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Christina K. Gilmartin. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. xiii + 303 pp. + 9 pp. of plates. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-08981-5; $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-20346-4.

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Gender Issues in the Early Chinese Revolutionary Milieu

According to most scholars, modern revolutionary parties have had difficulty in integrating more than one layer of oppression into the revolutionary agenda. Thus women are mobilized by radical parties, but told they must hold off on womens' issues until the revolution is won. Christina Kelley Gilmartin's book challenges this characterization for the case of the Chinese revolutionary process. Her work strongly argues that gender issues played an important role in the political culture of the early phase of the Chinese Communist Party and the broader nationalist revolution during the early 1920s. The book is divided into two parts of which the first part examines the incorporation of gender in the political culture of the early CCP and the burgeoning CCP-GMD United Front, and the second part focuses on the role of womens' mobilization during and after the May Thirtieth Incident until the autumn of 1927.

Gilmartin makes several arguments on the dynamics that shaped gender issues in early radical activities. First, the debates on womens' issues during the May Fourth era were often appraised by men, who were perhaps sympathetic, but did not understand the full range of feminist issues. Secondly, pathways to activism often had to include male tutelage, and to hold high position a woman most often had to be married to an important male activist. Gilmartin makes this case very strongly with her chapters on Li Da's wife, Wang Huiwu, and Cai Hesen's wife, Xiang Jingyu. When Li Da was off the CCP Central Committee his wife also lost her pivotal role in the formation of womens' work in the party, and likewise when Cai and Xiang split apart, it was Xiang Jingyu who paid with her position, not Cai Hesen or her lover, Peng Shuzhi. Thirdly, the womens' struggle is placed in the context of the United Front between the CCP and the GMD, whereby women had a wider organizational heritage and basis to mobilize women, especially in Guangdong. Fourthly, there were regional disparities within the mobilization of women–as different situations of culture and power existed in different areas, combined with a lack of coordination in the organizational effort, which tended to be based on a series of personal relationships. Finally, the real fruition of a womens' movement that was part of, not apart from, the national revolutionary movement came in Wuhan, when women were accorded genuine legal and social rights that were not paralleled until after 1949. However, in general, in the backlash of 1927 against the CCP and CCP sympathizers, women became targets of an unprecedented harsh violence that emasculated the movement.

Overall, Gilmartin is persuasive that womens' issues were only as strong as the sensibility of powerful males towards gender issues, which luckily for Chinese women were a fundamental aspect of the May Fourth era mentality. "Probing beneath the iconoclastic veneer of the writings of the cultural revolutionaries reveals the strong connection created between nationalism and feminism" (p.22). It was only through the strongest perseverance that radical women such as Wang Huiwu and Xiang Jingy were able to form and implement propaganda-agitation activities and set up local organizations such as schools or associations. Another example that Gilmartin gives is a description of the gender issues in Peng Pai's rural campaign. She explains that Peng Pai was an ardent feminist, but would not go against local issues that were unpopular. Moreover, he felt himself above the arguments against concubinage and took a second wife at the height of his popularity, thus setting a double standard. The role of Sun Yatsen appears even more ambivalent. His party cooperated and provided some of the best mobilization opportunities, yet he did not appear to personally promote the idea of a revolutionary mother figure to complement his growing status as father of the revolution (pp.156-57). Gilmartin further explains that Sun's death in 1925 actually progressed the "patriarchal premises into

the revolutionary nationalism of the 1920s....The deliberate effort to transform Sun Yatsen into a father-demigod imbued a strong male identity into the revolutionary nationalist consciousness of the day" (p.208).

Engendering the Chinese Revolution is based on Gilmartin's long-term studies which include interviews and access to much memoir and theoretical material that appears in the careful way she builds her arguments. The book includes a biographical directory that is useful for those interested in synopses of key figures in the work. Something that really distinguishes this work should be mentioned, and that is what is *not* in the work. Gilmartin concentrates on the ideas and activities of the Chinese feminists as opposed to exploring all the rumors of their personal lives. Although she does explore the idea of free marriages and the crossover of mates and second wives in some prominent activists' lives, these facts are presented in so far as they are relevant to the larger issues. This sense of civility and balance adds both credence and weight to the scholarship. In fact, I thought that a bit more explanation about Xiang Jingyu's affair with Peng Shuzhi would have been in order to clarify the situation somewhat for the uninformed to understand the disparity between Xiang's treatment and Peng's treatment by the CCP Central Committee.

As with any book of this scope, the depth of coverage can be a bit uneven, and this is true with some segments of the reading which do not go deep enough, or take advantage of the evidence that Gilmartin has painstakingly acquired. For example, I would have liked to see more material based on the interviews. Another instance was the treatment of Sun Yatsen and his policy towards women, which primarily covers the dimension of not approving a female country founder, but does not really explore his policies and behavior in detail, which might have been more considered given the stress on the United Front. Another area that could have used some expansion was interpretative, specifically the regionalization of womens' organization and mobilization techniques. It appears that Gilmartin had some data on 100 women who joined the CCP. If possible, why not correlate the regional and age data, since she discusses both regional and generational impacts? Further, regional studies of political activism and political culture such as the works of Prasenjit Duara and John Fitzgerald were not utilized in any significant way. They might have deepened the understanding of the differences in mobilization efforts. Lastly, one of the most fascinating arguments of the book is how empowered the men were to shape gender issues and the salience of the New Culture Movement in the development of a feminist ethos. I thought that Gilmartin's examples both of the paternalism of so-called feminists such as Mao Dun or the control of high political positions by Chinese men paradoxically, then, calls into question the uniqueness of the early Chinese womens' movement. How deep was the feminist ethos if the men could not share power–at the time? Was the Chinese movement, then, only superficially or deeply different from womens' rights in other countries? I think Gilmartin is arguing that the latter was the case–that Chinese women were more empowered, at least for a few years, in the actual activities of the women in mobilizing during the mass movements of the early 1920s. Yet it also seems that the substantive decline of the womens' movement after the terror of 1927 calls into question the genuineness of the commitment among the May Fourth era activists to gender issues.

In conclusion, this a groundbreaking book for gender and radical political studies. It has applications for both Chinese political history and womens' studies, and would be appropriate for courses in each area. Based on original research and carefully articulated arguments, Gilmartin's work provides a wealth of information that significantly contributes to the field of political culture in twentieth-century China.

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