

TEXT 9

WORKING WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST CONFUCIANISM IN CHINESE HISTORY

Inequality between men and women is not a social phenomenon dating back to time immemorial, but it emerged together with the slave system. Oppression of working women is, first and foremost, class oppression. Inequality between men and women is created by class antagonism. Precisely as Engels pointed out: **“The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male.”** (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*)

Doctrines of Confucius and Mencius Are Ropes Binding the Working Women

Towards the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) in China, the Confucian school represented by Confucius feverishly trumpeted the reactionary fallacy that man was superior to woman. He regarded women as low as slaves and preached that “only women and inferior men are difficult to keep.” Confucius held that the relations between husband and wife, like those between king and minister and between father and son, were all between master and servant and that this principle was universal under heaven. During the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) Mencius, a devotee of Confucius, arbitrarily drew a line between men and women and advocated that “between men and women things should not personally be given and taken.” He regarded a wife as a husband’s slave and prattled that for a woman morality meant only obedience. Under the influence of the reactionary preachings of Confucius and Mencius, some of the so-called Confucian classics went even further. They formulated many reactionary dogmas such as the “Three Obediences and Four Virtues” (obedience to the father and elder brothers when young, obedience to the husband when married, and obedience to the sons when widowed; women’s virtue, speech, appearance and chores), women taking part in political affairs would give rise to the danger of national subjugation and “separation

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of men and women” was a “major moral principle of a country.” They thus imposed numerous spiritual shackles on the masses of working women. All these reactionary fallacies spread by Confucius and Mencius were entirely for the purpose of upholding and trying to restore the slave system.

With the daily sharpening of the contradiction between the peasant class and the landlord class after the middle of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-8 A.D.), the landlord class gradually switched from respect for the Legalist school and opposing the Confucian school to worshipping the latter and opposing the former. As a result, reactionary Confucian ideas on the question of women developed further. A devotee of Confucius, Tung Chung-shu babbled that relations between husband and wife, like those between king and minister or father and son, were decided by the *yin-yang* relationship. The husband represented *yang* (male or positive element) and the wife *yin* (female or negative element). Pan Ku of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) epitomized this idea as follows: “The sovereign guides the ministers, the father guides the son and the husband guides the wife.” They alleged that the difference in status between men and women following the appearance of class antagonism was absolute and eternal like “*yang* being superior to *yin*” or the sky above the earth. This fallacy of deciding the status of men and women by the *yin-yang* principle put a theological cloak over the reactionary theories for oppressing women.

Ardent followers of Confucius in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) turned out many reactionary works such as *Analects for Women* and *Filial Piety for Women* to inculcate among the masses of working women the idea of man being superior to woman. These writings did everything possible to spread ideas that women must keep to their “chastity” and “submissively accept all unfair treatment” and that “between men and women things should not personally be given and taken.” Some even prescribed that a woman “should not look back when walking, twitch her lips when talking, move her knees when sitting, rustle her skirt when standing, laugh when happy and shout when angry.” If she followed these rules in all her acts, could she look like a living person?

As the peasants’ struggle against the landlord class mounted wave upon wave in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), the latter became more and more reactionary. Some followers of Confucius and Mencius made big efforts to elaborate the reactionary canon that “the sovereign guides the ministers, the father guides the son and the husband guides the wife.” They said this was prescribed by heaven long before the appearance of humanity. An apologist for the landlord class called Cheng Yi demanded that women strictly keep to their “chastity” and shouted that “starving to death is very insignificant, while loss of chastity (for a

widow to remarry was regarded as loss of chastity) is a great matter.” He thus openly preached that women should become willing sacrifices to the feudal ethical code. Countless numbers of women in the ensuing 800 years were victims of this reactionary idea advocated by Cheng Yi.

The Ming (1368-1644) and Ching (1644-1911) Dynasties were in the late period of feudal society. To stave off their decline and fall, the reactionary rulers were even more frantic in propagating the idea of male superiority. For more than 500 years a great many books preaching this idea were put out. They included systematically edited collections, popular readers and writings promulgated for the whole nation in the name of the supreme feudal rulers. This motley collection of books made the victimization of women more barbaric than ever before.

After the Revolution of 1911, Yuan Shih-kai who dreamt of restoring the monarchy and the autocrat and traitor to the people Chiang Kai-shek completely inherited the mantle of the previous reactionary rulers. They preached that “relations between husband and wife” and the “separation of men and women” advocated by the Confucian school were “immutable principles of social life.” Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao, revisionist chieftains in the Party, and their gangs also took over all that Confucius preached and continued spreading the reactionary idea of men being superior to women. Slandering women as “backward” and “useless,” they tried to continue putting Chinese women in bondage to the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius so as to restore capitalism in China.

Working Women—a Great Revolutionary Force

Where there is oppression, there is resistance. Numerous facts in Chinese history have proved that the working women not only can shatter the bonds of the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, but are a great revolutionary force in the fight against feudalism, Confucianism and imperialism.

Struggle Against Feudalism. Men in China were generally subjected to the domination of three authorities: political, clan and religious. As for women, in addition to being dominated by these three authorities, they were also dominated by men or the authority of the husband. Chairman Mao has said: **“These four authorities—political, clan, religious and masculine—are the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal system and ideology, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants.”** **“The political authority of the landlords is the backbone of all the other systems of authority.”** (*Report on an In-*

vestigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan.) In their struggle for liberation, the working women made feudal rule of the landlord class their first target of attack.

Towards the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Mother Lu of Haichu (present-day Jihchao County, Shantung Province) had bitter hatred for the exorbitant taxes and levies of the reactionary government. When her son was unjustly killed by the magistrate, this aggravated her pent-up hatred and enmity and she organized more than 1,000 impoverished peasants to stage an uprising in 17 A.D., proclaiming herself the general. Under her leadership, they took Haichu by storm, executed the magistrate, continued fighting the reactionary government and soon their army expanded to more than 10,000 people. After the death of Mother Lu, most of her units joined the rebellious peasant armies in other places. This formed a big nationwide peasant uprising which overthrew that reactionary regime.

The heroine Tang Sai-erh from Putai (present-day Pohsing County, Shantung Province) was a leader of a peasant uprising in Shantung in the early Ming Dynasty. By propagating revolution and organizing the masses, she assembled the armed peasant forces in the surrounding areas and established a rural revolutionary base area in 1420. The Ming government hurriedly dispatched troops to suppress the uprising. Spurring on her horse, Tang Sai-erh killed the enemy commander with her sword, and the enemy troops were completely annihilated. Terror-stricken, the Ming ruler immediately sent a senior officer to put down the uprising. Though encircled, she directed her troops to feint an attack on one place while striking at another, thus enabling the peasant forces to break through the encirclement and move to a place of safety. After the failure of the uprising, the Ming ruler twice issued orders to search for and arrest Tang Sai-erh, but the enemy never found her, for she was well protected by the masses.

Great Force in Criticizing Doctrines of Confucius and Mencius. The doctrines of Confucius and Mencius are spiritual pillars to uphold and restore the reactionary rule of the exploiting classes and ropes to enslave and bind the working women. In their struggle against this reactionary rule, the working women of China have heavily pounded and swept away these doctrines.

During the early period of the Tang Dynasty, Chen Shuo-chen from Muchow (present-day Chienteh County in Chekiang Province) and her brother-in-law Chang Shu-yin led an armed uprising in Chekiang in 653 A.D. She proclaimed herself Emperor Wen Chia and appointed Chang Shu-yin her prime minister. She threw overboard the Confucian fallacy that women should only stay at home and cook and “not take part in political affairs,” and so by her actions she criticized the reactionary

Confucian concept that the “right to rule comes directly from heaven.” She was the first woman emperor of a revolutionary political power founded by the working people in Chinese history.

During the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom revolutionary movement in the mid-19th century, working women actively took part in the armed struggle and in the movement opposing Confucianism.

The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom firmly opposed the idea and practice of male supremacy and stood for four great equalities—political equality, economic equality, equality among nationalities and equality between man and woman.

Politically, women in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom took part in extensive political activities and many held important official posts up to the highest ranks. Economically, the kingdom stipulated that “land shall be distributed according to the number of persons, irrespective of sex.” Militarily, men and women were armed alike to fight the enemy and the Taiping Army recruited a large number of soldiers from among the working women. There were about 100,000 women soldiers and many women generals, marshals and commanders. In the cultural and educational spheres, both men and women could take part in government examinations. In one special examination for women, the examinees exceeded 200 and both the chief and deputy examiners were women.

Heroines Resisting Imperialist Aggression. As a result of imperialist aggression after the Opium War in 1840, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The calamity-ridden Chinese working people at that time shouldered the herculean task of opposing imperialism, feudalism and the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius. Chairman Mao has pointed out: “**The history of China’s transformation into a semi-colony and colony by imperialism in collusion with Chinese feudalism is at the same time a history of struggle by the Chinese people against imperialism and its lackeys.**” (*The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party.*) Many working women’s heroic deeds are listed in the records of the Chinese people’s struggle against imperialist aggression.

After British troops had invaded and occupied Kwangchow in 1841, they went to pillage in Sanyuanli on its northern outskirts. Raising banners with the characters Ping Ying Tuan (Quell the British Corps), the heroic Sanyuanli people took up arms and gave the British invading troops a sound beating. Men and women, old and young, tens of thousands of people from 103 neighbouring villages joined forces to chase the retreating panic-stricken enemy. Ah Feng, wife of Chou Chun who was one of the Ping Ying Tuan leaders, was a courageous and skilful fighter in the corps and was warmly acclaimed by the masses.

The enemy dared not go near her. The women of Sanyuanli played a positive role in the struggle against the British invaders and proved through their own actions that the Chinese working women were an important force in the struggle against imperialism.

The Small Sword Society of Shanghai staged an armed uprising in 1853 to fight tit for tat against U.S., British and French imperialism and their lackeys. Chou Hsiu-ying, daughter of a leader of the rebellious army, Chou Li-chun, was adept at using a big sword and the masses called her Big Sword Girl Hsiu. At 17, she and her father joined in the struggle against the feudal landlords by refusing to pay the land rent. She was made a general after the uprising and heroically resisted the Ching government troops in the campaign to defend Chiating near Shanghai. When the Ching troops attacked Shanghai, she enticed the enemy to advance deep into a trap and large numbers of enemy troops were killed. In the fierce battle to break out of Shanghai, she fought courageously against the U.S., British and French aggressors and gave up her young life.

An Anglo-French allied army occupied Peking and Tientsin in 1860 and burnt and reduced the Yuan Ming Yuan Summer Palace in Peking's western suburbs to ashes. The British troops twice invaded Hsiehchung Village, five kilometres from the palace. When the enemy came to the village the second time, Feng Wan-chen, a 19-year-old daughter of a hunter's family, and the village's young hunters decided to take action. By launching a surprise attack, they killed more than 100 enemy troops and made the rest flee helter-skelter, leaving their guns and ammunition behind. Not fearing a strong enemy and daring to struggle, Feng Wan-chen personified the Chinese working women's glorious tradition in fighting tyranny.

Revelations of History

First, China's working women are a great revolutionary force. Not willing to be bound by the "four ropes," they are firm in putting up resistance, in making revolution and in transforming society. That was why they took part in every one of the hundreds of peasant uprisings in Chinese history. Marx said: "**Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment.**" (*Marx to L. Kugelmann.*) Although past revolutionary struggles by the working people, including the working women, did not win final victory, their struggles alone were the real force propelling the development of history in feudal society.

Second, male superiority is the product of private property and class oppression. The woman question is a question of class struggle.

Women's emancipation can be realized only by first overthrowing the social system in which there is exploitation and oppression of man by man. Working women in the past fought heroically in the forefront of the struggle, but because of the limitations of historical conditions they could not win real equality between men and women. It was only under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party that Chinese women together with men overthrew the three big mountains of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism weighing down on the Chinese people, toppled the criminal system that caused all kinds of suffering to China's women, and fundamentally removed the class origin of exploitation and oppression of women. Today they are vigorously playing their great "one-half" role in the three great revolutionary movements—class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment.

Third, only with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought can we thoroughly triumph over the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius and smash the spiritual shackles imposed on women. Working women in the past boldly pounded at these doctrines by their own actions and strove to free themselves from feudal oppression. But owing to the limitations of their times and class, they could not thoroughly expose and criticize the class content and reactionary essence of the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius. Later, the bourgeoisie took part in the struggle against Confucianism in the May 4th Movement of 1919, but it also could not thoroughly criticize these doctrines. The task of doing this is entrusted by history to the proletariat armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. Together with all the other working people of China, our working women are earnestly studying works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and by Chairman Mao, taking an active part in the movement to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius, thoroughly criticizing the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, occupying with Marxism all of the superstructure, including philosophy, history, education, literature, art and law, and carrying the class struggle in the realm of ideology through to the end.