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Maoist Women Voices

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**Communist Reform**

Mao Zedong said, “A man in China is usually subjected to the domination of three systems of authority...Women, in addition...are also dominated by the men.” While Mao promised freedom and equality for women, government inefficacy and social inertia impeded meaningful change. Women in Communist China under the rule of Mao Zedong found their voice through civic activity because communist reform policies failed to instate gender equality.

“Women (must) participate on an equal footing in all work useful to the war effort and to social progress” — Chairman Mao

In 1950, the CCP’s New Marriage Act outlawed forced marriages and polygamy, seeking to address systematic oppression of women.

**Reality**

Women continued to be marginalized and mistreated despite Communist reforms.

While communist policy did encourage equal integration of women into the workforce, they continued to face discrimination. Promises of equal wages, for instance, failed to pay out. In rural areas, administrators considered women to be less strong and skilled, resisting directives to award equal pay.

“Men and women must receive equal pay for equal work” — Chairman Mao

**Red Guard**

In a time when economic concerns and cultural prejudices excluded women from education, Red Guard participation provided “a legitimate role for women within the urban educational system” (Andors 105). In an ideological sense, this legitimization worked against traditional stereotypes and conceptions of women, and in a practical sense, the Red Guard provided women with training and industrial skills previously restricted to men (Andors 110). Young women normally oppressed by tradition gained the opportunity to travel throughout China (Jiang 5).

Though the Red Guard had a reputation for violence in carrying out Chairman Mao’s will, female participants were able to express their voice in Red Guard activities when few other opportunities existed.

**Civil Engagement**

Where government support was weak, strong women took initiative to influence society. Women formed social organizations and cooperatives to forward their goals.

Cai Chang, 1900-1990, became the founding president of the All China Women Federation in 1949. Though she had to closely follow Communist Party policies, she used her position to secure rights for women throughout China.

Women were underrepresented in the closed-membership Chinese Communist Party, but their high involvement in the voluntary Communist Youth League of China shows their enthusiasm for civil engagement. This chart shows male and female participation in each group by age.

**Bibliography**