
“Iron Bodies”: Women, War, and Sport in the Early Communist Movement in Modern China

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Between 1929 and 1934 the rural soviets set up by the Chinese Communist Party initiated arguably the most radical social changes in modern Chinese history prior to 1949. Land was redistributed, new laws were implemented and society was reorganized; these actions constituted attempts at fundamental transformation. What happened to women during this upheaval? How did women react to the attempted changes? How did those changes relate to women's emancipation? Did exercise play a role in these changes? If so, what was it? Specifically did it contribute directly to female liberation? Such questions have not been asked before. It is time they were. To answer these questions we must first understand the progress of the Women's Movement under the leadership of the Communist Party in China.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)¹ was established in July 1921 in Shanghai. The Women's Department, which addressed women's issues, was created in 1922. The Party's first manifesto on the “Resolution of Women's Movement: The Current Situation in China” made “equal rights for men and women” and “freedom of women from feudal culture and society” major aims.² A year later, the CCP formally recognized the right of women to vote, the need to protect female labor from exploitation and the need to abolish all legislation restrictive to women.³

Why did the CCP pay this close, concerned attention to women? One reason, as Mao Zedong, one of the founders of the CCP, explained in 1927, was that women were especially oppressed. In addition to being dominated by three systems-political, clan, and religious, a condition they shared with men-they were also dominated by men within the family. One of the goals of the peasant movement was to overthrow these four systems that represented the ideology and institution of patriarchal feudalism.⁴ Xiang Jingyu, the first and most eminent leader of the Women's Department of the CCP, located the source of Communist concern in the fact that women had been harshly exploited and oppressed by the

feudal social system and feudal culture of Confucianism for thousands of years with the result that they possessed great revolutionary potential. Women were half the Chinese population—and the most brutalized. They were, therefore, ideal recruits to the Communist revolution. They wanted revolution; they would support revolution.⁵ In addition, as good Marxists, Chinese Communists endorsed Marx's observation that "the degree of the emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation."⁶ However, although they emphasized the importance of women's emancipation, they never made this emancipation a top priority. In fact, the Chinese Communists distanced themselves from the women's suffrage movement. They concentrated, in the tradition of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Ferdinand A. Bebel,⁷ on the economic foundations of the oppression and exploitation of women and linked the women's struggle to the wider issue of the proletariat struggle against the forces of capitalism.⁸ Indeed, some Party members, such as Xiang Jingyu, strongly criticized the Women's Movement, feminist groups, and emancipatory ideologies as inspirations of the Western bourgeois social and political system. They argued that a handful of vociferous, radical women participating in government could not bring about fundamental change. Women would still be exploited and oppressed by Chinese reactionaries and foreign imperialists and would remain without legal implementation of their rights. Women, they further asserted, could not hope to be effectively liberated until the whole social system was changed and all the oppressed were liberated. Therefore, the liberation of women was not an isolated issue and was not exclusively women's business, but belonged within the larger process of the liberation of the whole working class. In short, the Women's Movement in China was not an independent manifestation but part of the peasant and worker revolutionary liberation movement.⁹

After the Nationalist Party's coup of April 12, 1927,¹⁰ the Communist Party split with the Nationalist Party. The Nationalist Party occupied the cities and the Communist Party retreated to rural bases in Hunan, Jiangxi, and Guangdong provinces. Its aim was to "struggle for the masses by means of careful organization, strikes, peasant activities and preparation for the establishment of soviets."¹¹ The Party also formed a political arm of the Women's Movement by working out systematic procedures for recruiting and organizing its members and by expanding the Movement in the rural areas.¹²

A sea change in Chinese history happened in the autumn of 1927. After opposing the Nationalist Party's coup, Zhu De's revolutionary troops from Nanchang city¹³ met Mao Zedong's peasant army groups from Hunan rural area¹⁴ at Jinggangshan, the border mountain area in Jiangxi province.¹⁵ The two forces merged and became the Chinese Worker-Peasants' Red Army (known succinctly as the Red Army).¹⁶ Zhu De was its commander-in-chief and Mao Zedong became its political commissar. They used this natural mountain stronghold to establish a soviet-style regime to further political revolution. The encirclement of the counter-revolutionary cities with revolutionary villages marked its beginning. Mao Zedong had said that "a single spark can start a prairie fire."¹⁷ It proved to be true. By 1930 a total of 15 areas had expanded into provincial border

zones centered around Jiangxi province. Delegates from each of the soviets met to establish the Chinese Soviet Republic in Ruijin, Jiangxi, in November 1931. Mao was its first chairman.¹⁸ Although the word “soviet” was borrowed from the Russian experience and language, the Chinese soviet differed from the Russian in that it did not center on the proletariat in the urban areas. A Chinese soviet was any area controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. In fact, the Chinese soviets were mostly rural military base areas.¹⁹

When the soviets were established, women’s rights were set down in several policy documents of the Party. In “The Guiding Principle of Labor Women’s Struggle” issued by the Central Executive Committee of the Party on November 8, 1930, the CCP insisted that in liberated areas its soviets must establish laws protecting and emancipating women. In these areas men and women were equal. Women over the age of 16 were to have the right to vote. They were to be eligible for political office. They were to have rights to land and choice in marriage. They were to be equal to men in politics, law, education, and the economy.²⁰ The Constitution of Jiangxi Soviet of 1931 set those principles into law.²¹ The Labor Code of the same year granted, in Article 29, equal pay for equal work for both women and adolescent girls.²² The land law of 1931, in Article 1, stated that “Hired farm hands, coolies and toiling laborers shall enjoy equal rights to land allotments, irrespective of sex.”²³ These innovations gave women the foundations in law necessary for economic emancipation. The marriage laws, for their part, brought women greater personal and social freedom. The first set of marriage laws, the Marriage Regulations, was included in the 1931 Constitution. They were based on Soviet Russia’s Legal Code of 1926, with local Chinese circumstances taken into account. They were China’s first modern marriage laws.²⁴ The second set was introduced in April 1934.²⁵ These were the most radical marriage laws to be passed by the Communist Party.²⁶ Although they were subsequently watered down²⁷—eventually the right to divorce and to choose a husband was withdrawn—the right to dispose of property and to have control of the children were retained.²⁸ These early laws—even in diluted form—fundamentally changed women’s legal status for the better.

The marriage laws were particularly significant for women’s emancipation. During the 1930s, despite various political reforms that had taken place in earlier years, urban women’s emancipation had its ups and downs. However, rural women’s lives had remained much the same as before. Sexual discrimination, of course, was a fundamental part of the patriarchal structure of familial control that underpinned the feudal autocratic order. Nothing in this regard changed in the vast rural areas in the first quarter of the 20th century despite several politically motivated movements.²⁹ Most women’s lives followed a common pattern. In hard times peasant families were forced to sell their daughters as slave girls or give them in adoption as “tong-yang-xi” (little daughter-in-law).³⁰ Little daughters-in-law were frequently older than the boys for whom they were intended, and the groom’s family expected labor from the girl before marriage. Thus, prior to marriage, “child brides” worked hard, endured the dominance of future mothers-in-law, and were often nursemaids to their infant husbands.³¹ In reality, however,

for girls not sold as adopted daughters-in-law, conditions were not much more palatable. Their marriages were always arranged by the parents, and within the marriage, they were treated not as human beings but as things—as machines for producing sons and as sources of labor. Marriage meant total servility: “If a woman marries a chicken, she should obey the chicken; if she marries a dog, she should obey the dog.”³² A married woman had absolutely no freedom, and escape from marriage came only through being driven out of the home or through death.

The CCP and the Red Army, as they moved through the rural areas, spread heretical ideas about such subjugated women, made frequent use of propaganda that pointed to their bitter lives, gave them liberty, and established marriage laws to protect them in the future. Chou Shu-nu, a child bride who joined the Red Army, recalled that when the CCP and the Red Army arrived at her village, they told people that it was wrong to have child brides. It was time for change. Women should have the right to personal freedom. “It seemed,” Chou Shu-nu remembered, “that what those people had to say fitted exactly my idea of justice and truth, especially the part about freedom of marriage and child brides.”³³

Other changes in women’s lives were also advocated by the CCP, in particular, participation in evening and day school to learn to read and write so as to motivate “the masses of women to rise up in order to overcome the actions of those who would ridicule women who would go to school.”³⁴ This emphasis on education remained strong in the Jangxi era. In 1934 Agnes Smedley wrote of the CCP soviets that “Great cultural progress has taken place. Thousands of schools, night schools, clubs, and classes for the eradication of illiteracy have been founded.”³⁵

There were marked differences between the CCP’s and the Nationalist Party’s policies on women’s emancipation. The CCP forbade child brides, whereas the Nationalist government only allowed the child bride to break her betrothal.³⁶ The Communists explicitly forbade both concubinage and bigamy, while the Nationalists, in effect, only opposed bigamy.³⁷ The Communists instituted a marriage age of 20 for men and 18 for women, in contrast to the Nationalist Party’s 18 and 16 respectively. While the Nationalist regulations allowed women to divorce, the Communists went further by institutionalizing a woman’s right to child custody if she wished to raise the child.³⁸ And the Communists also went further with regard to the principle of marital freedom of choice; they attacked “the arranged feudal marriage system”—a system based on the legal, economic, and political inequality of the sexes.³⁹ In addition, the Communists established marriage registration, thus giving them more control over marriage than any previous Chinese regime.

Although the CCP paid careful attention to women’s emancipation, it was not sympathetic to feminism. It had “grander” objectives. Its purpose, as Mao declared, was to save the Chinese people from destruction and to promote and lead the anti-imperialist movement. In short, the agenda was “not only the freeing of 450 million Chinese people, but taking a step toward the freeing of the whole suppressed peoples of the world.”⁴⁰ The Party’s attitude toward the Women’s Movement was not to free women to concentrate on women’s issues, as feminists demanded, but to free women from the feudal culture and family structure so as

to attend to the economic, social, and political struggle side by side with men. The fight against both a strong Nationalist Army and powerful provincial warlords required men and women to join forces both at the front and in the village. The Party insisted, "We must encourage women...to substitute for men. In the work behind the front, we need many women. We must implement the law to protect and emancipate women. We should lead and stimulate women's participation in revolutionary war. Women's emancipation must be associated with revolution."⁴¹ The Party, therefore, took the Women's Movement under its wing to develop it as part of the wider Communist political movement.⁴²

From 1928 to 1931 the Communists had two major goals: expanding the soviet areas and developing and strengthening a regular revolutionary army—the Red Army. The Red Army was the most pressing ambition. It increased from fewer than 10,000 in 1928 to 70,000 by April 1930.⁴³ The ultimate goal was 100,000 soldiers.⁴⁴ While the Jiangxi period (1928-1934) was also focused on formulating Party ideals and groping for effective governmental forms, the Red Army was the dominant priority due to the urgent requirement of military survival.⁴⁵ The soviets were frequently under attack from National forces and provincial militia. National armies under Chiang Kaishek,⁴⁶ supported by the foreign powers, attacked the Jiangxi soviets five times in three years.⁴⁷ Survival in the border areas depended purely and simply upon the ability to fight. "An independent regime must be an armed one," Mao wrote at the time. "Wherever there are no armed forces, or the armed forces are inadequate, or the tactics for dealing with the enemy are wrong, the enemy will immediately triumph!"⁴⁸ The need for the most complete military competence shaped the structure of the soviets. Women, therefore, were encouraged to take up military activities. And the consequent militant image of the women of the soviets helped in no small way to bury historic stereotypes of quiescent femininity.

The Communist soviets revived the Taiping Rebellion's concept of liberated women warriors⁴⁹ and structured the community around the idea of Darwinian survival through war, and to realize both ambitions created a formal system of physical exercise for women that for the first time permeated all levels of society. The physical freedoms of the privileged urban few of earlier years now became the freedoms of the poverty-stricken rural many. Women of every background were made to exercise with a single purpose—military survival. The emancipatory ideal of the female liberated body, both physiologically and psychologically, became the property of the ideologically committed of all classes rather than of the financially favored of a single class. Curiously the process was both circular and unilinear: the return to the old Taiping ideological idealism and the creation of a new Communist pattern of action.

Military activities and military training were firmly based on exercise, physical education, and sport in the Jiangxi Soviet period. The soviet areas from 1927 to 1934 saw a systematic attempt to promote physical exercise in armies, schools, factories, peasant and youth organizations, counties, and villages. This effort was called the "Red Sports Movement." The name "Red Sports Movement" (referred to henceforward as the RSM) was adopted officially in 1932,⁵⁰ but it originated

in 1929 after the Party's Gutian Conference.⁵¹ In the Resolution of the Gutian Conference, the Party decided to establish in each company of the Red Army a physical training program and a Club system.⁵² These were years of struggle for survival. Fitness, toughness, and stamina meant surviving and winning the war. In the view of the Party, sport was one of the best ways to unite the masses into a disciplined, patriotic, successful martial force. In 1929, therefore, the Party advocated the introduction of the RSM throughout the soviet areas. By 1933 there were 1,917 clubs in the soviet villages (there were 2,932 villages in the soviet areas at that time).⁵³ Additional sports clubs and organizations existed in urban schools and factories.⁵⁴ Mao stated in the Report of the Second All-Chinese Soviet Congress of 1934 that "A Red Sports Movement has been developing rapidly. Even remote villages have held track and field events and sports fields have been made in many places."⁵⁵ As the responsibility of the Educational Committee of the Soviet Republic and the Red Sports Society, the RSM, then, became a mass movement in which exercise henceforward was considered a fundamental aspect of the physical, cultural, and military training of people in soviet areas. It was a method of enabling the masses to develop fitness, build esprit de corps, and develop endurance. More than this, it was a means of binding the bulk of the workers and peasants to the Party, soviet, and Red Army, and drawing them into political activity. Exercise was an inseparable part of political education.

In concentrating attention here on the evolution of exercise in the soviets, of course, there is an obvious danger of exaggerating its relative importance in soviet society—and indeed in Chinese soviet policymaking. However, as an element of overall culture, exercise was certainly assigned a specific and important role in the Chinese soviet strategy for the creation and survival of a new ideology, a new identity and a new society during the Jiangxi period. It is time this was recognized, acknowledged, and recorded.

The RSM, as mentioned above, was the brain-child of the Red Army. Sport was to create "a new Chinese"—strong, disciplined, and patriotic, able to fight and thus ensure the solidarity, stability, and success of the Chinese Soviet Republic. Commanders, officers, and rankers of the Army all participated enthusiastically in physical activities through the RSM. Agnes Smedley observed that "the whole Army took part in athletic exercise, competing in every kind of sport."⁵⁶ Many Party and Army leaders' reminiscences certainly include sporting anecdotes. For instance, Mao Zedong, commissar of the First Front Red Army, liked to swim and climb. On occasion, he volunteered to referee basketball matches. Nie Rongzhen, a Red Army commander, enjoyed long distance running. Den Fa, the head of the Security Council of the government, Zhang Aiping, the Chief of the Young Pioneers and the Youth League, and Yang Yong, another Red Army commander, preferred to play basketball, volleyball, and football. Zhu De, the commander-in-chief of the First Front Red Army, who had been a sports instructor, allegedly spent time with his colleagues discussing how to win battles against the Nationalist army in order to obtain basketballs or footballs from the Nationalist cities for the competitions in the Red area.⁵⁷ He was also the sporting star of the soviet area. His skill at long jump, high jump, and especially the pole

vault was greatly admired. Any basketball match in which he took part attracted a large audience including his wife, Kang Keqing, overall commander of the Red Army women soldiers, who brought her troops to watch.⁵⁸

Women soldiers were not only spectators, but participants on battlefields and sports grounds. About 100 women soldiers were in the Red Army when it was founded in Jinggangshan in 1927.⁵⁹ After several years the number increased although there are no precise figures available. In addition to the famous Kang Keqing, the “girl commander,” as the men of the Red Army called her, less celebrated Red Army women took a direct part in battle. Wei Xiuying, for example, was present at some hundred battles and spent half a lifetime in the military. She was a classic communist revolutionary. She was sold by her parents at the age of five as a child bride. As she grew up she worked in the fields like a slave. She was often beaten and had little food. When the Red Army arrived at her village, she cut off her long hair and joined it. “The Woman Wei,” Harrison Salisbury commented, was one of tens of thousands who joined the Red Army from the ‘model county’ of the red zone. A division was formed of recruits from Bingo. Its population was 240,000, and 80,000 impoverished peasants like the Woman Wei joined the Party and the Red Army.”⁶⁰ Almost 2,000 women were with the Fourth Front Red Army. Zhao Lan, a woman soldier, described the value of exercise to them: “In the morning, we got up very early. We did our physical exercise in the fog. After breakfast, we practiced grenade throwing, marksmanship, bayonet-drill.... We participated in sport activities, such as high jump, long jump and horizontal bars everyday. We also had a long distance running competition everyday. We liked all sport events, especially long distance running, because all of these activities would help us when we were in battle.”⁶¹

Old people who live in Jianguo county, the soviet area in the border between Sichuan and Shanxi provinces,⁶² can still remember the heady days of the Red Army. It set up a soviet government in every county and built playgrounds in every village. There were more than a hundred playgrounds in the area. The playgrounds were called Red playgrounds or military training fields. They had facilities such as horizontal bars, wooden horses, and jumping pits. At Jianmen village, “Every morning and afternoon, there were male and female soldiers doing their physical training. And every evening, after supper, a team of women soldiers, carrying their swords on their backs, took part in horse racing. Their confident bearing impressed all who saw them. These women soldiers belonged to the women’s regiment of two thousand.”⁶³

Women soldiers not only served in the regiments, they also attended the Red Army schools and academies. There are no precise details of the numbers of women soldier students in these schools. Nevertheless, fragmentary information from those years reveals their presence. In early 1932, for example, Kang Keqing, the commander of the Red Army women soldiers, and 200 women from the division of Women Volunteers went to the Red Army Academy to study for six months. Afterwards ambitious to become a general of the Red Army, Kang stayed on and became a full-time student. She described men’s and women’s training in the Academy as exactly the same.⁶⁴ The structure of the Academy as well as the

Army's other schools were similar to the Army. Like the Army the Academy used sports activities and competitions to train the students to become efficient Red Army cadres.⁶⁵ Some women studied in the Red Army's School of Medicine. This school also held sports competitions, for example, at its opening and graduation ceremonies. The purpose was to publicize and promote the RSM so as to ensure the health and fitness of both the Red Army and the masses.⁶⁶ On July 24, 1933, for example, the school held a typical sports competition. It included 100-, 200-, and 400-meter races, high jump, long jump, table-tennis, basketball, and tennis. Woman students took part in the running events.⁶⁷

Women soldiers' participation in sport improved their health, emphasized their equality and changed their public image. In time, they gained an image of equality on battlefield and playing field. Agnes Smedley quotes a Red Army man speaking of Kang's troops in 1930: "The Women's Volunteer Corps under the woman commander Kang fought furiously and without fear, as if to show that they were the equal of the best of our Red Army units."⁶⁸ In *Stories of the Revolutionary Struggle of Jiangxi Women* published in 1963, the women were described as protecting their regime, land, and the fruits of victory, which they had gained. It seems certain that they, with the men, fought strongly and often showed incomparable bravery. More than this, when the Red Army opposed the Nationalists' invasions of the soviet, the women not only fought but provided medical assistance, worked in transport units, and formed entertainment units. They marched with the army, encountered the enemy, and in the front line saved and aided the wounded.⁶⁹ Harrison Salisbury noticed that in the Red Army sexual differences were ignored.⁷⁰ Women were not considered the weaker and inferior sex. They had early earned equal status. Liu Yin, a woman cadre of the First Front Red Army,⁷¹ remembered that on the Long March in 1935, the Red Army soldiers had to walk great distances each day. And there was quarrelling between the sexes. The men complained that the women were better treated than they were and didn't carry their fair share of the rice bags. As a result the women were placed in a separate unit, with Liu Yin as captain and Li Bozhao in charge of the commissary. Now they could not expect preferential treatment.⁷² This imposed sexual equality made women soldiers' lives arduous, but they coped. As a woman soldier Wei concluded: "Every day we were in difficulties. Every day we had a hard time."⁷³ These hard times were not without advantages. The women's regiment of the Fourth Front Red Army crossed the Grasslands and Great Snow Mountain three times and spent eight months wandering over the Tibetan plateau.⁷⁴ This equality, demanded by men, required women to be fitter. In the long term, compulsory physical training helped them both to obtain and maintain this fitness.

Some women joined the Red Army; many more participated in various mass organizations in the soviet areas. These organizations included children, adolescents, and adult female and male peasants and workers. The most important were the Handicraft Industry Union, the Farmhand Union, the Poor Peasants Association, the Red Vanguard, the Young Pioneers, the Children's Corps, and the Women's Association. In short, they covered virtually all occupations, all ages,

and both sexes. They were an integral part of the soviets. As Ipyong J.Kim noted: "The structure of the soviet government in Jiangxi...was highly centralized in the sense that all institutions were centrally created and all policies centrally controlled and supervised through the mechanism of the party...through the conferences at each level of government, and by the reporting and inspecting system."⁷⁵ The government endorsed the organizations and the organizations in turn supported the government at the grass roots level. This was their basic purpose. In late 1931 the Women's Association, however, was abolished by the government. It feared their growing independence. Women were compelled to participate in the other mass organizations according to their age, education, and occupation. This significant development had been clearly signalled early in the same year. On March 26, 1931, the government declared that the Women's Association, which had been formed in accordance with the Party's policy in 1927, was to be done away with.

Other organizations now set up women's working sections to integrate women's work. Women were pressed to join them.⁷⁶ On September 10, 1931, by the "Resolution of Women's Work in Xiang-Gang (Hunan and Jiangxi provinces) Border Soviet Area" it was decided that all women's independent organizations were abolished.⁷⁷ The Resolution argued that the soviet government was the representative of the worker-peasant class. This class embraced both sexes. There was, therefore, no need for an independent organization exclusively for women. Women should be meshed into the mass organizations mentioned above. However, two women's agencies, the Women's Life Improvement Committee and the Working Women's Congress, were set up by the government to study women's issues and to promote women's work within the soviet region. The task of the Women's Life Improvement Committee was to investigate the situation of women in the soviet, to consider women's problems, and to make recommendations regarding women's issues to the soviet's government. The aim of the Working Women's Congress was also to concern itself with women's problems and offer suggestions for their solution. In addition, they were involved with the education and mobilization of worker-peasant women.⁷⁸ These two agencies were not women's mass organizations. The first was a government advisory body and was actually a department of the government; the second appears to have been a kind of worker-peasant women's 'parliament.'⁷⁹

This dramatic change of soviet policy exposed fears that large-scale exclusive women's organizations might separate in time from other soviet institutions and become instruments of autonomous feminism, which, it was believed, meant placing women's interests above peasant and worker interests. This danger was perceived to come from female students—elite women intellectuals—who were acutely sensitive to historical inequality, family oppression, and sexual exploitation, conditions which were more readily accepted by worker-peasant women. It was believed that these students would insist on bringing up the issue of women's rights in family and society. This would challenge male power in both the family and community and bring about confrontation between the sexes. Such a diffusion of energy was not to be tolerated. Energy was to be used by all to bring about

revolutionary class change. Furthermore the Communists were realists. The attitude of peasants concerning women was not to be changed overnight. The Communists knew this only too well. A peasant revolt did not mean that peasants themselves would immediately change their negative attitude to women, which had been deeply rooted in feudal culture for over a thousand years. The cry of Communist women for freedom was more often than not ignored by Communist fathers, brothers, and husbands.⁸⁰ In this situation, any radical change in sex roles would have aroused deep antagonisms and stimulated confrontation. The Communist Revolution was a peasant-focused revolution that required male and female peasants to unite to fight against Nationalists and Imperialists. The Communists never allowed feminism to interfere with this purpose. The Women's Movement was always subordinate to the orthodox objectives of social change, economic reform, and military victory over the Nationalists and, later on, the Japanese.⁸¹

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the Communist Party never allowed the Women's Movement independence as we have seen, it far from ignored women. As already pointed out, they constituted half the population and were filled with revolutionary spirit. They had most to gain and least to lose.⁸² They were invaluable. The Party had to be careful, therefore, to keep a balance between women's demands and men's prejudices, retaining the support of both women and men while pursuing the creation of a seamless Party. For this reason the Chinese Communist Party never shifted in its casuistic attitude towards the Women's Movement. Salatt and Stacey charge that the Party operated on the basis of expediency rather than principle with regard to women.⁸³ Mariam D. Frenier has also argued that "the Party's policies towards women were largely based on expediency—that is, when women were needed they were appealed to on the basis of their low position in society but when they were not, their concerns were ignored."⁸⁴ However, it could be argued that, based on a fuller reading of the archival records of the Party⁸⁵ and a fuller understanding of recent Chinese history, the essence of the Party's attitude and policy towards women's liberation was not expediency but consistency. The Communist Party vigorously advocated women's freedom, always attached importance to women's work, and never ignored women's emancipation. The Party, however, never put women's emancipation at the top of its agenda. The CCP was not a feminist party but a "unisex" party. Its goal was to overthrow imperialist and reactionary rule, to liberate all oppressed people—male and female—and to build a Communist China. In this sense, the Women's Movement was to be involved in the politics of a class struggle rather than a sex war. The Movement was not subordinated to the authority of men, as Julia Kristeva simplistically states,⁸⁶ but subordinated to the Party's aims. And these were more than simply gender driven. This explains why the Party, on the one hand, pushed women's liberation forward and, on the other hand, restricted it to a set pace. In this way, open conflict between the sexes was avoided and concessions were made that would at least partly accommodate traditional male peasant attitudes. To prevent women from becoming too overtly assertive, as we have seen above, women were forced to join "unisex" organizations. In this way women's emancipatory

ambitions could be swallowed up in wider political imperatives. In essence, therefore, the aims of reorganization were to distract women from exclusive feminism, to encourage them to support class struggle and to focus their efforts on the defeat of Nationalists and Imperialists. To these ends women's activities were now subsumed within general mass organizations.

Exercise, sport and military training for women were a feature of all these organizations. And women were strongly encouraged to be involved in the RSM.⁸⁷ Generally speaking, males and females between the ages of 23 and 50 joined the Red Vanguard, ⁸⁸ between the ages of 16 and 23 joined the Young Pioneers,⁸⁹ and between the ages of 8 and 15 joined the Children's Corps.⁹⁰ The older adults joined the Poor Peasants Union, the Handicrafts Union and other mass organizations. As in the Army, in these organizations, exercise, games, athletics, and drill were de rigueur. For one good reason—everyone in the soviet was considered a potential soldier. In her book *China's Red Army Marches*, Agnes Smedley observed that the Red Vanguard were made up of both armed and trained men and women who “guarded the villages and towns and all the paths in the soviet regions.”⁹¹ Mao was still more specific. In “The Investigation of Xingguo County,” he stated that women in the county were an integral part of the Vanguard and groups of 40 to 50 females aged between 23 and 50 constituted a team. They did the same training as male Vanguard, including military drill for three hours each month.⁹² In his “The Model of Soviet Work in Changgang Village,” Mao described the RSM and the “cultural movement” in a Chinese communist model village.⁹³ He wrote that “The Changgang village as a whole was made up of four smaller hamlets. Each hamlet had a Club, there were Sport, Wall-newspaper, and Performance committees within the Club. Men and women participated in activities organized by those committees. Women in the hamlet were Vanguard. They drilled twice for five hours every month in their hamlet and took part in the military drill competition in the local town once a month.”⁹⁴ Mao was so pleased with Changgang village's athletic, cultural, and educational work that he asked that every Soviet village learn from it.⁹⁵

In the soviet areas, girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 23 were encouraged to join the Young Pioneers. It vigorously promoted the RSM. According to the “Resolution of the Present Work of the Young Pioneers in the Soviet Area,” the main objectives of the organization were to extend and improve the Young Pioneers' military and athletic activities.⁹⁶ To achieve these objectives the Central Committee of the Young Pioneers established a Sport and Physical Exercise Committee. It had large ambitions. It attempted to promote the RSM in every branch of the Young Pioneers. On June 13, 1932, the Headquarters of the Young Pioneers issued an order requesting that Clubs be set up in all branches to promote sport.⁹⁷ On November 27, 1932, Zhang Aiping, the chief-commander of the Young Pioneers, provided the Young Pioneers with teaching materials that were intended to serve as inspirational literature.⁹⁸ In 1934, to facilitate the development of the RSM throughout the Young Pioneers, the Headquarters of the Young Pioneers edited and published two instructional books, *Games for Young Pioneers* and *Gymnastics for Young Pioneers*. Both were approved by Zhou Enlai⁹⁹

and Zhang Aiping.¹⁰⁰ Later, the Central Committee for the People's Education used the textbooks in both the Children's Corps and the Lenin schools.¹⁰¹ They were the first primary school physical education textbooks in the soviet areas.¹⁰²

The minds and bodies of the young are especially important to revolutionaries. The young know no past; they only have a future. They are the true believers of tomorrow. Consequently, girls and boys between the ages of 8 and 14 were encouraged to join the Communist Labor Children's Corps.¹⁰³ Its aims were to teach boys and girls the basic principles of communism and to train them to be the reserve force of the Young Pioneers. The Young Pioneers, in turn, as mentioned above, were the reserve forces of the Red Army. Exercise played an important role in the Children's Corps. The Party advocated the use of sport to attract boys and girls to it. In January 1932, the First Jiangxi Provincial Congress issued "The Resolution of the Work of Children's Corps in the Soviet Area." It demanded that every village should build playgrounds for modern ball games and traditional folk games.¹⁰⁴ Children's Corps in every village were now required to do physical exercise and military drill. Mao was pleased with the Children's Corps' work in Xingguo county. In particular, he considered the fact that these children did military drill three times a week most impressive.¹⁰⁵ On April 1, 1933, "A View of Communist Children's Corps of Center Soviet Area"—a big sports meeting—was held in Ruijin, the capital of the Chinese Soviet Republic. Zhang Aiping's article entitled "Our Happy Festival" vividly describes how the girls and boys of the Children's Corps enthusiastically prepared for this important event: "April 1st is our festival. We are going to celebrate it. Brothers and sisters, let's review our achievements—study and exercise. Let's encourage our fathers and brothers to join the Red Army. Let's continue our 'Saturday helpers activity' to help Red Army soldiers' families and let's participate in all kind of exercise. We will tell the world that we are happy, lively and healthy children in the Red Soviet."¹⁰⁶

Exercise, military training, and the RSM not only suffused the Red Army, the mass adult organizations, and the mass children's organizations, it also permeated the soviet formal educational system. In the soviet areas, many children (girls and boys) aged 7 to 15 received free education. They attended the Lenin school set up in every village by the local government. In 1934 there were 3,052 Lenin primary schools in 2,232 villages in soviet areas. There were 89,716 students studying in these schools.¹⁰⁷ At least one-third were girls.¹⁰⁸ In school, girls and boys were equal. The curriculum was the same for both sexes. The aim of education was to train "the builders of Communism in the future, and the new generation now for the class struggle."¹⁰⁹ Correspondingly, the purpose of the school was to educate the students to be politically aware, to acquire basic knowledge and to possess strong bodies.¹¹⁰

"Sport was the best way to inculcate energy, resolution, enterprise, application, self-control and single-minded devotion to duty."¹¹¹ This positive view of sport propounded by Zhu De was popularized by the whole machinery of formal and informal propaganda. The Red Army, the Party, and the government used sport as an instrument to prepare for war, to wage war, to create and to popularize military mythical heroes and heroines. Sports fields were successfully linked to

battlefields. When the Third Red Army Regiment obtained the championship in the Jiangxi Provincial Ball-games Competition in May 1933, *Qingnian shihua* [True Words of Youth]¹¹² commented: “The Red Army soldiers are brave and strong on the playground. They will show these qualities on the battlefield. For this reason the Nationalist army has always been defeated by the Red Army.”¹¹³ When the Red Army of Fujian Division held a sports competition in July 1933, the champion regiment was praised as “ever-victorious both on the sports and battlefield.”¹¹⁴ Mao told his soldiers, “You must do physical training and physical exercise. Only when you strengthen your body will you be able to fight well against our enemies.”¹¹⁵ In short, sport was a prerequisite of a strong revolutionary fighting force. As one officer put it: “We must develop a sport movement to train our bodies to be strong and healthy. Education is necessary, but physical education is more necessary. Sport is action. Soldiers are trained for action. We should spread the ideal of developing a sports movement in order to train soldiers who not only have class consciousness but also masculine bodies.”¹¹⁶ Zhu De, the commander-in-chief, was more specific: “To win the war, we need to recruit 1,000,000 iron Red Army soldiers. Therefore, we need to develop a sports movement among the masses which will provide soldiers who are strong—with iron muscle and steel bone.”¹¹⁷

Precept became practice. Sports competitions became a functional fashion. From 1931 to 1934 they spread through the whole soviet area. Inter-organization, inter-county, and inter-provincial events took place everywhere. Ideologically speaking, the most significant of all the sports meetings held in 1933 was the Red Sports Meeting of the Whole Soviet Area, which took place in Ruijin on May 30. On May 5 the Chinese Soviet Republic had issued a decree covering the whole country—including the Nationalist areas. It declared, “For the purpose of breaking the Fourth Attack of the Nationalists and Imperialists, we must develop the Red Sports Movement to train the workers and peasants to have the collective spirit and strong bodies to meet the needs of the class struggle. This is urgent and necessary. Consequently, the soviet government has decided to have a formal athletic meeting of the whole soviet area in the red capital of the soviet on May 30th, 1933. This Red Sports Meeting is to test the physique of the workers and peasants and to act as a demonstration to our enemies.”¹¹⁸

The opening ceremony of this famous “Sports Meeting of the Chinese Soviet Republic” began at six o’clock in the evening. Its slogan was “to train the iron muscle and steel bone of the worker-peasant class in order to defeat the enemy.” Communist Party and Army leaders constituted the organizing committee. Activities included ball games—basketball, football, volleyball, tennis, table-tennis, and athletics—high jump, long jump, pole vault, discus, shot, javelin, and obstacle, 50-meter, 100-meter, 200-meter, and 400-meter races. More than 160 selected athletes from the Red Army, the schools, and the mass organizations of the whole soviet area participated. The meeting lasted for three days. At the closing ceremony, the first sports society in the soviet area was established. It was called the Red Sport Society of the Chinese Soviet Republic. Its aim was to consolidate the RSM throughout the soviet area. Communist Party and Army leaders Xiang

Yin, Wang Shenyong, Deng Fa, Zhang Aiping and Shi Bicheng were elected as members of the Society. The Red Sport Society's ambition now was to join the International Association of Red Sports and Gymnastics Associations (better known as Red Sports International—RSI).¹¹⁹ This decision was approved by the 180 competing athletes who represented thousands of peasants and workers. The Society agreed that under the leadership of the RSI, the Communist Chinese Red Sport Association—a branch of the RSI—would oppose the Lucerne Sports International (LSI), a branch of the Bureau of the Socialist International¹²⁰, and promote the RSM among the working classes of the world.¹²¹

Where did women fit into this revolutionary plan for the national and international promotion of competitive sport? The Party, of course, had always appreciated that sport, suitably controlled, was a powerful means for realizing women's emancipation.¹²² Women, therefore, were encouraged to attend sports competitions. At the May 30 Sports Meeting in 1933, Zhang Aiping pointed out that one of its shortcomings was that there were no women athletes involved. He demanded their participation.¹²³ His was an influential speech with positive consequences for women. Subsequently, women athletes took part in the Fujian Provincial Red Sports Meeting (August 2, 1933)¹²⁴ and the Jiangxi Provincial Red Sports Meeting (August 3, 1933).¹²⁵

On December 17, 1933, *Qingnian shihua* [True Words of Youth] reported that the women's Marx-Communist University's basketball team was successfully established. It further announced that:

“For the purposes of the development of the Red Sports Movement and for the women in the Soviet Area to advance the struggle, female athletes ask for the women in the whole Soviet Area to exercise and to train to become stronger for participation in the struggle. The women's basketball teams are the pioneers of their day. What do you think, girls and women in the Soviet University, Red Army Academy and every college, school and mass organization? How about you? Would you like to support the women's basketball players? Then organize your sports teams as soon as possible! Do exercise! Welcome the Second All Chinese Soviet Congress with your strong bodies and fighting spirit.”¹²⁶

According to an inquiry of 1934,¹²⁷ there were several universities, colleges, and institutes set up by the government in Jiangxi to train communist cadres of both sexes such as the Marx-Communist University, the Bank Special Training School, the College of Education, the Red Army Academy, the Drama School, and the Agrarian Culture School. In addition, Agnes Smedley observed there were many other normal schools and other institutions for the training of women.¹²⁸ In the universities and schools women attended physical education classes. They also did a great deal of physical exercise after school. In the Soviet University in Ruijing, for example, in which there were 2,000 men and women in training,¹²⁹ the women students participated in basketball, table-tennis, gymnastics, running, and walking.

Nevertheless, women's participation in competitive sport, especially at public sports meetings, was not as extensive as men's. This was too much to expect.

Women were eventually encouraged to participate, but participation was relatively slow to gather momentum. Tradition was still the obstacle that barred the way. Competitive sport posed problems. Traditional Chinese culture never approved of women appearing in public to show off either their athletic ability or their physical form. Female sexuality and physicality had come to be defined as synonymous in patriarchal culture. A culture that defined women in these terms was ill-disposed to see a reformation of sensual physicality and the adoption of 'masculine' forms of physicality. In the final analysis, this meant that women were either still to be excluded from the symbols, practices, and institutions of sport or, when they did participate, it was in a way that was acceptable to traditionalists. The Party officially acknowledged that the problem that affected women in sport was peasant and worker resistance to social and cultural change, especially men's resistance to change in women's status and image.¹³⁰ And the Party consequently moved gradually on the issue, as we have seen, at several levels including involvement in competitive sport. To a degree it was calculatedly and deliberately Janus-headed. Nevertheless, competitive sport with its emphasis on aggression, conquest, and self-assertion—all traditionally masculine rather than feminine virtues—was now made available to women in the Party's interest. Political survival was essential. Women, therefore, through fitness training of every kind, were to be prepared physiologically and psychologically to help the Party survive. They also gradually became accustomed to new opportunities, expectations, roles, images and freedoms.

The Jiangxi Era ended in October 1934 when the Nationalists were successful in their fifth attempt at encirclement. The majority of the Communists left the rural soviets and began the celebrated Long March that took them to Shanxi in late 1935. There the mistakes of the Jiangxi Era were scrutinized. From 1937 the United Front with the Nationalist Party resulted in new policies. The Communists compromised their principles in the attempt to ensure national unity to resist Japanese aggression. As a result of these policies in the border areas (also called the liberated areas), the Red Sports Movement and the Women's Movement advanced to new positions in their steady march towards cultural change.

In the context of the history of modern China and from the perspective of the Women's Movement, the Jiangxi period is prototypical. In addition to legal advances, land reform, and mobilization, which have received their due attention,¹³¹ changes in women's physical image through exercise—attempted and achieved in no small measure—all foreshadowed the future. These changes were slow, but they were real and they were the foundation of future social developments. Arguably one of the most significant cultural innovations of the Jiangxi Era was the RSM. Its emancipatory role to date has not been adequately recorded. It played a considerable part in the gradual replacement of patriarchal values and was, therefore, instrumental in the eventual rejection of those values. The RSM created new opportunities for women's development—mentally and physically. It challenged the past patriarchal culture. It contributed to the redefinition of the image of women and it produced radical female role models. While few in number, their influence was marked. Depictions of Jiangxi women who undertook

strenuous physical exercise and intensive military training to create iron bodies and fought with the Communist armies are still used today to ensure there will be no return to traditional attitudes and to underline the duties, responsibilities and possibilities of contemporary Chinese women under Communism.

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1. It was called in Chinese Zhongguo Gongchandang. Thirteen Chinese delegates, who represented the approximately 60 CCP members in China, attended the First Congress in July 1921. Their decision on party role and organization took a conventional Leninist line. For details of the establishment of the Party see Robert C. North, *Chinese Communism* (London: World University Library, 1966), pp. 28–30; *Moscow and Chinese Communists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 58; Jerome Chen, *Mao and the Chinese Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 75–88; Edwin E. Moise, *Modern China: A History* (London: Longman, 1986), pp. 48–53; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), pp. 310–324; Hu Sheng, *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1982), pp. 1192–1201.
2. The Second Congress of the CCP: “The Resolution of Women’s Movement,” July 1922; see also the CCP’s first manifesto “On the Current Situation in China” issued in July 1921, in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John K. Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1952), p. 63.
3. For the Third Congress of the CCP an updated document also called “The Resolution of Women’s Movement” was issued in June 1923.
4. Mao Zedong, “The Report on an Investigation into the Peasant Movement of Hunan,” which was first published in 1927 in the *CCP Weekly* and *Chinese Correspondence*. This article is now in the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe), vol. 1, 1991, pp. 1–17.
5. Wang Yizhi, “A Great Women Revolutionary,” *China Reconstructs* (March 1965), pp. 5–8; R. Witke, “Women as Politicians in China of the 1920s,” in Marilyn B. Young, (ed.), *Women in China: Studies in Social Changes and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1973), pp. 41–43.
6. Karl Marx, *The Holy Family* (Chinese translation), (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1976), p. 56.
7. Ferdinand August Bebel (1840–1913), German socialist. His book *Women and Socialism* (1879) was a standard reference work for the CCP’s women’s movement.
8. Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) first expounded socialist views on “the women’s question.” Subsequently Bebel in his *Women and Socialism* (1879) and Engels in his *The Origin of Family, Private and the State* (1884) developed the argument that the solution to the problem of sexual inequality lay in the abolition of capitalism. With the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialist production, human relationships would be freed from economic oppression, all exploitation would cease and women would be emancipated.
9. E. Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 121; Wang Yizhi, op. cit., pp. 25–26; R. Witke, “Women as Politicians in China of the 1920s,” op. cit., p. 43.

10. The Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) were united from 1923 to 1927. However, in April 1927, the Nationalist Party decreed the establishment of a national government and proscribed the CCP. The CCP was virtually destroyed. For details of this split, see Edwin E. Moise, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–66; John Robottom, *Modern China*, (London: Longman, 1971), p. 27; Joyce Reason, *Chiang Kai-shek and the Unity of China* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1943), pp. 28, 33–34, 43; R.C. North, *Chinese Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 104; H. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951), p. 37; C.P. Fitzgerald, *The Birth of Communist China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 67.
11. R.C. North, *Chinese Communism*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
12. See “The Resolution of Women’s Movement at the CCP’s Sixth Congress” (July 10, 1928), in Chinese Women’s Federation—Women’s Movement Research Centre (hereafter CWF), ed., *The Historical Archives of the Chinese Women’s Movement*, (Beijing: Zhongguo funu chubanshe, 4 vols., 1991), vol. 2, pp. 16–18.
13. Zhu De (1886–1976) studied in Yunnan Military Academy in 1909, participated in the 1911 Revolution and joined the CCP in 1922. He was the commander-in-chief of the Red Army in 1930s and the commander-in-chief of the Chinese Liberation Army from the 1940s to the 1970s. For details of his life, see his biography written by Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh (Zhu De)*, (London: John Calder, 1958) and *Battle Hymn of China*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), pp. 119–121.
14. When in 1927 the Nationalist Party proscribed the CCP in all major cities, Mao Zedong went back to his hometown, Hunan, to organize resistance. Because it began in September 1927, it was called the Autumn Harvest Uprising. After the failure of the uprising Mao Zedong and his peasant troops, almost a thousand men, went to Jinggangshan where they met Zhu De’s troops.
15. Jinggangshan is a spiny-backed outcrop, rising four to five thousand feet, which separates Mao’s home province Hunan from Jiangxi. Positioned along the border, spilling over the edge of each province, roadless, heavily wooded, Jinggangshan had for centuries been a preserve of outlaws. No authority exerted much effort to find out what was going on in this wilderness. It was a most suitable place for Mao to establish his revolutionary state. Harrison Salisbury has a vivid description of Jinggangshan in his book, *The Long March* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 22–28.
16. Agnes Smedley, *China’s Red Army Marches*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936), p. 92; E. F. Carlson, *The Chinese Army: Its Organization and Military Efficiency* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), pp. 15–16.
17. Mao Zedong, “A single spark can start a prairie fire,” in *Mao Zedong’s Selected Works* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), vol.1, pp. 97–108.
18. Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 207–208, (first published in 1938 by New York: Grove Press Inc.); R.C. North, *Chinese Communism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–123.
19. Derek J. Waller, *The Kiangsi Soviet Republic: Mao and the National Congress of 1931 and 1934* (Berkeley, CA: Center for Chinese Studies, China Research Monographs, no. 10, University of California, 1973), *passim*.
20. CWF, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 73–77.
21. This Constitution besides granting women equality included the statement: “all workers, peasants, Red Army men and all toilers and their families, without distinction of sex, religion or nationality.... shall while on Soviet territory, be equal before the law and shall be citizens of the Soviet Republic.” In Article 4 the Constitution granted to all adults above the age of 16 the right to vote and to be elected to soviet positions. For details, see Victor A. Yakantoff, *The Chinese Soviets* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1934), pp. 148–149.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

23. Conrad Brandt et al., *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, op. cit., pp. 224–225.
24. The Marriage Regulations were issued on November 28, 1931, by Mao Zedong, the chairman of the Chinese Soviet Republic, and Xiang Yin and Zhang Guotao, the vice chairmen. The document is in CWF, *The Historical Archive of Chinese Women's Movement*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 151–154. The English translation is available in M.J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971), pp. 281–282. See also Delia Davin, *Women-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 28–30; Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 51–62.
25. The document is in CWF, op. cit., pp. 373–374. For an English translation, see Ann Johnson, op. cit., pp. 115–137.
26. Hu Chi-hsi, “The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet,” *The China Quarterly*, (1974), vol. 59, pp. 477–490; Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 152; Delia David, *Women-Work*, op. cit., p. 28.
27. Delia David, *ibid.*, pp. 29–30. The reason for this situation lay in the fact that the whole period was marked by a desperate fight for survival, serious tension, and struggles within the Party leadership, and economic and social policies that were unevenly and imperfectly carried out. The strength of conservative attitudes toward women took immense efforts and long periods of time to overcome.
28. The Marriage Laws in 1931 ultimately developed into the Chinese Soviet Marriage Law promulgated on April 8, 1934, and finally evolved into the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China in 1950. See Delia Davin, “Women in the Liberated Areas,” in Marilyn B. Young, op. cit., p. 74; Ono Kazuko, op. cit., p. 152–153; Hu Chi-hsi, op. cit.
29. For example, the One Hundred-Day Reform (1898), the 1911 Revolution, the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement (1915–1921). All of these political movements had important impact on urban women's lives but had little influence on rural women.
30. A custom in rural areas, a bride could be provided cheaply for a son by adopting a future daughter-in-law while she was still a child.
31. For details of the custom of adopting daughters-in-law and the rural marriage situation, see Ono Kazuko, op. cit., pp. 142–145.
32. Ono Kazuko, *ibid.*, p. 145.
33. John Hinton, “Story of a Red Army Woman,” *China Reconstructs*, (November 1963), pp. 34–35.
34. Gongnong County Women's Life Improvement Committee, “Resolution of the First Chairperson's League Conference of Gongnong County Women's Life Improvement Committee” (1931), in *Shi Sou Collection* (also known as *Chen Cheng Collection*), in Microfilm, Reel 4, (from the Hoover Institute Library, Stanford).
35. Agnes Smedley, *China's Red Army Marches*, op. cit., p. xviii.
36. M.H. Van der Valk, *Conservatism in Modern Chinese Family Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1956), p. 50.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
38. M.J. Meijer, op. cit., p. 281.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
40. Anna Louise Strong, *The Chinese Conquer China* (New York: Doubleday, 1949), p. 409.
41. “The Decree of Central Government (No. 6): On Protecting Women's Rights and Establishment of Woman's Life Improvement Committee,” June 20, 1932, *Red China*, (1932), No. 26.
42. R. Witke, “Woman as Politician in China of the 1920s,” in Marilyn B. Young, op. cit., p. 43.

43. R.C. North, *Chinese Communism*, op. cit., p. 106.
44. See *True Words of the Youth*, (September 1933), vol. 2, no. 17.
45. The Red Army was the most important of the three elements of Communist rule: army, party, and government. The Party did exercise civil authority through the Central Bureau for Soviet Areas, but while Party control was extensive over both the soviet areas and the Red Armies, it was never complete. As to government, according to Ilpyong J.Kim, the early Jiangxi Soviet government was merely a mass organization of workers and peasants supporting the Red Army. See Ilpyong J. Kim, *The Politics of Chinese Communism: Kiangsi (Jiangxi) under the Soviets* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973).
46. Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), the commander-in-chief of the Nationalist Army and the president of the National Party. After the CCP took over mainland China in 1949, Chiang became president of the Guomindang government on Taiwan until 1975.
47. As the influence of the Communists spread in Jiangxi, Sichuan, and Fujian border areas, Chiang Kai-shek decided that the new Soviet Republic was a serious threat to the Chinese future. He decided that all the “red bandits,” as he called the Communists, must be destroyed. Between December 1930 and October 1933 he mounted four unsuccessful campaigns against the Jiangxi Soviet area. Then, with advice from Nazi military advisers, he began his fifth “extermination” campaign. About 1,000,000 civilians and Red Army soldiers were starved to death or killed. For details of Chiang’s campaigns, see Anna Louise Strong, *China’s Millions* (London, 1936), pp. 396–411.
48. Quoted in R. C. North, *Chinese Communism*, op. cit., p. 108.
49. Whether this was conscious or unconscious is not clear, but there can be no doubt that the liberated women of the Taiping Army had much in common with the liberated women in the Red Army.
50. The name “Red Sports Movement” first appeared in *Gongnong duben* [Workers and Peasants Text Books], (1932), no.3, lesson 77. It stated: “The Red Sports Movement can strengthen the body and stimulate a revolutionary spirit. Every worker and peasant should participate. The form of the Red Sports Movement included athletics, ball games, competition and performance.” In 1933 the term was used widely by the Party and media. In March 1933 Zhang Aiping, the chief-commander of the Young Pioneers, published an article entitled “Developing the Red Sports Movement.” In April 1933, *Qingnian shibua* [True Words of the Youth], the periodical of the Youth League, the Party’s organization for the youth aged 18 to 25, proposed the creation of a Red Sports Society to develop the Red Sports Movement in the Red area. In October, a Jiangxi Provincial Red Sports Meeting took place. In November *Qingnian shibua* introduced a special column entitled “Red Sports.” In December, the editor of *Qingnian shibua* published an article entitled “The Red Sports Movement and Youth.”
51. In December 1929 the Fourth Front Red Army, led by Zhu De and Mao Zedong, held a conference in Gutian county, Fujian province. At this conference Zhu and Mao established the basic principles of the Red Army.
52. Mao Zedong, “The Resolution of the Ninth Congress of the Fourth Front Red Army,” October 1929, in *Mao Zedong’s Selected Works* (Dongbei Press, 1948), pp. 3–7.
53. Gu Shiquan, “The Club and the Lenin Room’s Sports Activities in the Soviet Area,” *Tiyu wen shi* [The Journal of Sports Culture and History] (hereafter *TWS*) (1986), no. 5, p. 32.
54. Gu Shiquan, *ibid*.
55. The Second All-Chinese Soviet Congress was held at Ruijin, the capital city of the Chinese Soviet Republic, in January 1934. Mao’s speech was entitled “The Report of the Chinese Soviet Republic Central Committee and People’s Committee to the Second All-Chinese Soviet Congress,” and it was published in *Red China*, (January 26, 1934), no. 3.
56. Agnes Smedley, *China’s Red Army Marches*, op. cit., p. 200.
57. Liu Lian, “Zhu De and Basketball Competitions,” personal record.

58. Zeng Biao, "Zhu De and a Basketball Match," *TWS*, (1986), no. 3, pp. 27–28.
59. Helen Snow, *Red Dust*, (Westport, CN, 1972), p. 214.
60. Harrison Salisbury, op. cit., p. 32.
61. Du Zhong and Huang Yao, "Worker-Peasant's Sports Activities in Sichuan-Shanxi Border Red Area," *TWS*, (1983), no. 4, p. 45.
62. The Red areas expanded rapidly from the Jiangxi-Hunan border to the Jiangxi-Sichuan and Jiangxi-Fujian border areas. In 1934 the Communists controlled an area of 100,000 square miles with a population of roughly 36 million.
63. Jie Jinin, "The Red Army's Sport Activities in Jiange County," *TWS*, (1986), no. 6, p. 4.
64. Helen Snow, op. cit., p. 216.
65. See "The Report on the Big Competition of Worker-Peasant Red Academy," *Red China*, (September 6, 1932), no. 32.
66. "The Report of the Competition of the Red Army's School of Medicine," *True Words of Youth*, (December 17, 1933), vol. 3, no. 4.
67. "The Report of the Sport Meeting of the Red Army's School of Medicine," *True Words of Youth*, (March 12, 1933), vol. 2, no. 7.
68. Agnes Smedley, *China's Red Army Marches*, op. cit., p. 176.
69. The Jiangxi Women's Association, (ed.), *Stories of Jiangxi Women's Revolutionary Struggle* (Beijing: Zhongguo funu chubanshe, 1963), p. 2.
70. Harrison Salisbury, op. cit., p. 81.
71. There were 30 women cadres marching with the First Front Red Army, and they were mentally and physically tough. After the year-long march, they reached Yan'an safely.
72. Harrison Salisbury, op. cit., p. 88.
73. Ibid.
74. The leader of the Fourth Front Red Army, Zhang Guotao (1897–1979) was one of the founders of the CCP and the vice president of the Chinese Soviet Republic in the Jiangxi era. During the Long March Zhang's troops and Mao's troops met in North Sichuan in June 1935. After weeks of discussion the two leaders could not reach an agreement. Mao insisting on the need to drive yet farther north and east to Shanxi or Ningxia, Zhang wishing to build an isolated and defensible soviet in the Sichuan-Xikang border region. While Mao's troops continued towards the north, Zhang's troops took the reverse route south. Mao's troops arrived in Shanxi in October 1935 and set up a Communist base there. Zhang's plan to establish a Communist base in the Sichuan-Xikang border region failed. His troops were badly mauled in heavy fighting with regional warlords and the Nationalist Army.
75. Ipyong J. Kim, op. cit., p. 53.
76. See "No 1 Announcement of Jiangxi Provincial Government: On the Issue of Abolishing Women's Work Committee," March 26, 1931, in CWF, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 161–162.
77. See "The Resolution of women's Work in Hunan-Jiangxi Border Soviet Area," September 10, 1931, in CWF, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 157–160.
78. Ibid.
79. Both Davin, op. cit., and Kim, op. cit., neglect these women's agencies. Frenier criticized Davin and Kim for this omission. She argued that the two institutes were women's mass organizations. (See Frenier's dissertation, "Women and the Chinese Communist Party, 1921–1952: Changes in Party Policy and Mobilization Techniques," University of Iowa, 1978, p. 57.) In fact they were government agencies. See the original documents: "No. 1 Announcement: Abolishing Women's Working Committee" (March 26, 1931); "Resolution of Women's Work in Xiang-Gang Border Soviet Area" (September 10, 1931); "Resolution and Regulations of the Women's Life Improvement Committee of the Soviet Republic" (April 28, 1932); "Summary Report of the Women's Life Improvement Comm-

- ittee in Jiangxi Province” (October 10, 1932); “On the Organization and Regulation of the Women’s Life Improvement Committee in Fujian Province” (August 3, 1932). These documents were issued by the soviet government.
80. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (London: Marion Boyans, 1977), p. 114.
 81. *Ibid.*
 82. “The Announcement of Hunan Provincial Committee of CCP (No. 14), On the Current Situation of Hunan Women and the Principle of Our Work,” November 25, 1927, in CWF, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 8.
 83. Janet Salatt and Judith Stacey, “Women in Revolution: The Lessons of the Soviet Union and China,” *Socialist Revolution*, (1970), vol. 1, no. 6, pp. 59–62.
 84. Mariam D. Frenier, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
 85. See CWF, *op. cit.*, and the *Chen Cheng Collection*, *op. cit.*
 86. Julia Kristeva, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
 87. Simultaneously, the Party sought to impose its ban on footbinding—some men still, even at this late date, prevented women from unbinding their feet in the belief that they were prettier when bound. The Jiangxi Soviet Executive Committee told its cadres in no uncertain terms: “The Soviet of each level must do its best to enforce the Unbinding Feet Movement and ... to make it possible for the women with unbound feet to learn to work.” This attitude and its consequences created favorable conditions for participation in the Red Sports Movement by those oppressed physically by feudal customs. See Jiangxi Provincial Soviet Executive Committee, “Concerning working women’s special benefits,” January 22, 1934, in *Chen Cheng Collection*, Reel 6.
 88. The Red Vanguard was a military youth organization for ages 23 to 25 in the Soviet Area. It was a reserve force of the Red Army. It was supervised by the government, the Youth League, and the Army.
 89. The Young Pioneers was a youth organization for ages 13 to 16 in the Soviet Area. It comprised a reserve force of the Red Army. It was supervised by the Youth League and the Party.
 90. The Children’s Corps were the organization for children between the ages of 8 and 15. It was a reserve force of the Young Pioneers. It was supervised by the Young Pioneers and the Youth League.
 91. Agnes Smedley, *China’s Red Army Marches*, *op. cit.*, p. 206.
 92. Mao Zedong, “The Investigation of Xingguo County,” in *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, (Dongbei Press), *op. cit.*, pp. 75–81.
 93. Mao Zedong, “The Model of Soviet Work in Changgang Village.” (This document is in the Gangxian Museum, Jiangxi Province, China).
 94. *Ibid.*
 95. *Ibid.*
 96. The Soviet Central Committee of the Youth League, “The Outline of the Present Work of the Young Pioneers in the Soviet Area,” January 4, 1932, in *Historical Archive of the Chinese Youth Movement*, edited and published by the Central Committee of the Chinese Youth League, (1957), pp. 5–7.
 97. The Headquarters of the Young Pioneers, “The Order of the Headquarters of the Young Pioneers,” (June 13, 1932). (This document is in Ruijin County’s Revolutionary History Museum, Jiangxi Province, China).
 98. Zhang Aiping, “Letter from the Headquarters of the Young Pioneers: Setting up Model Branches of Education and Sport Movement,” *True Words of Youth*, (November 27, 1932) no. 21.
 99. Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) was at this time the commissar of the Young Pioneers. After 1949, he served as premier of China and was influential in Chinese foreign policy for three decades.

100. See “No. 4 Order of The Headquarters of the Young Pioneers” issued by Zhang Aiping, the chief, and Zhou Enlai, the commissar of the Young Pioneers, on April 8, 1934. (The original document is in Ruijin County’s Revolutionary History Museum, Jiangxi Province, China).
101. The Central Committee for People’s Education approved these two books in March 1934. (The original document of approval is in Ruijin Revolutionary History Museum, Jiangxi Province, China).
102. Gu Shiquan, “Sports Activities of Lenin Schools and the Young Pioneers in the Soviets Period,” *TWS*, (1986), no. 6, p. 29.
103. See “The Central Committee of the Youth League’s Resolution about the Children’s Corps Movement,” June 17, 1931, in *Historical Archive of the Chinese Youth Movement*, op. cit., p. 86.
104. See “The Resolution of the Work of Children’s Corps in the Soviet Area,” January 1932. (This document is in Jiangxi Provincial Museum, China).
105. Mao Zedong, “The Investigation of Xingguo County,” op. cit.
106. Zhang Aiping, “Our Happy Festival,” *True Words of Youth*, (March 5, 1933), vol. 2, no. 6.
107. See Mao Zedong, “The Report of the Chinese Soviet Republic Central Committee and People’s Committee to the Second All-China Soviets Congress,” op. cit.
108. There are no numbers available to show how many girl students enrolled in these schools, but according to Mao’s investigation of Xingguo county, there were 12,806 students in the Lenin primary school, where boys numbered 8,825 and girls 3,981. Thus girl students composed more than one third of the student numbers. This reveals that conservative views still had to be overcome.
109. See “A Draft Resolution of Curriculum” issued by the Central Committee for the People’s Education in October 1933. This document is in *Selected Archives of Education in the Soviet Areas* edited and published by Jiangxi: renmin chubanshe, 1981, pp. 12–14.
110. To achieve the goal, the Central Committee for the People’s Education issued several decrees stressing the need for physical education courses in schools. In October 1933, for example, a decree dealing with the curriculum of the primary school ordered that every pupil should attend physical education classes. In February 1934, Zhang Wentian, the chairman of the Government, issued a decree that instructed every school to establish a sports field. See *The Law of Education in the Soviets Period* edited and published by Jiangxi: renmin chubanshe, 1956, pp. 66–69.
111. See Zhu De’s speech quoted in Liu Lian, “Zhu De and the Basketball Competitions,” op. cit.; Xiao Hua, “The Youth Competition at the Front,” *True Words of Youth*, (August 1933), vol. 2, no. 24.
112. *Qingnian shihuo* [True Words of Youth] was the periodical of the Central Bureau of the Young Pioneers and the Youth League. The Youth League, supervised by the CCP, was, and still is, the reserve force of the CCP. People between the ages of 18 and 25 could apply to join it. It recommends outstanding members to the CCP.
113. See the article entitled “Jiangxi Provincial Ball Games Competition,” *True Words of Youth*, (May 14, 1933), vol. 2, no. 15.
114. Gu Ruenmin, “The Report of Sport Competition of Fujian Red Army Division,” *Red China*, (July 8, 1933), no. 92.
115. Quoted in *Modern Chinese Sports History* by The Chinese Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport (CSHPES), (ed.), (Beijing: Beijing tiyu xueyuan chubanshe, 1989), p. 366.
116. Ou Yangqing, “Studying and Improving Our Military Skill,” *Red China*, (July 29, 1933), no. 97.
117. Quoted in Xiao Hua’s article, “The Youth Competition at the Front,” op. cit.

118. This decree was entitled "Red Sport Meeting Will Take Place on May 30th" and it was published in *Red China*, (May 8, 1933), no. 77.
119. A post-war phenomenon was the mounting division between socialists and communists over the leadership and aims of the workers' sports movement. There were two major international sports organizations: the International Association of Red Sports and Gymnastics Association (RSI) and the Lucerne Sports International (LSI). The RSI was a branch of the communist International or Comintern. The LSI was a branch of the Bureau of the Socialist International. The two worker sport organizations were hostile right from the start. The communist RSI wished to build an international sports movement that would be a political vehicle of the class struggle. The socialist LSI was not concerned with the sports movement as an active revolutionary force. Instead, it was to be a strong, independent movement within capitalist society ready, after the revolution, to implement a fully developed system of physical culture. Eventually, the LSI banned all RSI members from its activities and all contacts with the USSR. For more details see J. Riordan, *Sport, Politics and Communism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 36–37. The Red Sport Society in Jiangxi declared that it was a member of the RSI, and, therefore, the Red Sports Movement in Jiangxi could be seen as a part of the international workers' sports movement and the international communist movement.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Zhang Aiping, "Report on the Significance of May 30th Sport Meeting," *True Words of Youth*, (June 11, 1933), vol. 2, no. 18.
122. See "The Resolution of Culture and Education of the First Congress of Xinag-e-gang Soviet Area," September 23, 1931, and "The Resolution of Culture and Education of the Congress of Min-zhe-gang Soviet Area," Autumn, 1932; and "The Resolution of Culture and Education of Yongxin County," June 3, 1932. (These documents are in Jiangxi Provincial Archives, China).
123. Zhang Aiping, "Report on the Significance of the May 30th Sports Meeting," *op. cit.*
124. Bi Chen, "The Significance of the Jiangxi Provincial Sports Meeting," *True Words of Youth*, (August 20, 1933), vol. 2, no. 25.
125. Tang Jian, "Report on the Significance of the 1st August Fujian Provincial Red Sport Meeting," *True Word of Youth*, (August 20, 1933), vol. 2, no. 25.
126. Bi Chen, "The Emergence of Women's Basketball Teams," *True Words of Youth*, (December 17, 1933), vol. 3, no. 4
127. The statistics are in *Red China*, (September 29, 1934), no. 239.
128. Agnes Smedley, *China's Red Army Marches*, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.
129. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.
130. "No.7 Announcement of Minxi Soviet Government: Present Aims and Works of the Women's Movement," December 6, 1930, in CWF, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 97.
131. Delia Davin, *op. cit.*; Mariam D. Frenier, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–81.