

## Chin Sung-ts'en's *A Tocsin For Women*: The Dextrous Merger of Radicalism and Conservatism in Feminism of the Early Twentieth Century

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In a 1979 essay on women activists in the T'ung-meng hui period Lin Wei-hung wrote that the significance of women's contributions to the social and political revolutions of the time were not regarded with due seriousness by either their contemporaries or later historians.<sup>①</sup> Despite the very prominent role played by women in all aspects of public life, including participation in education, military affairs, health, publishing and politics women were denied the basic right to vote in both the 1912 Provisional Constitution of the Republic and the reorganized Kuo-min tang

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① Lin Wei-hung, "T'ung-meng hui shih-tai nü ke-ming chih-shih de huo-tung," *Chung-kuo fu-nü shih lun-chi*, Pao Chia-lin (ed.) (1979; Taipei: Tao-hsiang chu-pan she, 1992), p. 296.

platform for the first elections.<sup>②</sup> The conservatism of the vast majority of the politically active male population is clear from this record, but a feature that remains less obvious is how this conservatism was rationalised by the nationalists and democrats who were at the forefront of the Hsin-hai revolution and who formed the basis of the new Republican government. In this article I will examine a radical treatise on women's rights, Chin Sung-ts'en's 1903 *A Tocsin for Women (Nü-chieh chung)*, in an attempt to excavate the conservative base upon which the social radicalism of this period was founded. Chang Yü-fa has pointed out the representative value of this text to discussions of social reform of this period by describing this treatise as comprising "all the important contemporary ideas on women's rights."<sup>③</sup> It will become apparent that *A Tocsin for Women* is imbued at the most fundamental level with a vision of women's role in society that conflicts with its more radical aspirations. The failure of the new Republic to include women as equal citizens despite a vocal women's movement, supported by figures such as Hu Han-min, can be accounted

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② For a summary of the tribulations of the women's suffrage movement see Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution 1850-1950*, Joshua A. Fogel (ed.) (Stanford: California University Press, 1989), pp. 80-92; Roxane Witke, "Woman as Politician in China of the 1920s," in Marilyn Young (ed.), *Women in China*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, no. 15 (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies University of Michigan, 1973), pp. 33-47; Li Yu-ning, "Sun Yat-sen and Women's Transformation," *Chinese Studies in History* (Summer, 1988), pp. 58-78. For a brief summary of the roles women played see Shen Chih, "Hsin-hai ke-ming shih-ch'i te nü chih-shi fen-tzu," *Shanghai she-hui k'e-hsueh yuan hsueh-shu chi-k'an*, 4 (1991), pp. 57-66.

③ Chang Yü-fa, "Women-A New Social Force," *Chinese Studies in History* (Winter, 1977-1978), p. 33. Chiang Yung-ching has also described the treatise as being representative of contemporaneous sentiments about women's rights saying that it "incorporated the more important of the contemporary ideas concerning women's rights." Chiang Yung-ching, "Hu Han-min's Ideas on Women's Rights and His Achievements," *Chinese Studies in History* (Summer, 1977), p. 38.

for in the ambiguity of the radicalism of the revolutionary years.<sup>④</sup> It is this co-mingling of radicalism and conservatism in the one representative text that will be explicated in this current article.

That *A Tocsin For Women* contains contradictory discourses regarding women's position in society is not surprising since ideological systems are necessarily multifaceted and moreover, interplay between such inherent contradictions ensures a text's flexibility. Thus, while not intending to deny the considerable value of this work to the emancipation of women in the twentieth century, this article will elucidate the conservative discourse in *A Tocsin For Women* as a tool with which to explain the failure of the 1911 revolution to realise the hopes of many of its female participants.

### *A Tocsin For Women* and Chin Sung-ts'en.

The full text of *A Tocsin For Women* was presumed to be lost for many years but recently Professor Li Yu-ning discovered a copy and presented her analysis of it to the Academia Sinica's conference "Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History" in January of 1992. Professor Li has generously let me view a copy of the text for the writing of this article. The rediscovery of such an important text will undoubtedly have a large impact on studies of women in China's past.

Although my primary concern rests with the text and not its author, I will include a brief recounting of Professor Li's more thorough narration of Chin's life as background. Chin Sung-ts'en was born in 1874 in Chiang-su and received a traditional education based on the *Ch'iu-ching*. Chin gradually became more and more involved in reform and revolutionary movements and became increasingly concerned about the importance of

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④ See Li Yu-ning, "Sun Yat-sen," pp. 64-67 for some of the early ambiguity in the debate around women's suffrage within the T'ung-meng Hui.

education to the modernization of society. He began writing a novel of social criticism, *Nieh-hai hua*, and this was later completed by Tseng P'u.<sup>⑤</sup> After the success of the 1911 revolution Chin assumed numerous educational and administrative posts, survived in straitened circumstances through the anti-Japanese war and died in January of 1947. Chin continued to write on pressing issues concerning China's modernization throughout his life but the 1903 *A Tocsin For Women* remains his primary comprehensive piece on women's place in strengthening China.<sup>⑥</sup>

*A Tocsin For Women* was published by Shang-hai's Ta-t'ung shu-chü, is eighty-seven pages long and divided into nine chapters including an introduction and conclusion. There are three prefaces written by supportive women: Mesdames Lin, Huang and Yang. Its table of contents reveals a book of considerable breadth: Women's morality, women's conduct, women's ability, methods for teaching women, women's rights, women's political participation, and a discussion of the evolution of marriage. *A Tocsin For Women* is first and foremost a call to women to participate in the overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty and is a manual of instruction for women on how to best become personally involved in national affairs.

Reflecting the radical trends of the times, *A Tocsin For Women* advocated freedom in choice of marriage partner, and stressed the importance of love in marriage. It asserted the rights of women to structured schooling, overseas training and travel. *A Tocsin For Women* called for the emergence of a new, strong, politically active Chinese woman who

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⑤ See Peter Li's entry for Tseng P'u in W.H. Nienhauser ed. *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1986), p.803.

⑥ A more detailed summary of Chin's life and deeds can be found in Li Yu-ning's "Nü-chieh chung yu Chung-hua nü-hsing de hsien-tai hua," in Academia Sinica Modern History Institute (eds), *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History: Part Two* (Taipei: Modern History Institute, 1992), pp. 1055-82.



would assume the grave responsibilities of nation strengthening so desperately needed by China at the time. Chin envisaged that women would participate in every aspect of the future democratic government filling posts ranging from President to Congress member. He also noted that governments in Europe and America were struggling to come to terms with the demands by women for the right to participate in the political process and described the women's problems of the twentieth century as being essentially related to political affairs.<sup>⑦</sup> Chin's basic premise was that the potential for virtue and knowledge were bestowed equally upon men and women and, given equality of opportunity, women would demonstrate this point in revolutionary action. A firm advocate of education's prominent place in the transformation of society, Chin regarded it as important that women be trained to participate in national affairs alongside their menfolk. Chin saw that China's women were ill prepared for such demands because their training was limited to the perpetuation of techniques for preserving chastity and purity. The breadth of Chin's scheme is described by Li Yu-ning's statement that Chin was a "severe critic of the culture, society, and political system of traditional China."<sup>⑧</sup> Chin demanded change in the individual, the family and the larger social organs of government in *A Tocsin for Women*. In these respects Chin can be considered a person of great vision and representative of a number of men and women of the time who similarly called for radical action in the face of major social uncertainty.

Explanations of the progressive features of Chin's thought, are not however the main concern of this article since other scholars have discussed these points in earlier work.<sup>⑨</sup> The features of Chin's work that

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⑦ Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung* (Shang-hai: Ta-t'ung shu-chü, 1903), pp. 56-57.

⑧ Li Yu-ning, "Nü-chieh chung yu Chung-hua nü-hsing," p. 1071.

⑨ Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, pp. 57-59; Ch'en Tong-yuan, *Chung-kuo fu-nü sheng-huo shih* (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1986), pp. 329-40; Li Yu-ning,

remain undisclosed are those which deal with the contradictory aspects of social change and the inevitable ambiguities in the narrative discourse promoting social change. The main contradictions appear in the unstated attitudes invoked by the work and in the fundamental goals of the work. It is these contradictions that I seek to excavate in a bid to partly explain why women were so easily excluded from the early Republican political order.

### Women's Rights: A Tangential Interest

The most basic contradiction within *A Tocsin For Women* that restrains its radical feminism rests with its *raison d'être*. It is primarily a treatise which "calls for women to rouse themselves and devote themselves entirely to the [anti-Ch'ing] revolution." The advocacy of women's rights was instrumental to this overriding bid for national salvation but assumed a subordinate and supportive role. This "incidental" and functional invocation of women's rights necessarily places it in a complex position within broad bids for social change. Ch'en Tung-yuan notes this secondary position of women's rights in his statement "*A Tocsin for Women* is a book that calls for women to participate in the revolution but it also has extremely deep insights into the notion of equality in power sharing between the sexes."<sup>10</sup> In a symbiotic relationship with the anti-Ch'ing movement prior to revolutionary success, women's rights fail to enter the mainstream after revolutionary success. The marriage of convenience between women's rights and national salvation transforms after 1911 to confirm that the advocacy of women's rights remains the "radical" and

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"*Nü-chieh chung yu Chung-hua nü-hsing*," pp. 1055-82; Pao Chia-lin, "Hsin-hai ke-ming shih-ch'i de fu-nü si-hsiang," in Pao Chialin (ed.), *Chung-kuo fu-nü shih lun-chi* (Taipei: Taohsiang ch'u-pan-she, 1992), pp. 266-95.

<sup>10</sup> Ch'en Tung-yuan, *Chung-kuo fu-nü*, p. 329.

subversive partner, despite the normalization of Republican values.

The text of *A Tocsin For Women* reflects the fragile, subordinate and dispensable nature of women's rights within the overriding discourse of national salvation and humanism in a multitude of ways. The advocacy of women's rights was perceived as having no legitimate, sustainable place outside of the current movement for democratisation. Chin's introduction declares that "Democracy and women's rights are interconnected in their origins and cannot be restrained" and he proceeds to urge the women of China to become involved in the revolution not only for the sake of the millions of women in China, but also for the progress of the entire Chinese population.<sup>⑪</sup> Thus fighting for women's rights became the revolutionary responsibility of women who were concerned about national salvation. Granted such selfless, broad motivation, the call for women's rights undoubtedly gained a credibility it would otherwise have been denied. Indeed, credibility was denied the women's movement after "national salvation" was achieved.

However, while the nexus between national and women's liberation did indeed grant such "partial" demands as women's rights a certain "credibility," it simultaneously asserted a dependency relationship that need not necessarily have existed. Women are the "slaves of slaves" according to Chin.<sup>⑫</sup> Men are slaves to an unjust social system and women slaves to men. In fact the material nature of these two types of "slavery" are identifiably discreet and can be addressed quite separately on a political arena. Women's rights could have been strengthened under the Imperial system where democracy had no place and indeed, this would have entailed reclaiming for women some of the social rights they had access to in previous periods of China's Imperial past. The perceived inevitability

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⑪ Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 3.

⑫ Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 35.

and immutability of the relationship between the movements for democracy and the movement for women's rights thereby had the effect of inhibiting the legitimacy of, indeed denying the possibility of, women's rights apart from the so called "human rights" or "Han rights" which became more accurately synonymous with the partial rights of upper-middle class men.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the reasons why many men regarded women as being ineligible for voting rights could have been used to justify a range of discriminatory social or political practices regardless of the system of government. Chin lists these reasons as being (1) Men are responsible for matters external to the household and women are responsible for domestic affairs. Any disruption to this pattern will cause a national catastrophe. (2) The qualities required of a citizen are manly attributes such as the ability to make a stand alone. Where these exist in a woman she is the exception and not the norm. (3) Women are naturally emotional and unstable. (4) None of the nations in Europe and America have given women equal political rights.<sup>14</sup> Chin presented these views in opposition to his own and would have disagreed with the notions of essential sexual difference in relation to women's abilities to govern but, by insisting upon their interdependency, the specificity of women's oppression is ignored. The appearance of the arguments listed above in regards to issue of women's right to vote is linked more to male concerns about maintaining patriarchal structures than it does with the need for an effective democracy.

Recognition of the importance of maintaining a separate and strong women's movement apart from the anti-Ch'ing democracy movement did exist in a Chinese women's group established in Tokyo in 1907- "The Society for the Reinstatement of Women's Rights." Peter Zarrow notes

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<sup>13</sup> Chilla Bulbeck discusses this contradiction between feminist agendas and those of other political organizations in her volume *One World Women's Movement* (London: Pluto Press, 1988), pp. 116-25.

<sup>14</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, pp. 58-59.

that "until 1907 virtually all Chinese feminism was nationalistic" and traces the birth of an independent feminist movement to the birth of this Chinese anarchist movement.<sup>15</sup> This association formed around Ho Chen, and took as its guiding principle the phrase "Strive to change age-old customs that honor men and belittle women" revealing that its prime focus of attention is sexual oppression of women by men. The rules the society proclaimed included the exhortations that members should "Never rely on the government. Never follow the orders of men." Moreover, members of the "Society for the Reinstatement of Women's Rights" established themselves as active interventionists in cases of physical or mental abuse of women.<sup>16</sup> Zarrow explains that anarcho-feminism recognised that "Women were uniquely oppressed—half of society left out because of its gender—but not oppressed in unique ways. The roots of oppression lay in the unfair economic system."<sup>17</sup> The nationalist-feminists, like Chin, saw women's liberation as evolving as a logical consequence of reclaiming China from the Manchus through the establishment of a democracy. The existence of the anarcho-feminist group, who perceived the importance of seeking sexual equality regardless of the nature of the national government, thereby contrasts with the more general appeal of the "moderate" position advocated by *A Tocsin For Women*. Indeed, Zarrow explains that Ho Chen was disliked by male commentators and mistrusted for her influence over her husband, the revolutionary Liu Shih-p'ei.<sup>18</sup> Clearly her views were too radical for many revolutionaries.

Later still, when the Republican government's exclusion of women from participation became firmly established, accompanied by the banning

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Zarrow, "He Zhen and Anarcho-feminism in China," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4 (November, 1988), p. 796.

<sup>16</sup> Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, pp. 65–66.

<sup>17</sup> Zarrow, "He Zhen," p. 802.

<sup>18</sup> Zarrow, "He Zhen," p. 800.

of the women's electoral lobby, the women's press indicates a shift in focus away from the supportive comradery with the anti-Manchu democracy of their men-folk towards a comradery with the international suffragettes movement. Ch'en Wan-chen's article in *Fu-nü chou-pao* titled "A Brief History of the Chinese Women's Movement" provides a circumspect summary of the betrayal of women's interests by the Republican leadership and argues for a bonding with other women's movements around the world by Chinese participation in international suffrage conferences.<sup>19</sup> Magazines provided women with surveys of the progress women had made in other nations as encouragement. Notions of separate spheres of political concerns and separate interests in social issues, between men and women, was developing.<sup>20</sup> This shift in mood contrasts dramatically with the sentiment found in *A Tocsin For Women* imbued, as it is, with the male democrats' subtle patronage of the women's movement. Clearly, Chin can not be held to task for not predicting the future, and one cannot doubt the sincerity of the intentions expressed in the treatise but as will become clear throughout the course of this article the subtext, gaps and silences of the text suggest the subordinate, dispensable nature of the women's movement.

## Useless Women

*A Tocsin For Women's* debt to the sentiments of the reformers of the 1890s is clear in respect to its view that women were one of the

<sup>19</sup> Ch'eng Wan-chen, "Chung-kuo fu-nü yun-tong de lue-shih" Reprinted in *Nü-chieh wen-hsueh tu-pen: ti yi ce* (Shang-hai: Hsin wen-hua shu she, 1945), pp. 129-33.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Li San-wu's essay "Fu-nü ts'an-cheng yun-tung yan-chiu." Reprinted in *Nü-chieh wen-hsueh tu-pen: ti yi ce*, pp. 143-87. Here Li introduces readers to works of Wollstonecraft and other Western feminists as well as the progress of the Suffragettes movement in places as distant as Queensland and Nicaragua.

major impediments to the development of a strong and progressive China. Women as idle, dependent consumers of male production were causing China's decline, according to K'ang Yu-wei's viewpoint.<sup>21</sup> Catherine Gipoulon summarises the position of the 1890s reformers with regard to women as being "They believed that this process of [China's] modernization could only come about by the 'modernization' of Chinese women. China's weakness was the weakness of its women."<sup>22</sup> This criticism of women's contribution to society is reiterated in *A Tocsin For Women*.

The text and its prefaces are imbued with a censorious tone that judge women by a social standard that was accessible only to men. The effect is one where women are being cajoled into action, reprimanded for previous failures to act and moreover, had their existing skills denigrated. Partial responsibility for the current chaotic state of China is placed at the feet of women who, as mothers, have failed as the nation's teachers. The eulogies to motherhood and the isolation of women into their "mothers of future citizens" role carries with it the disdain and loathing of mothers who are also the mothers of the opposition as well as establishing a matrix whereby women are invoked, not as citizens, but as their mothers.<sup>23</sup> A major thrust of Chin Sung-ts'en's educational goals was to engender women with the abilities to train the men of the future in a manner that would strengthen China and to build and strengthen the physical health of

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<sup>21</sup> Zarrow, "He Zhen," pp. 797-98.

<sup>22</sup> Catherine Gipoulon, "The Emergence of Women in Politics in China, 1898-1927," *Chinese Studies in History* (Winter, 1989-1990), p. 47. See also the many comments made by women themselves in journals such as *Nü-hsüeh pao* cited by Charlotte L. Beahan in her article "Feminism and Nationalism in the Chinese Women's Press, 1902-1911," *Modern China*, vol. 1, no. 4 (October, 1975), pp. 383-84. Elisabeth Croll also describes this syndrome in her chapter "New Expectations: Patriotism and the Vote," in *Feminism and Socialism in China*, by Elisabeth Croll (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 45-79.

<sup>23</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 3.

women so that the children they give birth to will be physically healthy.<sup>24</sup> This goal, on the one hand is noble in its concern for the education of women, but on the other is disdainful of women's efforts and dextrously transferring blame for the weak state of China back onto women.

This trend of thought is far from unique because both the concerned literati of the late Ming and the 1890 reformers invoked a similar discourse on women's education and the responsibility women have for social decline. Dorothy Ko points out that Hsia Shu-fang, author of the *Nü-ching hsü*, exhorted women to "forsake their luxurious habits and cultivate their virtues [by reading the precepts] so as to be rearers of good sons" because "rebels and bandits descended from Heaven, but were given birth to by women."<sup>25</sup> Chiang Yung-ching similarly shows how the view that women's education was important to strengthening the nation was fundamental to Liang Ch'i-chao's proposed reforms. Women's schools were envisaged to help "cultivate women to be good wives and virtuous mothers, but not the traditional type.... The reformers wanted women to be able to assume maternal responsibilities. They believed that 'the rectification of the people's hearts and the multiplication of men of talents' had to begin with child education, that the foundation of child education rested on maternal education, and that the foundation of maternal education rested on women's education."<sup>26</sup>

Chin's *A Tocsin For Women* also argues that the traditional edu-

<sup>24</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p.45. Charlotte Beahan points out that women's "education was not justified as an inherent right of women, but as an absolute necessity for the good of the nation as a whole." Beahan, "Feminism and Nationalism," p. 385.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy Ko, "Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women's Culture," *Late Imperial China*, vol. 13, no.1 (June, 1992), p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Chiang Yung-ching, "Hu Han-min's Ideas," p. 35. The Chinese version of this article appeared in Li Yu-ning and Chang Yü-fa (eds), *Chung-kuo fu-nü shih lun- wen chi* (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1981), pp. 319-42.



cational principles for women were responsible for the decrepit state of women's personalities and abilities declaring that the major concern of the previous education system for women was the development of personal virtue and not public virtue. "For three thousand years, Chinese women have repeatedly paid attention to individual personal virtue and have regarded public virtue as something which is of no direct concern to them." Personal virtue taught women to "keep their bodies as pure as jade" whereas public morality entreated women to be patriotic and concerned with saving the nation. Chin's educational principles regarded national salvation and public awareness as being indispensable.<sup>27</sup>

The Yang preface reveals the implicit denigration of women's abilities albeit couched in acknowledgment of great potential. "We have no morality except that which holds us to compliance, we have no disposition except that which our cosmetics afford us, we have no abilities other than drawing water and cooking meals, we have no education except in embroidery, and the only power we have is over our dowry casket."<sup>28</sup> The women described appear inept, weak and self centred, with their contribution to society completely disregarded. Although abilities in the kitchen are fundamental to the sustenance of all members of any nation, and are certainly an integral part of any revolutionary movement, the Yang preface regards them with a disdain that appears representative of the period's attitudes towards female activities. Moreover, that this book was intended for women to read, with prefaces written by three women shows that many upper-class women had considerable literacy skills. The tone of the work thereby attempts to cajole women into action by belittling their skills rather than empowering these women by creating a new way of looking at

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<sup>27</sup> See the eight guiding goals outlined by Chin. Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Yang Nü-shih, "Yang Nü-shih hsü," in Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 1.

their existing skills. Disdain for cosmetics, embroidery and kitchen chores has perpetuated and reflected the general disdain for women. *A Tocsin For Women* builds upon and extends this denigration of women in an attempt to draw women into the anti-Ch'ing revolution and is inherently ambiguous in this respect.

Indeed, *A Tocsin For Women's* explicit denigration of women's skills and contributions is echoed in later periods when failure to include women in the political processes of government was justified on the grounds that the abilities of Chinese women were so poor that granting women the vote would be irresponsible. Women, in their current uneducated state, would not know the importance of the political rights granted them, and thus any election held on these grounds would be of no particular social value. This sort of attitude, of course, left the speaker in the magnanimous position of saying that women would possibly in the future prove themselves worthy of the right to vote but their present talents were too feeble for the idea of female suffrage to be entertained seriously.<sup>29</sup> As Chin stated "Chinese women are using all their energies addressing the problem of education and, for the present, have no time to discuss politics."<sup>30</sup>

The subtext of *A Tocsin For Women's* pedagogical vision is that women should become more like men. For Chin and many other intellectuals of the period, men were the ideal of cultivated, civilised social beings that women should aspire to emulate. This implicitly adopts the position that the behaviour of Chinese men is irreproachable and that the chaotic state of the nation is unassociated with their "talents" and behaviour. The failure of Chinese women to achieve a suitable degree of manly talent is, according to Chin, a clear result of the education they received as girls

<sup>29</sup> See for example the views expressed in Wang Tsuo-ch'en's, "Chung-kuo hsien-tsai nü-tse ts'an-cheng yun-tung chih p'i-p'an." Reprinted from *Liu Jih hsüeh-sheng hsüeh-pao* in *Nü-chieh wen-hsueh tu-pen: ti yi ts'e*, pp. 188.

<sup>30</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 57.

and young women. Chin asserts that there are no differences between the natural endowments of women and men with regards to intelligence, rather, that the weakness of women's level of political awareness and cultural attainment are entirely the products of educational deprivation.<sup>⑪</sup>

Clearly, the absolution of men from responsibility for the national crisis, in the assumed perfection of the male form, is unsustainable given the dominance of men in public life, with the notable exception of the Empress Dowager. From Chin's perspective, women's naturally endowed talent requires the training and restraining of a good education. Such an education as her brothers had received would produce in the sister a similar level of social awareness, political purpose and moral rectitude and thus facilitate the regeneration of a strong and independent China.

Superstition was, according to Chin, a particular problem for women, and one that reflected the low level of education, since it grew from "hopes, longings and emotion."<sup>⑫</sup> Chin was of the opinion that women would have to break themselves from this habit if they were to help save the nation with their patriotic fervour. In this derisive link of women with superstition on the grounds that they are naturally more emotional, Chin ignores its important supportive function to oppressed social groups, including women. Chin's objection to women's participation in superstition developed within the discourse of patronage and tolerance with which Chinese moralists regarded their womenfolk.

The overriding misogynistic and patronising tone of the treatise at once denigrating women's skills, reprimanding her for her lack of manly attributes, and crediting her with the disgraceful state of the nation is drawn from a strong network of texts reflecting a similar discourse. The

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<sup>⑪</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 28. Chin refers to the education system of old China as being barbarous (yeh-man) whereas his proposed system would be civilised (wen-ming).

<sup>⑫</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 17.

*Analects* famed statement regarding the difficulty of restraining women heads the list but there are echoes of a similar sentiment from Ch'ing texts as well. The partiality and inaccuracy of the discourse which blamed women for the fall of kingdoms, families and dynasties was noted in the mid Ch'ing by fiction writers such as Ts'ao Hsüeh-ch'in. His protagonist Chia Pao-yü queries the homily that beautiful women are to be mistrusted lest they cause chaos after his beautiful maid-servant, Ch'ing-wen has been dismissed by his mother on precisely these grounds. Pao-yü replies to Hsi-jen's comment that "beautiful young women are often trouble-makers" by saying "Who said that beautiful young women are trouble-makers? There have always been lots and lots of beautiful women who were nothing of the kind."<sup>33</sup>

Later, in 1935, Lin Yü-t'ang was to query the injustice of the more general assumption that women are perceived to be the source of social disharmony. "Chinese ethics is essentially a masculine ethics.... thus whenever the men rulers made a mess of the business of government and a lost dynasty, the men scholars were always able to point out a woman as the cause of their downfall.... Queen Tachi was made, by common consent, responsible for the downfall of the Shang Dynasty during the reign of the tyrant King Chou. Another Queen, Possu, was, by common verdict of the men historians, responsible for the fall of the East Chou dynasty under another tyrant King Yu."<sup>34</sup> Yet the strength of the vision that women are the source of social decline persists through to the years when Lu Hsün's essays were published. In his jotting titled "Ah Ch'in" we read of Lu Hsün's intellectual distaste for the notion that women cause the decline of dynasties however by the final few paragraphs of the essay

<sup>33</sup> Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone: Volume Three The Warning Voice*, trans. by David Hawkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 538.

<sup>34</sup> Lin Yu-tang, "Feminist Thought in Ancient China," *T'ien Hsia Monthly*, vol.1, no. 2 (September, 1935), p. 127.

it is clear that Lu Hsün's intellectual convictions to the feminist cause are weaker than his retreat to the more common understanding that women are a public nuisance and left to their own devices will create havoc.<sup>95</sup> Thus, while Chin's *A Tocsin For Women* predates these last two texts, it is evident that the doubt regarding the effects of women on social order invoked by the treatise has solid discursive triggers that would grant it a ready significance and even an acceptability in the more conservative circles — while simultaneously proposing radical changes to the position of women in Chinese society.

### A Code of Radical Chastity

Another of *A Tocsin For Women*'s dextrous mergers of the conventional with the revolutionary is in Chin's discussion of dress codes and suitable female deportment. Chin's attention to the personal details of suitable behaviour has a tone reminiscent of P'an Chao's *Lessons for Women*. Clearly dress-code and hair style were major signifiers of political stance for both men and women at this point in time. Ch'iu Chin chose early on to don male attire and assume the habits of men as a show of her radical aspirations, however in Chin's advice to readers there implicitly lies a pragmatist's defence of female modesty that tempers the bolder Ch'iu Chin who showed herself to be heedless of public opinion. Indeed, the eight goals for women's education set out by Chin Sung-ts'en include the notions of purity and chastity. "1. To be trained to become a high-minded, clean and unadulterated, totally just and humane person..... 8.

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<sup>95</sup> Lu Hsün, "Ah Ch'in," in *Lu Hsün chüan ch'i : ti liu pen* (Bei-ching: Jen-min wen-hsueh chu-pan she, 1973), pp. 199-204. See my article "Representations of Women and Social Power in 18th Century China: The Case of Wang Xifeng," *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (June, 1993), pp. 11-37 for a specific discussion of the Ch'ing discourse on women and social decline in *Hung-lou meng*.

To be trained to become a revolutionary of unflinching purity.”<sup>36</sup> This invocation of the moral vocabulary familiar to women raised on Confucian homilies, reveals the restrained nature of Chin’s feminist radicalism when compared to his contemporary, Ch’iu Chin.

Chin Sung-ts’en shows concern that Chinese women should not dress like Western women with the latters’ “wasp-like waists, bulging breasts and heavily flowered hats” on the grounds that such a dress code has dubious benefits to health and culture.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand he was not in favour of the tendency amongst Chinese women to “excessive adornment” either. The decoration of women’s bodies with copious amounts of jewels and precious stones is simply frivolous and the use of powder and rouge can serve to distort a woman’s natural beauty. It was the naturalness of beauty that Chin praised and self-adornment was regarded as time-wasting, and detrimental to a woman’s appearance.<sup>38</sup> His comments on the practice of whitening skin with powders include the notions that “whiteness signifies death and this type of beauty belongs to ghosts.”<sup>39</sup> The elaborate dressing of hair was regarded as being as harmful as foot-binding and Chin was amongst the first to propose the adoption of the Western style of short hair for women.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, the puritanism of Chin’s vision of an ideal dress-code for Chinese woman did not challenge the fundamental problem that women were regarded as the aesthetic sex. The task of being beautiful and the oppressiveness of being constantly and predominantly judged on the degree of beauty, appears not to have been of concern to Chin. Instead, Chin simply changes the prescriptions of beauty towards the “natural”

<sup>36</sup> Chin Sung-ts’en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 45.

<sup>37</sup> Chin Sung-ts’en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Chin Sung-ts’en, *Nü-chieh chung*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>39</sup> Chin Sung-ts’en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> Chin Sung-ts’en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 17.

look which is more convenient for the revolutionary cause. Indeed, in a Republican summary of the debate surrounding short hair for women Mei Sheng points out that two of the main objections people had to the trend towards short hair for women were that it was ugly and moreover would make women and men indistinguishable.<sup>④①</sup> Chin's code of natural beauty is a dextrous merger of the two sentiments, the conservative and the radical, because it claims that short, unadorned hair is beautiful as well as pragmatic. This effectively retains the discourse where women are perceived as being different from men as the aesthetic sex.<sup>④②</sup>

A similar blend of radicalism and conservatism is evidenced in Chin's proposal for co-ed education. Chin recommends that co-ed education be restricted to the younger age-groups only and is of the opinion that separate schooling, of an equally high standard, should be pursued after this age.<sup>④③</sup> An over-riding concern with propriety for the unmarried young woman appears mellow in contrast with Chin's strong calls for women to participate fully in the liberation of China from the Manchu rule. Chin's assertion that Chinese women should reclaim six rights, including "the right to enter school, the right to make friends, the right to conduct business, the right to own property, the right to come and go as they please, and the right to freedom in marriage" is tempered by the reluctance to encourage post-primary co-ed education.<sup>④④</sup> Clearly, the sexual vulnerability of an unmarried, young woman is irreconcilable with

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④① Mei Sheng, "Nü-tse chien-fa wen-t'i," in Mei Sheng (ed.), *Chung-kuo fu-nü wen-ti t'ao-lun chi: t'i liu ts'e* (Shanghai: Hsin wen-hua shu she, n.d.), p. 128.

④② Roxane Witke notes that in the 1930s intellectual women went out of their way to "not look pretty, certainly not by the standards of old China" in a bid to show the seriousness of their purpose. Roxane Witke, "Women in Shanghai of the 1930s," in Lionello Lanciotti (ed.) *La Donna Nella Cina Imperiale E Nella Repubblicana* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1980), p. 111.

④③ Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 44.

④④ Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, pp. 51-52.

these rights for Chin. Once again it is precisely this co-mingling of the radical and the conservative which “makes the text work.”

Chin’s disdain of women’s preoccupation with chastity in the comment that personal virtue was wrongly woman’s major concern under the Ch’ing education system is tempered by Chin’s own careful attention to the detail of conduct, dress and deportment which take as their foundation a concern for women’s moral rectitude, albeit with a more “modern” allure. On the issue of separate post-primary education Chin also proves to be an early voice of the more restrained members of China’s new Republic. In an address published in *Hsin chiao-yü*, T’ao Chih-hsing provides evidence of the strength of opposition to post-primary co-ed schooling in a defense of the few institutions where it is offered. T’ao reveals that such a method of schooling has not led to great catastrophes as suspected and that equality of educational opportunity is the concrete gain.<sup>45</sup> Thus Chin’s restrained pedagogical line would have found favour among the conservative of the educated sections of society even many years after *A Tocsin for Women* was published.

## Conclusion

This brief analysis of Chin’s *A Tocsin for Women* reveals then, the ambiguous and contradictory aspects of its feminist ideology. Indeed, the treatise can be seen as being far from univocal. A composite of the reformers’ and radicals’ views of its time, the discursive tensions woven into its text can be seen as representative of the political and moral constraints the early Republican’s found themselves working within. The *Tocsin*’s fundamental reliance upon a strong tradition of Confucian

<sup>45</sup> T’ao Chih-hsing, “Wei fan-tui chung-hsüeh nan-nü t’ong-hsüeh de ching-yen,” Reprinted in *Nü-chieh wen-hsüeh tu-pen: ti er tse*, pp. 242–45.



inspired exhortations to national improvement or national order ensured its appeal to those more conservative members of the population, while its more radical claims for sexual equality in all aspects of life served as inspiration for such women as those who formed themselves into the Women's Suffrage Alliance, to fight for the basic rights denied them after 1911. One such woman was Lin Ts'ong-su, author of one of the three prefaces to *A Tocsin For Women*.

Chin Sung-ts'en's challenging vision of a new social order is, however, far from an ideological monochrome. Encapsulating the dominant views of reformers of its time, *A Tocsin for Women* has simultaneously revealed itself to be firmly grounded in the traditional patriarchal morality of Imperial China. Indeed, part of the treatise's success may lie with these contradictory messages, because ambiguities ensure that the treatise can be invoked in a multitude of situations or forms depending upon the readers' expectations. Ultimately however, Chin's text remains an important document in the history of the Chinese women's movement and, as is clear from the following statement, contains important insights into the problems caused by complacency. "Slaves have a slave's glory, servants have a servant's happiness, but this glory and this happiness draw not from knowledge, merely misery. But if they are roused to love freedom and respect equality, then, men and women can unite together to create a new China."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Chin Sung-ts'en, *Nü-chieh chung*, p. 83.

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