

# Women's, Gender and Mainstream Studies on Republican China: Problems in Theory and Research<sup>\*</sup>

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In the past three decades women's and gender studies have considerably strengthened their position within and without China. In this respect, the struggle to establish the field on its own has been successful. Yet, at the same time, it must be stressed that women's and gender studies still essentially exist only as a part of Chinese studies and as an independent supplement to so-called mainstream Chinese studies. This situation is connected with different methodological approaches: one which supports the establishment of women's studies as an independent, even though interdisciplinary discipline, and another which supports changes within disciplines from an overall gender perspective.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, some scholars might practically argue that not enough research has

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<sup>1</sup> See Eichler, 1995:305.

been done yet on women themselves, and therefore, our first task at the moment is still primarily to focus on women, their status, and their position in the family, in society, in the military, in political circles and religious associations and, in this way, to promote and encourage women's studies; later, we can discuss the question of engendering the whole period. In my view, however, we should not only concentrate on women's and gender studies, but at the same time also make an effort to engender the history of the Republican period in every aspect. This means that every historical analysis should consider the male and the female factor equally and take gender relations into account as a possible driving force of history (Perrot 1989:25). Or, to put it another way, the "dynamics of social gender relations and their regulation within a society are part of the universal/general historical process" and need to be studied as such (Wunder 1992:132). Such a call for engendering was made by feminist studies already in the early 80s, but so far we have not been able to develop a practical strategy for doing this. Thus, in practical research, only a few studies (generally written by female academics who concentrate on women's and gender studies) have engendered certain periods or aspects of Republican history. But they have hardly had any effect on the so-called mainstream study and research of the Republican period, that is, on the whole picture of the Republican period which still dominates the field.

So my first question is why hardly any or only a very slow integration of the findings from women's history studies into non-gendered "mainstream" studies on the Republican Period has taken place. My second question is how we can further promote women's and gender history studies and at the same time develop strategies to engender the whole history, that is, using the gender category as we use other central concepts, such as class, to study Chinese

Republican history.<sup>2</sup> In my paper I use the terms “women” and “gender” not from a postmodern and cultural perspective but from a perspective of feminist historical materialism, which takes gender as a hierarchical social division between women and men rather than simply a cultural distinction (Delphy 1993).<sup>3</sup> In the following presentation I would like, from a very practical point of view, to make some observations on three points:

1. I will briefly outline the development of women's and gender history that deals with the Republican period: the dominant methodological approaches, paradigms, and its academic institutionalization.

2. I will discuss five reasons for the non-integration of women's and gender studies and “mainstream history” and point out possible strategies for overcoming the marginalization of women's and gender studies and for promoting the integration of the gender perspective in Republican history studies in general.

3. I will present two examples to show how women and gender are depicted in mainstream studies.

(1) *The development of women's and gender history dealing with the Republican period:*

There are three distinct periods:

**First: the period of feminist socialism in the 1970s**

This period was influenced by the new feminist movement in the West,

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<sup>2</sup> I will not enter into the ongoing theoretical debates concerning gender and I will not argue why I do not agree with Judith Butler and a poststructural approach questioning the practicability and usefulness of the category “gender”. Moreover, I will not be able to plunge into the debates on postmodernism and feminism, on the “linguistic turn” and the “cultural turn” or on recently made calls for a materialist feminism.

<sup>3</sup> Compare also Jackson 2001:285 who follows the arguments made by Delphy 1993.

which brought the contemporary situation of Chinese women, their historical process of liberation from the traditional patriarchal family and society into the focus of Western female scholars. The Western women's movement and studies on Chinese women were therefore closely interrelated. These studies were connected with the then prevalent perception of the liberation of Chinese women as a model for Western women – parallel to the perception of Maoist China as a model for socialism and revolution in the West and in the Third World. Embedded in the whole process of socialist revolution, women's history was depicted as an integral part of the emancipation movement in modern China. Theoretically and methodologically, Chinese women's studies were closely connected with critical theory and an approach influenced by Marxist and Maoist theories. The dominant approach can be described as compensatory and contributory, that is, women were "discovered" as historical subjects and objects and added – at that time – mostly to political history, and their role as actors in history and their significant contribution to revolutionary history and the liberation process were highlighted.<sup>4</sup> Examples of this kind of approach were "pioneering monographs related to a gender analysis of the Chinese communist party's march to power" (Gilmartin 1995:233), such as Elisabeth Croll's *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London 1978), Delia Davin's *Women-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford 1976) and Bobby Siu's *Women of China. Imperialism and Women's Resistance* (London 1983). Women in these studies were presented as either traditional or revolutionary, the history of the Republican Period was a prelude to the

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<sup>4</sup> In this respect I do not agree with Wang Zheng's statement that studies in the 70s and 80s – "largely because of the inaccessibility of primary source material" and because the major works drew on official documents for an interpretation of Chinese women's history – "tend to reduce Chinese women to obscure entities with little significance in historical process" and that "the women in these works do not appear as agents for social change" (Wang Zheng 1999:2).

People's Republic, and in this sense, seen as a road to victory, a process of liberation, in which women played an integral part. In this period when Chinese studies, in general, were very weak in the West, only very few female scholars and graduate students started with women's history studies. The male-dominated scientific community in the China field in the West was very reluctant to accept the new topic and even rejected it. In Mainland China women's studies at that time were not a topic at all, whereas in Taiwan the first publications on women's studies appeared. Lü Xiulian's book *On New Feminism* (Xin nüxingzhuyi) dominated the debate (Spakowski 1995:50-60).

### **Second: the period of critical feminism in the 80s**

The disillusionment about socialism in China on one hand, and the access to more information and the development of new modes of analysis in feminist studies on the other, resulted, on the whole, in more elaborated studies of women's history in the Republican period. The relationship between women's studies and Marxist-Maoist studies was replaced by a more independent feminist position, which was generally critical towards male and mainstream positions, including Marxist theory. The dominant conceptual framework employed by historians of the Republican period was the incompatibility of Marxism and feminism (Gilmartin 1995:4). The compensatory and contributory approach was still widespread, but now the paradigm had been radically reversed: the entirety of Chinese history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including women's history, was no longer depicted as a revolutionary process and liberation, rather, conversely, as a process of hindering liberation, hindering a "real revolution," or sacrificing women to a so-called revolution. Thus, sharp critics of the cultural revolution turned into sharp critics of the CCP and its policies on women. Women continued to be victims even in the liberation movement. An example of this trend was Judith Stacey's *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (London 1983). Using the

category “patriarchy” and following a social history approach, Stacey nevertheless was successful in integrating “women’s history” as a structural part in the whole process of Chinese development. The number of women’s studies in the China field increased and more detailed research was done on the Republican period, which slowly replaced the “revolution” paradigm with the “modernization” paradigm. The China field in the West still did not in general pay much attention to women’s history.

In Taiwan the feminist periodical “Awakening” was started in 1982 and this was the start of a broader development of women’s studies using a feminist perspective (Spakowski 1995:60-76). In China itself during the latter half of the 1980s, starting with Li Xiaojiang, the issue of women’s studies was raised, some conferences were organized, a few female historians started paying attention to this new topic. Women’s studies in China in the late 80s was a direct outcome of the so-called “women’s question”, that is, all the social problems women had to face after market reforms started replacing state socialism (Spakowski 1993, Frick 1995).

### **Third: the period in the 1990s characterized by more diversified academic study of women and gender**

This period is characterized by several new tendencies. In some respects, it yielded a more sophisticated, scholarly approach to Chinese women’s history and more detailed analysis, both from Western and Chinese scholars. The close relationship between women’s studies and the feminist movement diminished and the connection between studies on Chinese women and emancipative theories, including the feminist critique of male and mainstream works, was no longer inevitable. The category “women,” moreover, was often replaced by the category “gender.” This “gender turn,” in some respects, marked a more academic approach and a less political-minded, critical feminist approach.

Moreover, the revolution paradigm was replaced by the modernization paradigm and the contributory approach (women's contribution to the history of mankind) was once again underscored by depicting the active and positive elements of contribution. But "contribution" now meant not only contribution to political history and to the cause of liberation, but to all aspects of women's lives. A de-victimization of Chinese women took place. Readers learned much more about "how women responded to, coped with, struggled against, or maneuvered to change the circumstances around them, or what role women played in the relations of power in social, political, or domestic arenas" (Wang Zheng 1999:2). Even for the so-called traditional period, it was pointed out that Chinese women had not only been victims, but had also acted as agents for historical change. They were no longer depicted merely as obedient daughters and wives in patriarchal families, suppressed by the patriarchal system and Confucian ideology, but also as self-conscious agents in social networking and part of a flourishing women culture, as for example in Dorothy Ko's *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* (1994) and Patricia Ebrey's *The Inner Quarters* (Song) (1993). As a result, a historization took place which analyzed women in their respective historical periods, in their respective social and family status; and to a certain extent, the term "woman" was deconstructed. But women were still often depicted as an entity, irrespective of class, social and political status. The emphasis on the agency of women and the evaluation of this agency per se as positive without regarding the character of this agency in relation to their role in society is something I would like to question here. Take a historical figure such as Song Meiling, for example, who belonged to the network of GMD leadership and who, of course, actively supported GMD policy in every period. Her political role is more likely different from the political role of Qiu Jin or prominent women in the May Fourth period.

Moreover, the gender turn, which in theory means that the analytical

category “gender” should replace the category “women” in practical research, however, tends to focus on women rather than on both men and women. This may be due to the nature of practical research which demands a focus on workable topics. Researchers in general don’t use gender as a starting point in the sense of taking both women and men into account as distinctive agents of history and depicting both women’s and men’s historical role and point of view. Nevertheless, these studies have successfully linked the history of women to social history, family history, cultural history and political history, and, moreover, have shown — like Christina Gilmartin in her *Engendering the Chinese Revolution* and Wang Zheng in her *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* — how the gender perspective can add not only to knowledge on women and their contribution to history and thus enrich the picture of the so-called mainstream perspective on revolution, but can also change the whole picture. From a feminist perspective they tried “to reconfigure” the history of a whole period and sought “to break male monopoly of a contested site” (Wang Zheng 1999:4-5).

The arguments raised by female academics who challenged white women’s dominance in feminist studies influenced yet another important tendency. Western female scholars began to develop a self-critical attitude towards Eurocentric or Western-centric feminist approaches in evaluating the history of Chinese women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was a “break with a universalist outlook that presumes that only one type of female emancipatory experience, that based on Western criteria, can be deemed truly feminist” (Gilmartin 1995:6). Instead, they demanded that Chinese women’s history be evaluated from its own point of view. Examples of this approach are Elisabeth Croll’s *Changing Identities of Chinese Women* (1995) and, also published in 1995, the book “Engendering China,” edited by Christina Gilmartin, Gail Hershatler, Lisa Rofel and Tyrene White, and, last but not least, Christian

Gilmartin's *Engendering the Chinese Revolution* (1995).

Finally, women's studies began flourishing in China itself, both male and female historians participated, centers for women's studies were established at several academic institutions, and valuable source material (women's movement, women's periodicals, autobiographies) and studies on women's history in the Republican period were published. The 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in 1995 in Peking as well as the funding of centers and research by American foundations interested in promoting trends of westernization contributed to this flourishing of women's studies. The promotion of women's studies, however, has decreased in the meantime because of diminishing financial support and reluctant acceptance. Nevertheless, in Mainland China as well as in Taiwan and in Western countries, the issue of women's and gender studies and women's history have been accepted to the extent that conferences hold special gender panels, research foundations give funding to gender issues, and courses on gender issues have been accepted in the curricula of universities. And of course this conference itself demonstrates the state of the field.

(2) *Five reasons for the non-integration of women and gender studies and "mainstream history"*

As I pointed out in the first part of my paper, historical women's and gender studies increasingly integrate the history of women with the social, cultural and political development of each respective period and have demonstrated the usefulness of this approach in challenging the findings of male and mainstream histories and reconfiguring the picture of the whole historical process.

The question is why so-called mainstream studies haven't reacted to this challenge and made efforts to engender their narratives and stories. Admittedly,

some changes have occurred in comparison with earlier studies and “any work on the era that omits discussion of gender is considered parochial and incomplete” (Wang Zheng 1999:4). Therefore, one result of the establishment of women’s and gender studies is that gender and women are now included and added to the stories which are told, a result of greater awareness in this respect. But up to now gender as an analytical category and as a specific perspective has not really been accepted by the still male-dominated field.<sup>5</sup> This is not only the case with Chinese male historians, who recently at a conference on family history openly attacked the gender approach as a means of dealing with this topic; this is also the case with Western studies, including studies by female scholars who in theory accept gender as an analytical category. And there is an economic reason for this attitude as well: women and gender studies, if taken as a separate subject, have low status in terms of career opportunities.

Gender studies are still put in a specific niche and research findings from gender studies only slowly trickle into mainstream studies.<sup>6</sup> In consequence, what the gender approach demands, that is, an expansion of methods, a revision of concepts, the formulation of new research questions and research aims (Budde 1997:131), as well as a deconstruction of prevalent (non-gendered) images of history, has not yet taken place.

Gender studies and so-called mainstream studies and reference works on the Republican period are separate. For the most part the discourses and debates are also separate. “Her-story” can sometimes be read in a “separatistic way” apart from the mainstream. More or less the only links are

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<sup>5</sup> In a similar way, class as a category does not often find its way into studies; so it is still necessary to deconstruct “the Chinese” or “Peking” when speaking of the Chinese government or the CCP.

<sup>6</sup> See Budde, 1997: 125-150. Budde came to the same conclusions concerning the engendering of German history (1997:126).

mainly constituted by persons working in both fields. The source material is different and research aims are not interconnected. A scholar might do research on women's issues on one hand and on—let's say, political history without taking the gender perspective into consideration on the other hand. These include female researchers who are willing to use the gender approach. They see the necessity for an engendering of history and they are aware of the potential of this approach to deepen our knowledge of history, but they still do not necessarily apply this approach to all their studies. So tension often arises between being a researcher who applies certain disciplinary (mainstream) approaches and being a researcher who also applies feminist approaches.

What are the reasons for this?

**First: The problem of the heavy impact and dominance of already established theories, paradigms and master narratives**

Already established theories, paradigms and master narratives play a very influential role in shaping the ongoing research and study of a subject.<sup>7</sup> To bridge the gap between gender/women's studies and mainstream studies, I think it is necessary to show much more concretely than we have in the past the male bias of the theories and paradigms used in mainstream studies. A critical evaluation of these studies (including those written by ourselves) in respect to how they depict gender relations and gender hierarchies, and how they legitimate, reproduce and re-establish gender hierarchies,<sup>8</sup> may help us to find a way out of this dilemma. We need to adopt a critical attitude towards the dominant paradigms and master narratives of the field and should try to change the situation actively from within the field and, in some respects, against the

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<sup>7</sup> One well-known example is the impact-response paradigm established by the Fairbank school which, despite Paul Cohen's criticism, is still influential today.

<sup>8</sup> See Fox Keller/Longino 1996 who claim this as a task for feminist cultural studies.

field, and not from outside or from the niche of gender studies. The master narrative of Chinese women as victims, for instance, still prevails in mainstream studies despite the de-victimization narrative now dominant in Chinese women's history.

**Second: The problem of individual scholarly acceptance of the gender perspective**

Actual whole-hearted acceptance by so-called mainstream Chinese studies and by influential male and female scholars still does not exist. For them, gender is not an analytical category such as class or race. They don't regard the category "gender" as a methodological tool for doing research. They are not aware of the potential in working with this category. What we can do to promote their subjective willingness to integrate the gender perspective into their research is to continue pointing out issues and topics and to show how an engendering is possible. Maybe we need to change the perspective: starting not with women and asking how we can depict their historical role in distinctive historical events and periods, but starting from the master narratives prevalent in the field and asking for female and male agency and non-agency in every institution, decision, policy, etc.

The problem of individual acceptance is, to be sure, closely related to the social practices of knowledge production and mechanisms of positional, symbolic and collective (networking) power, control of publication, and funding, which, I dare to say, is still male and mainstream dominated. In claiming that those academics who follow a gender approach are critical towards the mainstream, I am assuming that the gender perspective per se still means being anti-hegemonic and anti-dominant in respect to other political and social questions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I would not — as Sandra Harding, for instance, did for sociology — make sharp

**Third: The problem of institutional political and academic acceptance**

I think another reason for the marginalization of women's and gender studies is the institutional weakness of Chinese studies in general at European universities and at most North American universities, which have no special Chinese studies program or have only a small area studies department. There is a fixed set of curricula concentrating on major developments in politics, economics, culture and ideology etc., let's say, a basic set of knowledge on China. The topics are much broader than your own research so you have to use the available studies as reference and teaching material—which is not engendered. In this situation it is hardly possible for anyone to do the process of “engendering” on their own while teaching. This is how mainstream knowledge and approaches—already forming a canon of knowledge and a master narrative about the Republican period—are transmitted from one generation to the next. These still include the books by John K. Fairbank and the *Cambridge History of China*. Starting from my view of the European state of the field, I would suggest three ways to overcome this situation. First: we should try to include in our teaching—much more than we have already—critics of the dominant paradigms in the field. We should incorporate in our teaching discussions on the construction and transmission of knowledge in the China field, on methodology, which itself is an outcome of male dominance,<sup>10</sup> and on the tension of claiming objectivity and having a gender, class or race bias. Second: it would be worthwhile to make an effort to prepare new teaching material which is engendered and not only adding “women” to an

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distinctions for the China field between three feminist epistemologies: empiricism, postmodernism, and standpoint theory, even if I myself would argue in favor of standpoint theory and thereby avoid a claim of objectivity which seems to be outdated. See the debate about these distinctions in sociology in Witz 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Compare, for instance, the debate on statistical science and its male bias, Hughes 1995.

ungendered history. This would include thinking about training methods and ways of overcoming the widespread assumption among students that gender studies or a gender perspective are not “valid”<sup>11</sup> (of a low value) and the perception that they present opinions rather than facts. Third: we should encourage at least our Ph.D. students to achieve a threefold qualification: a qualification in the basic discipline, that is, history; a qualification in the area, China; and an additional qualification in gender studies. This may lead to a disciplinary/ China/ gender tension in the field of Republican history which, once revealed, may also become an effective methodological tool.

**Fourth: The problem of “difficult” topics and non-gendered source materials**

It seems that some topics and issues are more difficult to engender than others. And this is related to the historical source material. Gender studies up to now have concentrated on fields such as political movements, cultural history, and social history, or on specific subjects: the status and role of women in the family and in society, and women’s work, issues that obviously relate to women’s questions such as marriage, family, children, footbinding, sexuality, demographic development. In the source materials available on these topics, there is evidence of the specific historical roles and functions women played.

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<sup>11</sup> See the reflections in the book edited by Sollie/Leslie and the research report about gender inclusiveness of a women’s history curriculum in secondary education by ten Dam/Teekens 1997, which states that in the eyes of students and even teachers “women’s history is exclusively associated with values, in terms of opinions, whereas the regular issues that are treated in the ‘traditional’ history curriculum are seen as knowledge, in terms of fact” (1997:72). Even nowadays in the European age of “gender-mainstreaming”, exclusively undertaking feminist/gender research is not a “good” career move and—if one focuses on Chinese gender studies—will inevitably lead to academic marginalization or, if one is not already established as an academic, might be the means for being pushed aside by male competitors.

It is not extremely difficult to find the source materials and do the respective research. In this respect, studies on women's history have done a very good job in discovering new material or reading already well-known material from a new perspective. But there are other topics which are much more difficult to "engender", such as economic history, political history, and international relations (on a macro-base), or the history of ideas or discourses. Quite a different type of source material exists for these topics, which at a first glance does not reveal an obvious gender distinction but instead implies seemingly ungendered information. The specific character of this source material, collected or left behind mainly by men, having a male bias and often neither differentiating class, race, generation, profession, and very rarely gender, contributes to the difficulties historians have and should not be underestimated. How to deal with these texts? One strategy is to supply what these texts do not: namely, oral histories of women as a corrective.<sup>12</sup> Oral histories, of course, are a very good means of reconstructing not only the subject position of women in history, but also of men, especially those of the lower classes. But collecting oral histories is only possible to a limited extent. In my view, it is still necessary that we ourselves learn and then teach our students how to read source materials in an indirect way in order to explore and excavate men and women as different actors, and how to discuss the respective issues from a gender perspective. In this way we can attempt to engender topics which are based on this "ungendered" kind of material, where only ungendered persons and institutions – and that for the writer and the reader means "men" – show up.

Let's take the history of the relations between Comintern and the CCP or the GMD in the 1920s and 1930s, for example. In this material "gender" is not

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<sup>12</sup> See Wang Zheng 1999:7 who used oral histories of women to counter male-dominant written sources.

visible. The great bulk of the available source material contains, in some way, gender-neutral information, speaking of peasants, workers, party members, institutions, “the party,” party conferences and sessions. For those who left these materials behind as working reports, decisions, or proposals the characteristic “worker” or “party” was much more important than the characteristic “men” or “women.” Women are put in a special niche apart from the mainstream when some sources specifically relate to the women’s movement as part of the revolutionary movement, but also, in some respects, as something different. Apart from this, women are mentioned or enter the stage as historical actors only in very special cases. Even women as victims rarely appear.

But do these “ungendered” perceptions of those years really demonstrate that “gender” in relation to the concept “class” or “peasant” might be placed second or third when evaluating the political development of the Republican period? Certainly, the motives for political strategies and the outcomes of their policies at first seem difficult to analyse from a gender perspective. To be sure, there are no gender-neutral topics and issues, but I have to admit that we must still work on finding methods and ways of implementing the engendering, especially on macro-level topics.

One strategy for overcoming the difficulties with male-biased texts might be to deconstruct and evaluate anew the central texts and categories of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history on “revolution,” “identity,” “modernization,” “nation-building,” CCP and GMD from the gender perspective. On the discursive level we may start asking what the functions and outcomes of prevalent gender constructions in narratives or so-called non-gendered narratives of the Republican Period are? Is there a difference between Chinese discourse and Western discourse? How can we engender the collective memory both from the actor’s and the perception’s perspective? Or

let's take "nation" as an example. How is the construction of "nation" related to the construction of "gender" in the Republican period? Do men represent the nation and the national level, whereas women represent the imagined community, only the symbolic level and have no relation to this national agency?<sup>13</sup> On the history level we may ask: What were the differences or similarities in the perception of nation and revolution by men and women, in the motives for joining or not-joining the national or the revolutionary movements, the outcomes, the strategies in dealing with revolution and the historical roles that males and females played? In what way was the concept of national identity and the "nation-building" process of the Republic a gendered one? Were male and female roles ascribed to complementary roles and identities as they were in European countries?<sup>14</sup>

**Fifth: The problem of "ranking" the gender category in comparison to other analytical categories**

One big methodological and practical question still lies in determining the relationship of the category "gender" to other concepts and analytical categories, such as "class," "race," "generation" or "nation". I would suggest viewing this relationship not as a fixed one, but as one dependent on the issue and the period. I argue that it is an interactional, reciprocal relationship which may undergo changes in the processes of interactions. Therefore, we need to find out and evaluate what categories are predominant in what topics or in which ways categories and practical politics are related to one another. For instance, in the field of Japanese history, one thesis postulates that in the process of establishing a modern society the category "gender" replaced the category "status" as a predominant category of social stratification

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<sup>13</sup> This at least is assumed for European countries (see Wenk/Eschebach 2002:27-28).

<sup>14</sup> See Planert 2000:9 who discusses this in terms of Europe.

(Getreuer-Kargl 1997:21).<sup>15</sup> Works on the Chinese Republican period do not go so far: Wang Zheng, however, made the point that “gender equality ... was a principle of modern society” and that talking about women’s emancipation was an easy way to express an identification with the New Culture movement and with the idea of a modern citizenship (Wang Zheng 1999:13). To give another example: in studying educational problems or political participation, women of the upper classes – in my view – have much more in common with men of the upper classes than with women of the lower classes. But in studying gender relations in families, women of both upper and lower classes share more features than what divides them by class distinctions. So when talking about the relationship between gender and class, for instance, it is necessary to distinguish the respective contexts. The relationship is not a constant which remains the same in every context, but is a changing one.

(3) *Women and gender in mainstream studies: two examples*

I want to present here two examples of the treatment of women and gender in mainstream studies, which to some extent represent the field and are widely used – I assume – in teaching Chinese Republican history.

**The first example: Women are invisible, conceptualized as victims, and briefly tacked on to the narrative**

In “China. A New History” by John K. Fairbank and Merle Goldman (the enlarged 1998 edition, first edition 1992), women are almost invisible in the narrative with two exceptions. The first is that women play an important role in the conceptual framework of the book insofar as the inferior position ascribed to them by Confucian (male) moralists serves as a means of revealing

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<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in Europe the category “gender” is an invention of modern society from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, before that it meant all females and males, living and dead, and not restricted to one generation (Wunder 1992:132-133).

the character of Chinese state and society. The second is the issue of footbinding, which is elaborated at considerable length to show women as victims on one hand and their passivity on the other. In this way, the depiction of women is more an instrument of Fairbank's and Goldman's narrative rather than a part, even a very small part, of the narrative.

The book gives a short description of the history from 1912 to 1949 in about 90 pages (pp.255-342). According to one reviewer, it "will serve for decades to come as a standard reference and text book"<sup>16</sup> and indeed it proclaims to be an authoritative history of China and has had significant influence in constructing a specific image of China. For the Republican period, the index in the category "women" boasts 2 entries with respect to the "emancipation of women". Mao Zedong, for instance, is mentioned on 23 pages referring only to the Republican period. The reference to "footbinding" covers the pre-Republican period with 6 entries, covering 8 pages. There are 5 entries for the period after 1949 and 10 entries for the pre-Republican period with respect to women. In addition, there are 12 pictures for the Republican period, which are all of men with two exceptions: Sun Yatsen is shown accompanied by his wife Song Qingling, and Song Meiling is shown sewing bandages in a wartime hospital: several other women are sewing in the background.

The conceptual framework for the interpretation of women in Chinese history is laid out in the introduction which aims to serve as a guideline (pp.18-19): Women's positions are closely linked and interpreted within a hierarchical structured family and family system, a state in miniature, a microcosm parallel with the macrocosm of society and state. A Chinese woman "had no economic independence," had an "inferior social status,"

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<sup>16</sup> Robert L. Worden, front cover of the paperback edition 1998.

which was “merely one manifestation of the hierarchic nature of China’s entire social code and cosmology.” While male and female are both viewed as necessary and complementary, one element, the female one, has been depicted by nature as passive toward the other. Chinese male moralists worked out “the behavior pattern of obedience and passivity that was expected by women.” And here the narrative stops, leaving the reader alone in equating these ideas, which have been passed on in the China field for decades, with historical reality. None of the findings from historical women’s studies has been taken into consideration. The authors later exemplify the subjection of women in late imperial China by presenting the case of footbinding as an incomparably cruel social practice (pp.173-176), mentioning in particular that Manchu women did not bind their feet (p.148). These statements are the only ones concerning women during this period, except for pointing out the segregationist tendencies of the Taiping and that they gave “special scope to women, who supported and sometimes served in the army and ran the palaces in place of eunuchs” (p.210).

The first entry concerning the Republican period says: “Ideas of several kinds of socialism, of the emancipation of women, and the rights of labor versus capitalists swept around the globe and flooded into Republican China” (p.267). First, this statement has to be evaluated in the context of the above-mentioned framework of women’s subjection and the pattern of their obedience and passivity. It exemplifies the paradigm of a dichotomy between tradition and modernity which also relates to women. Second, in connection with this paradigm, we see the outdated “impact-response paradigm” in the image that ideas, including the idea of women’s emancipation, flooded into China, implying that China’s scholar-elite were mainly responsive objects who took over tasks from the West, thereby neglecting their own agency, to say nothing of women being depicted as historical subjects, as agents. Third, far more space in the short chapter on the New Culture Movement is devoted to

the attacks on the writing system than to referring – at least – to the situation of women; they do not – at this point of the narrative – even show up as victims. Women are invisible and, if they are mentioned, then only ideas about them, presented by men, play a historical role.

This can also be clearly seen with the second entry on women. It specifies that it was “the anarchists” who “eloquently put forward ideas of egalitarianism, especially the emancipation of women from family bonds and of the peasantry from exploitation, that would become part of the Chinese vocabulary of revolution” (p.275). Women were objects of political action, not historical agents; anarchists – without gender distinction – were assumed to be men.

**The second example: Women are added as agents, but as separate entities. Further, men represent women, but women don't represent men**

John Fitzgerald's “Awakening China. Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution,” published in 1996, is an example of the contributory approach I have just described, which follows the narrative of women's agency in contributing to the “awakening” trope, but separates them from other social groups. The “separation” of women from other social entities, such as peasants or revolutionary thinkers, is combined with a methodological approach with a non-gendered concept of “awakening” in which women are represented by men, but men are not represented by women.

This book presents a new approach to that period and to the topic of revolution, influenced by methodological positions embedded in the “linguistic and cultural turn.” It is one of the mainstream books covering a broader spectrum of the political and cultural history from this period that also includes women in its narrative. One can find in the index the categories “women” (22, 132-134) and “emancipation of women” (99-102, 284, 369), “Women's Bureau,

Central” (276, 284-285), “Women’s Bureau, City” (285), “Women’s Bureau, Provincial” (285), “Women’s cooperatives” (25), “Women’s movement” (31, 37, 101-102, 284-85, 330), “Women’s Movement Training Institute” (284), “Women’s Patriotic Comrades of Tianjin” (31), “Women’s Weekly” (285) and “Women’s Voice” (284-85, 392). Altogether, according to the index, excluding the mention of “women” in the footnotes, women are mentioned on 18 out of 348 pages. The category “men” is missing in the index. As acting women Qiu Jin (31), He Xiangning (2, 285), Ding Ling (100-101), Isabella Bird (115), Pearl Buck (128, 137, 145, 358), Vera Vladimirovna Vishniakova-Akimova (284) and Deng Yingchao (285) are mentioned.

The master narrative of this book centers around “awakening” as a topic of intellectual discourse, subjective perception, political goal, mobilizing force, manifesting in architecture, literature, politics, institutions and parties. In the end, it turns out to be a history centering around intellectual history that broadens its scope to other layers of historical development. Therefore a few pages are dedicated to outlining the specific role of women’s institutions on this topic. Furthermore, the author clearly describes the role and function of women in the perception and politics of awakening. He points out that the figures of the New Citizen and the New Woman were generic icons of nationalism in the propaganda of both Nationalist and Communist parties (22). He claims that the trope of awakening was used by different interest groups, study societies and political factions, including the women’s movement. It was namely Qiu Jin who “turned the awakened lion to the service of the women’s movement” (31). The role of Ibsen’s play *Nora* and its function in the emancipation narrative is related by the author as well (99-101). And, last but not least, Fitzgerald states that in the perception of foreign writers on China as well as in the perception of Chinese intellectuals such as Liang Qichao, Chinese women have been depicted as the most oppressed members of Chinese

society and that the “female condition served as an indisputable sign of the unredeemed barbarity of the people of Asia” (132). And as a consequence, women became the symbol of awakening (and I would add: of liberation) (284), but both female and male “recognized themselves in the symbol of the awakening female, and both invested in her struggle to free the suppressed hopes of a captive nation.” (284)

To summarize: In terms of methodology, women play a role in Fitzgerald's perception and narrative of Republican history in four respects: First: several active women contribute to history as agents by participating in the master narrative of those years: the awakening issue. This “adding” of women to the picture of history is still on the level of “contributory history”.

Second: “women's issues,” “women's problems,” and the “emancipation narrative” were depicted as part of the awakening trope alongside issues such as “nation,” “youth,” “peasants” and “workers.” This, of course, is partly due to the materials Fitzgerald analyzed, in which women as special subjects are separated and appear as a special social entity at the same level as other subjects. The problem is that Fitzgerald followed the sources in this respect, not asking why women—together with youth, peasants and workers—have been given this specific role in the awakening narrative, and why men and women alike have been depicted without gender difference in their function as youth, peasants or workers. So he uncritically placed women (as a construct) separate from youth, peasants and workers, while the latter—one might conclude—were perceived (and constructed) as gender-neutral, which, in general, means as male. The compensatory function of women and women's issues in history, which is clearly seen in the relevant source material, is continued in Fitzgerald's narrative. He doesn't step away from his male-biased sources in order to include gender.

Third: The leading concept of the study: “awakening” is discussed in

many aspects and in many relations, but Fitzgerald does not deconstruct or engender the meaning, the content itself (such as the meaning of class, race, nationalism, Marxism). The study assumes that these concepts and the reality behind these concepts embrace people, masses, proletariat, activists, and revolutionary thinkers (320) and does not take into consideration that “awakening” of the “masses” mean different things for men and women. Gilmartin’s finding, for instance, that in the 20s it was necessary for He Xiangning to wrap the CCP Women’s Department programs in a nationalist cloak (Gilmartin 1994:224) hints at the way in which the concept of nation has been understood by female activists. It was merely a conceptive tool to promote their material interests. Therefore, one has to ask whether the narrative of awakening—as Fitzgerald suggests—was used in the same way by male and female revolutionaries, whether there was a difference of content and meaning and, last but not least, in the way it was connected with feminist narratives of that time.

And fourth, it is interesting to note that, for instance, Qiu Jin is only cited when especially addressing the awaking of women, but she is not cited when addressing “revolutionary thinkers,” which—at least according to the following quotations—means male revolutionary thinkers. So it is assumed that male revolutionary thinkers also represent female thinkers, but female revolutionary thinkers do not also represent male thinkers, only women.

I would like to summarize:

**First:** we should promote the engendering of the history of the Republican period in China from within the field rather than establish Chinese gender studies as a supplement to mainstream studies.

**Second:** I suggest we strengthen our criticism of dominant paradigms and master narratives of the field from a gender perspective by deconstructing

ungendered agency and institutions in mainstream works and exposing the reasons for the continuation of non-gendering approaches.

**Third:** I further recommend that we stress the need to work on new engendered teaching materials and interdisciplinary study programs which include women's and gender studies.

**Fourth:** last but not least, I recommend that we consider gender studies and the integration of gender studies into the mainstream not merely as an academic task, but also as a task connected with political aims, such as implementing the political and social emancipation of women, in China and in the West.

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