training period, women who knew how to till and plough increased from 400 to 733 (Hongse 1934b). Similar results were reported for Ruijin, Xingguo and other districts and counties (Chen Yi 1981, pp. 363-68; Hongse 1934c; 1934f).

The operational definition of women's class status reflected in the Decisions also changed the effect of interclass marriages on women's class position. Although both the 1932 Regulations and the 1933 Decisions do not provide that marriage itself is sufficient to change a person's class standing, they use different factors in determining the class status of individuals in interclass marriages. The 1932 Regulations is more simplistic and considers "class origin" as the only relevant criterion. In contrast, the 1933 Decisions based the determination on three separate factors: time when the interclass marriage took place, the woman's class status before marriage or her class origin, and the living or labor condition of the woman after marriage (Hsiao 1969, pp. 277-79; Mao 1971-72, v. 4, p. 60). Table 4 summarizes these criteria with their cross-classifications. While the Party did not make explicit their reasons for the change from a simple, albeit ambiguous rule, to a complex set of conditions, I surmise that their reasons may be found in the concrete situations of the Chinese countryside.

The 1932 Regulations prohibits women of landlord origin from receiving land allotments even if they had married poor peasants, leaving unspecified the treatment of women of poor peasant backgrounds who married landlords. This oversight, whether deliberate or unconscious, was corrected in the 1933 Decisions. Table 4 indicates the particular conditions under which a poor peasant woman may lose her status as a result of outclass marriage. In order to understand why these specifications were introduced, we must first examine how these outclass marriages had come about.
### Table 4. Class Status of Women Resulting from Outmarriages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Origin of Bride</th>
<th>Contributed Labor</th>
<th>Didn’t</th>
<th>Contributed Labor</th>
<th>Didn’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L/R</td>
<td>P/W^b</td>
<td>L/R</td>
<td>P/W^c</td>
<td>L/R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/W</td>
<td>P/W</td>
<td>L/R^d</td>
<td>P/W</td>
<td>P/W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^a Based on Mao, Zedong, Guanyu tudi douzheng zhong yixie wenti de jueding [Decisions Concerning Some Problems Arising from the Agrarian Struggle]. Pp. 43-64, in Mao 1971-72, v. 4.

Abbreviations: L = Landlord; R = Rich peasant; P = Poor peasant; W = Worker

^b Contributed a minimum of one year’s labor

^c Contributed a minimum of five years’ labor

^d At least five years without contributing labor

Before the Revolution, interclass marriages between women of poor peasant background and men of rich peasant and landlord families occurred under one of two conditions: 1) poor peasant families were forced to sell their female members to rich peasant and landlord families as concubines or child-brides in order to survive, and landlords and rich peasants bought them in order to have heirs and/or to possess their labor power (Jiangxisheng Funu 1950, p. 21; Lo 1935, p. 20); and 2) landlords who could not find suitable mates for their crippled or diseased sons often had them marry women from poor families (Xinzhongguo Funu 1950, p. 22). In a majority of these cases, the married women were treated badly by their families of procreation, and their position was no improvement from their pre-marital days. Instead of living a life similar to that of their husbands or fathers, they were oppressed and exploited as poor peasants, or even worse, as virtual slaves (Jiangxisheng Funu 1950, pp. 20-21; Lo 1935, p. 20). The act of marriage, therefore, did not actually change their original class position. To classify them as landlords or rich peasants would be a tremendous distortion of reality.

On the other hand, in some cases the act of marriage did bring about a change in the status of women from poor peasant origins. Regardless of the manner under which the women were incorporated into the households of the landlords, some women were not required to labor in the fields after their marriage and enjoyed the same living standard as their husbands (Xinzhongguo Funu 1950, p. 22). Since the act of interclass marriage changed the class positions of some poor peasant women but
not others, it alone could not constitute a sufficient condition for class
determination. Instead, life-style or living condition—that is, whether or
not the woman performed labor—was used as the major determining cri-
teration for the class position of poor peasant women who married outside
of their class.

What about landlord women who married poor peasant men? This
type of interclass marriage must have been extremely rare before the
Uprising. One possible circumstance in which this might occur involved
the adoption of a son-in-law. I suspect that adoption of sons-in-law was
very uncommon and that even when it was practiced, it may not have
involved couples from disparate classes. However, as the Uprising was
approaching, landlords may have used this method hoping to retain their
property. For the same reason, landlords may have voluntarily married
their daughters to poor peasants. Given the importance of family ties in
rural China, this practice would be quite rational on the part of the land-
lord. Some poor peasants may have been attracted to such marriages,
also hoping for some gains. The CCP apparently took this view and
designed a policy not to benefit landlords who tried to evade “revolution-
ary justice” by marrying their women off to poor peasants.

As we can see from Table 4, of the eight interclass combinations,
migration resulted in a change in women’s class position in only three
instances, all of which were due to the labor factor. Thus, if landlord
women married poor peasant men, their class status would change to
poor peasant only if they provided labor for a minimum period of one
year. Similarly, poor peasant women who married landlord men would
change their class status to landlord women only if they did not provide
labor for at least five years. The policy favored women of peasant origin
over women of landlord origin in that while the former were not consid-
ered to have lost their peasantry status unless they had lived a life of
leisure for five years, the latter could gain peasant status only by working
for at least one year. And if the marriage was contracted after the Upris-
ing, it would take a landlord woman at least five years of labor to gain
peasant status. Since a peasant status was desired, individuals benefited
when it was more difficult to lose and less difficult to gain.

The difference in treatment of landlord women who married outside
of their class before and after the Uprising is worth examining. Why was
a longer period of demonstrated labor required to change the landlord
woman’s class status if she were married after the Uprising? Two expla-
nations may be advanced. First, as discussed above, landlord men may
have been attempting to retain their property by marrying their daugh-
ters into a higher class. This motive only made sense after the Uprising,
however, since in most places landlords could not have anticipated the
Land Revolution that followed the seizure of political power. The Deci-
sions punished landlords and removed the incentive for such opportunis-
tic manipulation of women, by making it harder for women to change their status and thereby benefit their family of orientation. Second, the Party, concerned with the class purity and revolutionary activism of the poor peasants, may simply have wanted to discourage poor peasant men from marrying landlord women after the Uprising, particularly since there was no demographic necessity for them to do so. Since marriages between landlord women and poor peasant men would not by law result in any economic or political gain for either partner, such marriages would be unlikely to occur. While I have not found cases in the Jiangxi period to substantiate my view, observers and writers during later land reform movements have reported cases where poor peasant men rejected marriage offers from landlords who hoped to be treated leniently due to kinship ties (Belden 1970, p. 198; Ding 1952; Zhou 1961). In any case, it is clear that the Party tried to discourage interclass marriages (Shengwei 1933) by emphasizing the significance of class struggle and by allowing unconditional divorce of couples who were from different classes (Xianggansheng 1931). In some areas, couples were forced to divorce each other on account of class incompatibility (Fang 1980, p. 87). The Party, concerned about the purity of the revolutionary class, was worried that poor peasants might shift their class interest or lose their revolutionary zeal as a result of marrying outside of their class. This possibility was often the theme of literary writings (Ding 1952).

The degree of specificity contained in the Decisions reflects the deep concerns of the Party about the operational definition of class and about the application of class analysis to individual men and women. Mao emphasized that class analysis must be carefully carried out because “it is the instance that determines an individual’s life or death” (Zhonggong 1982, p. 333). Trying to lessen the tenacious patriarchal control over individuals by their families, particularly but not exclusively over women, the Party emphasized that individuals would share in the fruits of struggle based on their own class status. That status has two components: family status, i.e., class origin, and individual position. While the individual’s position is primarily determined by his or her labor, the status of the family is defined by an assessment of the collective as a whole. The importance of the class status of one’s family decreased during the Jiangxi soviet period. In fact, the tendency to deemphasize class origin in determining present class status was a subject of major controversy during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. During that period, class background became the single most important criterion in determining opportunities in education and occupation.

Beginning in 1979, class origin based on family status became less relevant. Almost forty years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, former landlords have either died or have been deprived of economic and political power for so long as to be of little
consequence. However, the question of when class origin ceases to be a relevant factor in determining a person's thought and behavior, and thus in the treatment of an individual under law, has been a significant concern of the Chinese leadership throughout the history of the CCP (Kraus 1981; Schram 1984).

The aim of the Land Revolution was not simply the redistribution of land on a more egalitarian basis, but the development of production to support the revolutionary struggle. The Party leadership saw collectivization as the only solution to China's agrarian problems. Because arable land was limited, redistribution on an individual basis meant that each rural resident, regardless of gender or age, had an equally small share of land. If each were to cultivate that land individually, productivity would not increase. Furthermore, in reality it was not possible for each individual to be on his or her own because there were insufficient farm implements and draught animals to guarantee ownership for everyone. In addition, some peasants had more strength and knowledge about farming than others, which would result in uneven productivity and in the eventual revival of the old class structure. Therefore, although land redistribution by law was to be on an individual basis, in reality, the household was the unit of production, and land was owned in common by individuals within the household. Land deeds in many areas issued after the Land Revolution showed the names of all members of the family to indicate that each owned a share of the land. Theoretically, when family members left the household, they would take that share with them (Zhonghua 1934). But clearly, this was not easy to implement. Reports abound of violations of soviet marriage laws that provide for women to take their share of the land with them upon divorce (Hongse 1932b). One is led to conclude that as long as the economy is household-based, the remnants of patriarchy will continue to operate, making it difficult if not impossible to give women a class identity independent of their men. This reality undercuts the importance of distributing land to women who are deeply anchored in patriarchal families.

Since the Jiangxi soviets were under CCP control for only a short time, these post-Land Revolution problems were not clearly understood, nor were they resolved. After the People's Republic of China was established and Land Reform was completed throughout China, a host of these problems surfaced. Many women appealed to the courts concerning land disposition after their marriages and divorces, and both men and women brought inheritance cases to court (Beijing 1957, pp. 65-68). These problems, having both economic and social implications, must have contributed to the Party's decision to move away from a household-

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14 During the Jiangxi period, the term "tudi geming" or Land Revolution was used to refer to the process of land confiscation and redistribution, but the term "tudi gaige" or Land Reform was used to refer to the same process carried out in the 40s and 50s.
based economy towards collectivization in 1957 shortly after the completion of the Land Reform.

**CONCLUSION**

In China as in other Socialist countries, class status determines to a large extent the allocation of economic opportunities and political rights. It is especially significant during revolutionary upheavals, when political actions are based on perceived class interests and potential class alliances. The success of the revolution, therefore, hinges on class analysis. This article traces and interprets the history of one such analysis, that of women’s class status. The Chinese experience demonstrates that class analysis requires more than a mechanical application of a set of predetermined criteria derived from a specific theoretical orientation. It depends instead on an understanding of the complex realities of individual and family within a matrix of class and gender relationships involving ownership, labor, and exploitation. Housework, for example, cannot be included or excluded as a criterion of class simply on the basis of theoretical analysis. In the Chinese case studied here, class analysis also involved political factors such as support for the revolution or counter-revolution, and economic factors such as the scarcity of land and resources.

The three approaches to gender and class analysis reflected in the Chinese land laws parallel the different approaches put forward by feminist activists in the West. The proto-feminist approach sees women as an oppressed class, deprived of control over the means of production and reproduction, their labor expropriated by men within a system of patriarchy (Firestone 1970). The familistic approach ignores to a large extent the inequality within patriarchy. It focuses instead upon women’s class status and concludes that women of different classes have different interests (Guettel 1974). The synthesis of these two approaches takes into account both gender inequality and class exploitation by focusing on the individual woman’s specific role in the social structure, including her relations to the mode of production and reproduction. Those who argue for the third position do not believe either Marxism or feminism, taken alone, to be adequate in dealing with the gender-class dilemma. These theorists draw upon both Marxist and feminist perspectives in their analysis (Hamilton 1978). However, Western theorists have had no opportunity to benefit from practice, that is, to test the validity of an approach by examining its concrete consequences. The Chinese experience, despite its unique historical and social features, can provide Western Marxists some clues to the possible consequences of their theoretical position.

Traditional Marxist arguments treat class relations as relations of production and deny that family and domestic relations can be a locus of
class struggle. One consequence of such a perspective is that women are not recognized as having a class identity as women (Stolcke 1981, p. 46). Thus, in response, early feminist theorists attempted to conceptualize women’s domestic subordination in political and economic terms, analyzing women’s direct exploitation by capital through their social responsibility for unpaid domestic labor. This analysis still gives priority to a class structure based on wage labor. Feminists today challenge this Marxist preoccupation, emphasizing that women’s unpaid domestic labor reproduces the working class as a class and is necessary to the existence of wage labor (Sacks 1988, pp. 4-6). This clearly is a position that the CCP did not envision, or if it did, did not espouse. In its most radical vision, the CCP saw family and domestic relations subordinated to relations of production as characterized by socialized agricultural or wage labor. Once women come to see their collective role as reproducers of the class structure, their confrontation with the State is likely to include a broader spectrum of issues. As Karen Sacks explains, this is why “women seem more likely to see class struggle more broadly than men” and “have a more radical vision of the scope of necessary social change” (1988, p. 11).

As a life history of revolution, the Chinese experience reveals the problems of translating revolutionary ideals into policies and of implementing those policies through law. By definition, revolutions involve deliberate changes in values. Traditional values and the laws that embody those values must be swept away, and new laws must take their place to reflect the values of the new regime. As this process goes forward, the revolutionaries face painful contradictions between their revolutionary vision and the need to embed that vision in specific workable laws. In the case under study, the conflict between patriarchal ideology and gender equality accounts for the ambiguity in the Party’s analysis of women’s class position. Revolutionary legal programs must also mediate between current public interests and a projected future state of society. They therefore sometimes must run counter to people’s immediate self-interests. Legal policies designed to implement ideals without regard for these self-interests are likely to be resisted. Therefore, when a new revolutionary regime struggles to frame legal policies, it is likely to choose those that are in the immediate self-interest of the vast majority, and on that foundation to build support for their regime. The alternatives include 1) adopting a phase of totalitarian rule; 2) following a process of revisionism; or 3) engaging in a dialectical progression that involves continuous swings in legal policy. Each approach carries its own costs, and revolutionary dreams often are dimmed in the process.

Chinese land reform, while illustrating the advantages of the third approach, also reveals two of its problems: its instability and tendency toward patchwork remedies. In addition, the Chinese case illustrates
how adoption of a legal policy is likely to have unanticipated consequences in other areas. For example, protecting middle peasants in the Land Revolution complicated struggles for gender equality, and treating women as individuals and giving them an allotment of land resulted in interclass marriages. These unanticipated consequences were due to the contradiction between a legal system that treated the individual as a unit of society and an economic system that made the household the unit. Unanticipated consequences also resulted from favoring the family of procreation when the links with the family of orientation remained strong. Purposeful change cannot ignore either economic realities or the objective social relations of society.

A final implication can be drawn from the Chinese case: despite the efforts, or perhaps lack of efforts, of the Chinese Communist Party, the household-based economy and the remnants of patriarchal ideology combined to allow husbands and fathers to manipulate women both to improve their own situations and to subvert the Party's stated goal to transform the basis of women's class status. The Party was unable to create a legal structure in which a woman's class status would be independent of the family. It seems clear that women cannot have an independent class status within a household-based economy under patriarchy, and any artificial manipulation of class criterion by formalistic legal definitions will be unlikely to succeed.

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