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## Bringing the *Jia* Back into *Guojia*: Engendering Chinese Intellectual Politics

As long as women fail to be men's equals, anger and sorrow will never be required.

—He-Yin Zhen, “The Feminist Manifesto” (1907; in Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013a, 182)

**D**o women's problems now really have nothing to do with intellectuals?” In 2005, the US-based Chinese scholar Zhong Xueping posed this question in *Dushu* (Reading), China's leading journal of intellectual criticism (Zhong 2005, 13). The question, while rhetorical in tone, was not a frivolous one; rather, it pointed to grave contradictions emerging in twenty-first-century Chinese intellectual discussions. In recent decades, both feminists and critical intellectuals have claimed discursive space in China's limited public sphere to contemplate the costs and benefits of market-driven reform and globalization for Chinese society. What is the significance, then, of Zhong's observation of the apparent marginalization of feminist concerns among Chinese intellectuals?<sup>1</sup>

This title of this essay is a nod to the 1985 book *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol. I extend special thanks to the participants in the Conference on Feminist Sinologies, University of Michigan, October 2012, and especially to Nan Da for her valuable advocacy and assistance in clarifying some of my ideas. Anonymous *Signs* reviewers also pushed me to think through many of these ideas in more rigorous ways. Friends and colleagues River Branch, Jennifer Hellwarth, Shanna Kirschner, and Liz Olson, and my comrades Verónica Dantan and Laura Quinn provided encouraging feedback. Jim Fitch asked me on a daily basis about this work, providing both confidence and love. I am also grateful to the Allegheny College students Cui Yuanshuai, Li Jiarong, Yang Shengkai, and Ni Xuewei for assistance with Chinese-language materials, as well as to the Allegheny College faculty travel fund for providing support for research for this article.

<sup>1</sup> “Feminism” has long been a contested term in China. Here, for purposes of concision, I generally use the term in its simplest connotation—the support of some version of male-female equality. I also use “gender” simply to indicate socially conditioned differences between the sexes, as that is the meaning that is also most common for *shehui xingbie* (“social sex”), the term primarily used for “gender” in China today.

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From the late nineteenth and into much of the twentieth century, the “woman question” was a central aspect of intellectual struggles concerning China’s position in the world. Women’s equality with men became a *sine qua non* for China’s attainment of “modernity.” The New Culture movement and its “Chinese enlightenment” of the 1910s and 1920s featured women’s emancipation as a central imperative (Wang Z. 1999, 13). Later, the Chinese Communist Party also pursued male-female equality as a key mission, albeit in a context that was state dominated and that primarily involved women’s entering the paid workforce rather than a thoroughgoing examination of gendered roles and norms. However flawed in execution, Chinese visions of modernity for much of the twentieth century consistently featured some notion of gender equality as an essential component. Yet the post-Mao reforms, which specify modernization as a continued goal, have retreated from commitments to improve women’s status. Thus, Zhong’s question arises in the milieu of the apparent marginalization of feminist concerns in the post-Mao era, in society at large as well as among intellectuals, at a moment when gender inequalities remain and become even more acute under globalizing, market-oriented policies.

How can we understand the abandonment of feminist concerns in the most recent stage of China’s modernization? This study documents the retreat from women’s equality in intellectual discourse and explores factors that contribute to it. To demonstrate the marginalization of the “woman question” in contemporary public debates, I begin by tracing its prominence in early twentieth-century Chinese intellectual discourse. I then draw upon the works of two contemporary male critical intellectuals, Wang Hui and Zhao Tingyang, to reveal how they enact a post-Mao, reform-era gender erasure in their meditations on Chinese modernities. I contrast these erasures with Chinese feminist discussions about the nature of the subject, globalization, and modernity and suggest that the theoretical analyses of Wang and Zhao would profit from the insights of contemporary Chinese feminists.

### **An engendered Chinese modernity**

The marginal position of gender inequality and women’s concerns in contemporary Chinese intellectual criticism is in part a product of the overall marginalization of women in post-Mao Chinese society and politics. Yet this marginalization is puzzling, given the long centrality of women’s concerns to Chinese intellectual reckonings with the West and modernity.<sup>2</sup> From the

<sup>2</sup> Modernity and its alternatives remain central concepts used by many to make sense of China’s unique developmental path. See, e.g., Lin (2006).

late Qing Dynasty (end of the nineteenth century) and onward into the Republic of China (after 1912), Chinese intellectual reckonings with the West and modernity featured themes such as the necessary abandonment of Confucian norms, the end of the imperial form of rule, and new forms of Chinese nationalism, as well as calls for “Mr. Democracy” and “Mr. Science.” The woman question was a central part of all of these discussions.<sup>3</sup> To fully understand the place of the woman question in Chinese debates on modernity, it is especially vital to comprehend complexities in the thought of this period. Both male intellectuals and female intellectuals of the early twentieth century foregrounded the woman question in their discourses about China’s fate. Thus, the Chinese conception of modernity is always already gendered in inflection.<sup>4</sup>

A “liberal” version of feminism surfaced in the last years of Qing rule, most famously in the male intellectual Jin Tianhe’s manifesto *Nüjie Zhong* ([1903] 2013). Originally published in 1903, this work (the 2013 translation renders its title as “The Women’s Bell”) promoted women’s education alongside “a Western concept of liberal civil rights and women’s rights” (Wang Z. 1999, 38–40). This liberal individualist approach to feminism also emphasized the rejection of China’s Confucian legacies. Much of the male-led intellectual endorsement of women’s equality throughout the New Culture movement echoed these themes. The liberal approach to women’s emancipation was permeated by a rich diversity of ideas, however. As Joan Judge has documented, these texts posited multifarious relationships of gender to historical temporality. Some yearned for a return to a virtuous Confucian model of femininity, while others were much more firmly committed to visions of female progress (2008, 12–15).

Even before the fall of dynastic rule, alternatives to the insistent voices of liberal feminism emerged. He-Yin Zhen (1886–1920?), an anarchist feminist, published radical and systematic critiques in 1907–8.<sup>5</sup> He-Yin’s use of the category *nannü* encompassed more than its literal translation, “male-female.”<sup>6</sup> In her analysis, *nannü* offered a “transhistorical,” “totalizing and foundational” way to understand all forms of power and distinction, as an “originary and primary category in the division and subdi-

<sup>3</sup> For one overview of the vast literature on gender in twentieth-century China, see Her-shatter (2007). For an extensive discussion of the May Fourth era, see Wang Z. (1999).

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Nan Da for this helpful formulation and clarification.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to the recent book *The Birth of Chinese Feminism* (Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013a) for its translations of He-Yin Zhen’s work and for its subtle analysis of the wide-ranging implications of He-Yin’s critical framework.

<sup>6</sup> He-Yin Zhen’s name is itself of feminist interest. Lydia Liu, Rebecca Karl, and Dorothy Ko note that her surname was “He” but that “she preferred to sign her name as ‘He-Yin Zhen’ so as to include her mother’s maiden name in the family name” (Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013c, 2).

vision of social groups and as a primary division in the global political economy” (Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013c, 9, 21, 17–18). He-Yin conceived of gender divisions as central to oppressive social structures and developed a penetrating analysis of gendered inequalities. For He-Yin, only a thoroughgoing social and political revolution against *nannü* and its associated “social demand for hierarchy” would suffice for “the elimination of this category as a metaphysical-political principle” (20–21). As an anarchist, He-Yin also regarded the state form as innately suffused with power relations, and she insisted that “the feminist struggle was not to be subordinated to struggles that advanced the nationalist, ethnocentric, or capitalist modernization agendas; rather, it was the beginning and outcome of a total social revolution that would abolish the state and private property to bring about true social equality and the end to all social hierarchies” (7). In 1908, He-Yin and her husband were the first to publish Chinese translations of *The Communist Manifesto*, which appeared in their journal *Natural Justice* (5). Their work preceded the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, in 1921, by over a decade and established early linkages of feminism to socialist concerns.

During the 1920s, liberal approaches and Marxist approaches to women’s liberation began to compete in the then relatively broad marketplace of ideas. Gender equality featured in diverse Chinese intellectual imaginings of modernity.<sup>7</sup> The central place of feminist concerns in both male and female intellectual contemplations of a new “modern” China, however, coexisted with ambivalences and contradictions. Although many criticized China’s long Confucian heritage, Confucianism shaped some visions of the feminist future. Wang Zheng has suggested that male intellectuals’ interest in emancipating women was driven in part by Confucian ideals of “social obligations to others” (1999, 59–60). Even He-Yin’s radical feminism featured an understanding of the changeability of *nannü* as “something that can be molded and developed with education or distorted with the lack of it,” echoing Confucian perspectives on the educability of “character or personhood” (in Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013c, 15–16). Feminist criticism of the early twentieth century sought to overcome Confucianism, yet it was profoundly influenced by it.

In the New Culture movement of the 1920s, male feminist discussions of equality were often tainted by condescending attitudes toward women’s activism (Wang Z. 1999, 62). Such ambivalences translated into subse-

<sup>7</sup> Tani Barlow (2004) examines how terms for “woman” in twentieth-century Chinese thought were posed in the future anterior and, thus, how women’s issues have always been discussed in an anticipatory and even utopian fashion.

quent subordination of gender to socialist and nationalist concerns. The struggle against inequality remained part of visions of Chinese modernity, but class transcended gender in the process of China's socialist revolution. Although the call for equality and democracy was common in the New Culture years, nationalism ultimately proved a more potent cause. Although there were countertrends, such as "cosmopolitan-internationalist commitment to democracy" and a "concern for the entire human race" in the early Chinese Marxism of Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao (Wang Z. 1999, 56), the intertwining of feminism and nationalism eventually proved problematic. Gail Hershatler has traced the Chinese focus on equality and democracy across much of the twentieth century, demonstrating how "this formulation" led to the frequent deferment of women's equality to national issues and later state-socialist calls for women's "self-sacrifice that resonated profoundly with presocialist notions of womanly virtue" (2007, 79–80, 96–97).

The subordination of gender equality to nationalist and socialist objectives was the precedent for the marginalization of feminist concerns in post-Mao social and intellectual life. In varied ways, women have been casualties of the competitive environment pervading China's transition to a market socialist economy.<sup>8</sup> The increase in *de facto* discrimination against women has generated a revived and vibrant feminist discourse, as well as the creation of women's studies in academic institutions and the founding of new women's nongovernmental organizations to supplement the quasi-official All-China Women's Federation (ACWF, or Fulian).

Li Xiaojiang led the revival of feminist discourse in the 1980s, advocating the reclaiming of women's subjectivity and femininity after years of a dominant-gender sameness discourse under Mao Zedong. She also championed the development of independent women's studies. Li played a crucial role in claiming feminist space in post-Mao academic and activist circles, highlighting the complex ways that Maoist rule did not always serve the cause of women's emancipation, despite its claims to favor male-female equality. Precisely because feminism was "dismembered by the two main Western ideologies that had taken root in China"—nationalism and socialism—Li insisted that post-Mao feminism must recover a more autonomous voice (1999, 268).

Some have suggested that this search for autonomy is one cause of feminism's separation from the wider post-Mao intellectual milieu. Zhong Xueping (2005, 19) linked Li's repudiation of Mao-era discourses advocating gender sameness to male intellectuals' post-Mao marginalization of

<sup>8</sup> For one critical view of the effects of "reform" on Chinese women, see Tan and Jiang (2006).

feminist concerns. Others have gone further, linking Li's version of feminism to neoliberal trends in contemporary Chinese socioeconomic relations. Tani Barlow analyzes Li's views as a form of "market feminism" (Barlow 2004, 254). Feng Xu ties Li's notion of "personal/*geren* revolution" to an increasing emphasis on individual self-governance and consumerism (Xu 2009, 204–5; see also Yan 2011). Several Chinese feminists have raised questions about uncomfortable interrelationships between the proliferation of foreign-funded women's NGOs (Xu 2009, 202), the facilitation of the "market-guided commodity economy" (Wang Lingzhen 2010, 31–32), and the marginalization of the ACWF, an official arm of the socialist state. Renmin University professor Song Shaopeng has characterized Chinese feminism as altogether "neoliberal" in character, tempted by the allure of "individual freedom and subjectivity after . . . the totalitarian state past" (2012, 105). Indeed, Song has suggested that Chinese feminism's neoliberal tendencies are responsible for blunting its potential for "cultural construction and cultural criticism" (2007, 9–10).

Song's analysis does not clearly distinguish between separatism and marginalization, between feminist calls for separate spaces in which to theorize women's condition and gender inequality and the refusal of male intellectuals to read and engage feminist works. Nonetheless, some intellectuals have seized upon certain themes in Chinese feminism to rationalize its marginalization. Feminist intellectual self-consciousness, its insightful critiques of the gendered dimensions of the reforms unfolding in Chinese social and economic life, and its indictment of the "masculinization of this humanist tale" of Chinese statist feminism (Rofel 2007, 73) have been invoked to explain the erasure of feminist concerns from intellectual discourse, owing to their departure from tendencies of "the oppositional intellectual" in post-Mao China, "who configured himself as an unmarked humanist individual" (73). Some Chinese feminists have attempted to negotiate this precarious positioning. The Marxist feminist Dai Jinhua, for example, has emphasized both the need for "female space" to "break the monolithic maleness of [Chinese intellectual] space" and the dilemmas facing women who are forced to choose between "women's writing" and siding with "political dissidents" (1999, 202–3).<sup>9</sup> Dai's work also points to the vital importance of feminist criticism of the effects of post-Mao reform on equality and justice in China, pointing out that class and gender "obscure each other" in male intellectual discussions. Dai notes that writings about gender are both "highlighting and concealing the existence of class reality" at a moment when explicit critiques about the

<sup>9</sup> Dai is the best representative of a feminist scholar who is also a generally acknowledged part of wider intellectual debates (see, e.g., He 2008).

(re)emergence of sharp class distinctions can still “run the risk of breaking the political taboos imposed by the strictly controlled ideology” of state socialism (2004, 291, 297).<sup>10</sup>

Chinese feminist discourse and practice offer vital contributions to contemporary conversations about China’s “national public culture” (Rofel 2007, 20). Yet they are seldom heeded by male Chinese intellectuals, who continue to imagine a nationalist project that omits fully half the Chinese population. In the following section, I will show how the absence of engagement with feminist arguments renders the work of male intellectuals markedly incomplete. By failing to address the concerns of Chinese women and feminist visions of China’s future, the critical perspectives articulated in androcentric discursive frames remain inadequate.

### **Gender gaps in contemporary Chinese intellectual criticism**

Post-1989 Chinese intellectual life can be divided into two divergent camps, the “New Left” and the “new liberals.” The fundamental question, “Whither China?” underpins searching discussions about China’s fate in a globalizing world dominated by the West. As male intellectuals take up questions about what it means to be “modern” and still “Chinese,” their criticism is easily colonized by statist factions in a period in which a thin surface of state socialist ideology coexists with an increasingly neoliberal economic core.<sup>11</sup> Discourses that circulate in the West may appear impressively critical even when they subtly rework strands of socialist, neoliberal, cultural nationalist, and Confucian thought.

Wang Hui and Zhao Tingyang provide powerful examples of contemporary male intellectual discourses from China that have been widely translated and discussed in the West.<sup>12</sup> Wang is one of the leading thinkers of

<sup>10</sup> Wang Zheng and Ying Zhang (Wang and Zhang 2010, 66–67) also note the usefulness of feminist critiques in keeping “social justice” issues on the radar of state policy due to the “taboo” of organizing explicitly around class issues.

<sup>11</sup> One English-language collection of intellectual criticism is titled *Whither China?* (X. Zhang 2001), and a major analysis of post-Mao Chinese intellectual thought-work is *Worrying about China* (Davies 2007). For one survey of the trends in the first decades after the advent of reform in China, see C. Wang (2003); for one recent treatment of the two major factions in intellectual politics, see X. Wang (2012).

<sup>12</sup> Most of my analysis of the work of Wang and Zhao admittedly derives from English-language translations of their work. Wang is particularly well translated in Western academic publications—three of his books have been published in English (Wang H. 2003, 2009, 2011), alongside numerous articles and critical assessments. This perhaps itself shows the dominance of male intellectual discourse in the academy both “East” and “West”: such depth of attention has not been given to Chinese feminist scholars, with the partial exception of Dai (2002). It is possible that a fuller survey of this work in Chinese would reveal greater nuance in con-



the Chinese New Left who seeks to resuscitate the legacy of the Chinese socialist revolution to theorize a Chinese (alternative) modernity. Zhao is an important representative of the new Confucianism, a group of thinkers who envision China's future in terms inseparable from its oldest intellectual tradition. As representatives of the predominant intellectual trends in China today, the works of Wang and Zhao demonstrate how cultural nationalist tendencies enact a post-Mao reform-era gender erasure.

As distinct from new liberalism, both the New Left and new Confucianism self-consciously seek to craft a Chinese alternative to Western neoliberal versions of modernity. Neither Wang nor Zhao rejects modernity per se; instead, both men critique actually existing formations of (Western) modernities, theorizing a distinctive alternative grounded in Chinese experience. These two thinkers share a more general Chinese skepticism of contemporary Western (i.e., American) hegemony. And their work generally lacks any attention to gender issues as a component of Chinese modernity; thus, they break with a key feature of Chinese intellectual reckonings with the West over the long twentieth century.

In their unrelenting opposition to American hegemony, these thinkers are aligned with the official discourses of the Chinese party-state. Zhao echoes statist rhetoric regarding China's "peaceful rise" (see, e.g., Glaser and Medeiros 2007) and diagnoses the (American-led) international order as a "failed world" (Zhao 2006, 39). He suggests that the ancient Chinese concept of *tianxia* ("All-under-Heaven") can provide an alternative perspective (Zhao 2009, 11). Some of his perspectives cohere with Sinocentric and Chinese nationalist views concerning past and present Chinese interactions with other states. By contrast, many regard Wang's work as critical of and diverging from Chinese party-state approaches. He frequently refers to neoliberalism as China's "new ruling ideology" (e.g., Wang H. 2004a, 26), and he has been publicly critical of the Chinese Communist Party (e.g., Wang and Khong 2014). Yet his calls for China to continue learning from its socialist history are thoroughly compatible with the ideological approach, if not the de facto policies, of the Chinese Communist Party. As indicated by the "harmonious society" slogan of the Hu Jintao leadership (2002–12) and the current "Chinese dream" of Xi Jinping, the Chinese government has developed its own rhetorical critique of certain aspects of economic reform.<sup>13</sup> Despite his New Left appellation, Wang is also sympathetic to certain aspects of the Confucian revival that are now a part of the Chinese

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sideration given to gender issues; however, Zhong's critique in *Dushu* (2005) indicates that would not likely be the case.

<sup>13</sup> In large part, my interpretation here of Wang's place in the Chinese critical sphere reflects the party-state's own ideological ambiguities. Western observers of his work do

intellectual and statist scene, finding it to be a “creative and adaptive resource in tackling changing political circumstances over two millennia” (B. Wang 2007, 221).

As representatives of contemporary male intellectualism, Wang and Zhao envision the future(s) of Chinese modernity in markedly androcentric terms.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the intricate linkage of the woman question to the national question a century ago, they regard feminist concerns either as a manifestation of “tribalism” that detracts from a wider sense of nationhood (Davies 2007, 97) or, in the words of Gan Yang, a leading member of the New Left, as attention to “trivial problems” derived from “Western” feminism and diverging from “a grand historical and macroscopic view” (quoted in Song 2007, 6). The muscular masculinity of this nationalist perspective resonates with themes in the work of the New Culture movement that followed the May Fourth protests of 1919, which conceived “feminization” as “synonymous with weakness” and sought “to conjure up the image of a robust masculinity as the correct disposition” (Davies 2007, 211). In addition, like their fellow intellectuals, Wang and Zhao manifest general ignorance of and lack of interest in the efflorescence of post-Mao feminist perspectives. Indeed, Wang has dismissively claimed that “the interests of workers, peasants, women, and other social groups has gradually gained some hearing” but not “any theoretical elaboration” (Wang H. 2004a, 55).

There are multiple reasons to lament male Chinese intellectuals’ abandonment of long-established feminist commitments. Most notably, their vision of Chinese modernity is devoid of gender justice, a critical omission for any theoretical perspective that claims to address the needs of “the people.” In addition, Wang and Zhao advance conceptions of subjectivity, globalization, and modernity that would benefit significantly from insights developed by Chinese feminist scholars. The theoretical adequacy of their accounts suffers from neglect of contemporary feminist discourses.

## **Engendering key questions and concepts**

### ***Questions of the subject***

The nature of subjectivity and its relation to political action has been an important topic for intellectual discussion since the May Fourth era. Seek-

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sometimes identify him as being in sympathy or even in concert with certain explicit ideological trends of the Chinese leadership (see Pocha 2005; Mishra 2006).

<sup>14</sup> It is, of course, very difficult to be a genuinely critical intellectual in the Chinese authoritarian context (see, e.g., Davies 2001, 19–20).

ing to “pull men and women out of the Confucian web of unequal social relations and set them on an equal footing,” many Chinese intellectuals embraced an “essential and abstract human being” (Wang Z. 1999, 17–18). Yet debates about the abstract individual seldom freed women from their “obligations to others” (23). As neoliberal views have gained ground in China, a particular version of the abstract individual has been resurrected. *Homo economicus*—the thoroughly individualized neoliberal subject, who is “held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being” (Harvey 2005, 65)—has captured the imaginations of some Chinese intellectuals. In the wake of the collectivist Mao period, liberal individualism found adherents within the newly liberated Chinese intellectual scene and among some feminists, such as Li Xiaojiang.

Both Wang and Zhao advance critiques of the “radical individualism” that is part of the post-1989 neoliberal transformation in China (Wang H. 2003, 160). For Wang, reassessing the value of “methodological individualism” is a vital part of the more general critique of “liberal globalization” (B. Wang 2007, 236–37), which he develops in his masterwork, the four-volume *Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (Wang H. 2004b). Similarly, Zhao challenges the methodological presuppositions of Western neoliberalism, advocating instead a “methodological *relationalism*, a universal approach to understanding, analyzing, and explaining human actions and values in terms of *relations* rather than *individuals* (independent agents, subjects, or monads)” (2012, 49).

Zhao situates his perspective of an “ontology of coexistence” firmly within the Confucian tradition and its “philosophy of relations, better termed *relationology*,” explicitly contrasting his vision with the “competitive” and “zero-sum” Western version of the subject (2012, 49–51). He posits as central to his “ontology of coexistence” the value of attention to “human obligations” (51), a Confucian legacy that historically left women torn between “obligations to others” and “equal rights” (Wang Z. 1999, 22–23).

A relational perspective on the subject is consistent with feminist perspectives, both Chinese and Western. Some Western feminists have long criticized the “abstract individualism” of political liberalism (Jaggar 1983, 43), and some have more recently developed concepts such as “relational autonomy” (Budgeon 2011, 143). Feminist approaches to questions of relationality, however, provide careful analyses of gender power and privilege constitutive of many traditional relationships.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the radical feminist He-Yin Zhen challenged Chinese conceptions of the subject, which, she contended,

legitimized hierarchical relations between men and women. For example, the eighteenth-century male thinker Chen Hongmou had conceptualized the sexes as “a profusion of relational, bound, unequal dyads” that produce “a recognizable person” (Barlow 2004, 44, 42). While arguing for a relational view of subjectivity, He-Yin rejected binary formations that institutionalized inequality: “In He-Yin’s analytical strategy, the world cannot be dichotomized into native and nonnative, Chinese and non-Chinese, male and female. For He-Yin, history cannot be seen in such dichotomous terms; the world is Chinese and global at the same time, and it is always already gendered, or *nannü*’ed” (Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013b, 38).

Contemporary efforts to revive Confucianism in China have not dealt adequately with its long-standing patriarchal emphases. Chinese feminists have cautioned against the deep-seated sexist aspects of Confucian thought. Tsinghua University philosopher Xiao Wei has argued that hierarchies of obligations cause Confucianism to be inherently “discriminatory” and “patriarchal”; thus, neo-Confucianism “cannot be a kind of care ethics,” as some claim (2007, 35–36, 43–44). Challenging the adequacy of “care” as a “moral asset” in an era of “exaggerated individualism” (45), Xiao has considered the possibility of recuperating some of the more “positive” aspects of Confucian ethics for feminism, such as concepts of the self, including “relational selfhood” and the “caring and cared-for self” (2009, 123–26). Marxist feminist Song Shaopeng has also mused about the need to create “a woman-friendly feminist Confucianism[,] . . . for example, ties between Confucian concepts such as *ren* [“benevolence,” “humaneness”] and feminist ethics of care” (Song 2007, 11). Chinese feminist thinkers are willing to consider the relevance of Confucian ideas of the subject, but unlike Chinese male intellectuals, feminist scholars insist that the gendered implications of this formulation not be neglected.

Subtle differences also distinguish feminist discussions of individual “freedom” in relation to social situatedness from the views of male critical intellectuals. Wang argues for the “liberation of the value of freedom itself from its imprisonment in a monological understanding of economic relations, and for placing this concept in a broader framework of understanding” (Wang H. 2004a, 31). Wang’s “broader framework” places the individual within various and diverse “collective categories” but is not attentive to gendered power dynamics within these collectivities. Feminist scholars are keenly aware of constructions of collectivity that normalize male experience and expectations. Challenging such androcentrism, Li Xiaojiang seeks to resuscitate women’s individuality and to revalue the “petty qualities of femininity (such as being peaceful, close to nature,

emotional)” in order to “promote those valuable human characteristics that have long been undervalued by the standards of civilized society” (Li 1994, 379).

Li does not forget that women are, or can be, a “collective category . . . defined by the economic structures of social life” (Rofel 2007, 81–82). She insists that women’s “subjectivity” should not negate their “social responsibility” (quoted in John 2005, 1596). Many Chinese feminists emphasize that “women’s liberation movements are conducted collectively” (Song 2007, 8), providing a potent alternative to the “individualism and subjectivity putting emphasis on individual effort and personal choice as the core of neoliberal ideology” (Song 2012, 106).

Chinese feminist scholars concur with Wang and Zhao that the subject must be understood in relation to the collective. They develop insightful alternatives to neoliberal individualism. They value collective action as a means to resist both neoliberal markets and authoritarian states. Yet they also provide critical analyses of gender hierarchies and gendered dynamics within collectives, which serve as an important corrective to the gender blindness of New Left and neo-Confucian intellectuals. They offer more nuanced understandings of the subject than male intellectuals who universalize male concerns and who elide great diversities and differences among the Chinese population.

### ***Questions of the globalized state***

Another important site for feminist interventions in Chinese intellectual discourse pertains to ongoing tensions between nationalist and globalizing forces. These tensions can be found within the thought of both Wang and Zhao. While both men suggest the transcendence of nativist tendencies characterizing much Chinese thought today, they also maintain Sinocentrism in order to “recover China’s cultural integrity or even civilizational grandeur” (Davies 2007, 9). Feminist interpretations of nationalism, the state, and globalization offer essential theoretical refinements and clarifications of these viewpoints.

Wang claims that he does not support a “retreat into nationalist mode” but, rather, advocates “a critical internationalism in order to expose the inner contradictions of globalization” (Wang H. 2009, 18). Yet he also conceptualizes a multiethnic China “shaped by this great civilization, its rich history, and profound traditions of thought” (Wang and Barlow 2012, 304). Wang’s notion of “this great civilization” manifests Han Chinese chauvinism at the expense of self-determination for China’s minority ethnic groups, which raises questions about the scope of Wang’s commitment to a more participatory form of democracy. Similarly, Zhao

promotes a vision of *tianxia*, or “All-under-Heaven,” as a new form of international organization, which replaces the current “failed world” with one in which “the world’s universal wellbeing takes priority over that of the nation-state” (2009, 6). Yet, *tianxia* is a concept rooted in China’s Zhou Dynasty (ca. 1122–256 BCE). Defined by Zhao in terms of “familyship,” “the central idea of ‘all-under-heaven’ is to reconstitute the world along the lines of a family, thereby transforming the world into a home for all peoples, as it should be” (Zhao 2009, 11).<sup>15</sup> Zhao’s notion of familyship is both utopian and patriarchal, harking back to the Confucian ideal of the family as a microcosm of the larger political order. Applied to foreign policy, Zhao’s work pays homage to the imperial Chinese “voluntary tribute system” (2006, 35) as a mode of organizing relations among neighboring states. His discussion occludes the blatant hierarchies that structured the tribute system in the past and affirms a Sinocentric future that consolidates global relations that would be far more hierarchical than equal in nature.

Wang’s and Zhao’s critiques of neoliberalism, or the “failed world,” go hand in hand with their mutual skepticism of American hegemony (e.g., Zhao 2009, 6–7; Wang H. 2011, 10–11). Zhao is highly critical of the United Nations as a version of “universalism” that represents “a mission of Western modernity” (2006, 37). As an alternative, Zhao envisions a Sinocentric conception of “worldness” (2009, 5–6). Similarly, Wang criticizes neoimperial and nondemocratic institutions such as the World Trade Organization (Wang H. 2011, 14). Both men are skeptical of existing economic and political relations within a globalized world and offer alternative conceptions of Chinese globality. But they remain oblivious to gendered aspects of globalization. Chinese feminist theorists provide more nuanced perspectives on globalization and the nation-state, offering insights important to the achievement of social justice and gender equality.

Transnational feminists have been more critical than supportive of nationalism, but they acknowledge the complex relations between feminist concerns and nationalist concerns, especially in the developing world. Feminists in China have diverging views of the state and of nationalism. In the early twentieth century, He-Yin rejected the state form and its inherent “reproduction of the powerful and wealthy in society” (in Liu, Karl, and Ko 2013c, 22–23). She considered elimination of the state essential to ending

<sup>15</sup> The Chinese term for “state” is *guojia*, with *guo* originally meaning a “center defended by a boundary” and *jia* meaning “home” or “family” (Wilder and Ingram 1974, 26–27, 76). Thus, in a sense, Zhao is “bringing the *jia* back into *guojia*” with his concept of familyship. This also does point out the potentially inherently patriarchal connotations of the idea of the “state” in Chinese language and culture.

women's subordination. By contrast, Dai's view of "the inevitable conflict between transnational capitalism and the national welfare" (2001, 174) indicates a role for national integrity as a counterweight to global capitalism. Where Li Xiaojiang values "national differences" (Judge 2008, 237), Song Shaopeng adopts a much more cautionary approach to the "cultural nationalism" present in China today, proposing a "community-based socialist feminism" in order "to resist both nationalism and the destructive erosion of society by market doctrines" (2012, 99).

Contemporary feminists also adopt a more refined approach to globalization and its effects than Wang's or Zhao's. Li has famously lauded globalization for affording women opportunities for choice and individuality (2001) and for providing "new opportunities for vulnerable people and marginalized groups in China" (2006, 167), a perspective that Wang Zheng explicitly critiques (2004, 87). Other feminists have analyzed the highly gendered manifestations of globalization in areas such as labor (Jin 2008) and health care (Liu 2008). Some feminists also draw attention to globalization's costs for "vulnerable groups" such as "ethnic minorities" (Wang Lihua 2008, viii–ix).

Despite critical stances on both nationalism and globalization, Chinese feminists have identified certain important roles for the state and certain positive aspects of an inevitably globalizing world. In contrast to Wang's abstract call for "institutional innovation within society" as a way of overcoming China's "teleology of modernization" (Wang H. 2003, 185–86), Chinese feminists point out that such institutional innovation is already under way in the collaboration between the ACWF and women's NGOs on feminist agendas (e.g., Wang and Zhang 2010). And in contrast to Zhao's analysis of globalization as a manifestation of a "failed world," feminists call attention to women's appeal to global norms of gender equality as one means to pressure the Chinese state to address growing gender discrimination (e.g., Tan 2010). Moving beyond male intellectuals' abstract critiques of the globalized state, Chinese feminists offer insights into gendered dynamics of globalization and provide a critical assessment of the growing inequalities that accompany contemporary nationalist trends in China.

### **Questions of alternative modernity**

Since the end of the Qing Dynasty, the question of alternative modernity has been essential to Chinese critical intellectualism. In this arena, as in discussions of subjectivity, nationalism, and globalization, Chinese feminists offer important correctives to the views of male intellectuals—correctives that give social justice a key role in alternative modernity.

In much of his work, Wang's central goal is theorizing an "antimodern" modernity, a project he regards as fundamental to Chinese modernity from its beginnings (Wang H. 2003, 150). He insists that "the history that modernity arrogantly refuses contains possibilities and revelations capable of overcoming the crisis of modernity" (quoted in Y. Zhang 2010, 71). One component of the crisis of modernity is "depoliticized politics," which enables the supposedly "neutral state" to serve the interests of market forces (Wang H. 2009, 12). To resolve this problem, Wang recommends "a redefinition of the boundaries of politics itself," transcending "simple political democratization" by including "economic and cultural democratization as well" (18, 102).

Also skeptical of contemporary "democratic" political form, Zhao argues that neoliberal democracy "represents misled minds much more than the independent" (2006, 32). Endorsing "Confucian equilibrium" as an alternative international political order, Zhao suggests that a "strategy aimed at harmony" among nation-states will create a "game of necessary and mutual accomplishment" (2009, 15). According to Zhao, mutuality will be achieved through a sense of familyship that promotes "ethical/political legitimacy": "Familyship is the minimal and irreducible location of harmony, cooperation, common interests and happiness, so that it is arguably the universal framework through which to interpret all possible cases of harmony, cooperation, common interests, and happiness" (2006, 32–33). By developing a sense of "worldness," Zhao's conception of harmony also ameliorates the contemporary situation in which "there is no one to take care of the world" (2009, 11).

In order to address entrenched power relations, Chinese feminists have also advocated a conception of democracy that transcends procedural arrangements. And they have theorized multiple strategies to "take care of the world" as an alternative to conventional international relations. Yet feminist scholars insist that resolving the problem of gender inequality is integral to democracy and care for the world. Through their erasure of gender dynamics, Wang and Zhao truncate the theoretical promise of their prescriptions. By neglecting the power of gender in putatively democratic systems, Wang fails to conceptualize meaningful democratic practices for women and men. By idealizing familyship, Zhao entrenches paternalistic and patriarchal tendencies within his new world order. By focusing on abstract theorizations, Wang and Zhao fail to develop "middle-range conceptual tools" (Y. Zhang 2010, 82) that address injustices in immediate contexts and provide mechanisms to help realize their political visions.

Gendering the concepts of theorists such as Wang and Zhao could deepen their critiques and illuminate points at which their theories fail to



provide adequate solutions. With their emphasis on praxis, feminist scholars provide important correctives to the gender gaps in male intellectual discourses. Some Chinese feminist critics, for example, have interrogated the possibilities of linking the recently revived Confucian concept of harmony to gender equality (Chen 2005). Others have engendered Marxist perspectives on the “free and full development of humanity” (Hu 2009, 10), implicitly challenging Chinese nationalism as well as typical views of development. Like Wang, these feminists seek to resuscitate China’s socialist legacy—but in ways that acknowledge the gendered shortcomings of China’s alternative modernity. Chinese feminists attempt to recuperate Marxism to alter contemporary practices in China, not simply to envision an abstract future.

The Marxist feminist Song Shaopeng recognizes the value of New Left thought, but she is highly critical of its sexist propensities. Asserting that “the New Left’s problem is that it ignores that gender equality is also an important constitutive part of socialist tradition” (2007, 10), Song blends Sinosocialism with elements of “the individualism released in the 1980s and the individual subjectivity brought forth then” to “reconstruct today’s civil society” and develop a model of “community-based socialist feminism” (2012, 109, 99). By acknowledging the reality of “a diverse society,” Song suggests, theorists can “resist the desire for unification, which leads to homogeneity” (109–10). Thus, she advances a direct attack on Chinese cultural nationalist views such as Zhao’s quest for *tianxia*, which he explicitly regards as “homogeneous” (Zhao 2006, 33). Integrating the practice of women’s NGOs, the revived stress on individual subjectivity in much post-Mao feminism, and socialist economic and political forms, Song defends a public place for women qua women while also engaging the broader aspirations of most Chinese critical intellectualism. Song exemplifies a theoretical project that repoliticizes feminism and engenders intellectual criticism in China today.

### Conclusions

The contemporary Chinese male intellectual erasure of the woman question is itself a clue as to the contested nature of alternative modernity in twenty-first-century China. Given the centrality of gender issues and women’s equality to twentieth-century imaginings of Chinese modernity, Sinological discussions of (alternative) modernity are always already gendered in inflection. Thus, silence on questions of gender is not merely an error of omission but a reworking of the very terms of discourse. The gulf between state-socialist ideology and capitalist economic development pol-

icies has triggered intellectual debates over a sustainable China model. But these debates are altogether inadequate when they omit half the Chinese population. The vibrant feminist conversations in contemporary China offer critical insights sorely lacking in the public discourses of male intellectuals. Ironically, statist commitments to gender equality in the Chinese authoritarian context may provide an opening for feminist contributions. Any conception of an alternative Chinese modernity true to the heritage of Chinese struggles for autonomy from quasi-colonial Western influence must be predicated on gender justice as an inherent part of its formulation.

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