

Exploring the Development of Women in Contemporary China Based on Western Feminist Socialism

Jiali Mo

Shandong University of Technology, Zibo, China

Abstract: Feminist socialism emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It explored the causes of women's oppression in many ways by examining many problems faced by women, and proposed a path for women's liberation. Although some phenomena that unfair treatment of women in today's society and their lack of voice in the family has been improved, there are still problems that hinder women's development. Western feminism socialism, though based on the realities of the region, to a certain extent, has provided a direction for the realization of Chinese women's freedom and development in the true sense.

Keywords: Feminist Socialism; Capitalism; Patriarchy; Female Development; Female Liberation; Chinese Women.

1. Introduction

The survival and development of women in China in the new era are faced with many challenges, and exploring the root causes of the problems and the paths for future development has become a topic of the times. On the road to the new examination, we have to do a better job of answering the question on "women's development". From the standpoint of women, feminist socialism discusses the unjust treatment of women in capitalist society and how to liberate them. Their ultimate goal is to give women the right to speak and participate, and to protect their rights and interests comprehensively. Therefore, feminist socialism is of great practical significance in solving women's problems in contemporary China.

2. The Basic Propositions of Western Feminist Socialism

The content of feminist socialism on women's emancipation is based on the analysis and criticism of housework and social labor, capitalism and patriarchy. And it gradually matured and eventually formed a complete theoretical system in the struggle against capitalism. These theoretical propositions mainly include the following.

2.1. The root cause of women's oppression lies in the combination of patriarchy and capitalism.

By analyzing the oppression suffered by women in capitalist society, feminist socialists revealed the root causes of women's oppression. They argue that ideology and the lack of value of housework are the main causes of women's oppression. To a certain extent, patriarchy and capitalism interact and have a deep-rooted influence on human beings. In order to consolidate their position as the "head of the family", men must consolidate their economic dominance, and they unite together to create institutional barriers in the marketplace and propagate the public opinion that "men outside the home, women inside" and that "virtuous wives". As a result, women are forced to do unrecognized housework, while men have an absolute advantage in the field of production. Men take advantage of the gender divide at work to ensure women's emotional and financial dependence on

them, thereby eliminating women's independence.

2.2. Women are still not free from the plight of oppression in modern society

The oppression of women in modern society is invisible and all-encompassing, manifesting itself in all aspects of social life. Feminist socialists have analyzed the situation of women's oppression in capitalist society from three main angles. Firstly, in terms of range of activity, women's activities mostly revolve around the family. While men dominate social production and public life. This social life is seen as the more important sphere. Although some women have a certain income in the society, they are not completely free from the control of the family; on the contrary, they have to do both household chores and social work, thus facing the double pressure from both the family and the society. Secondly, in terms of the domestic sphere, men enjoy absolute authority in the family, while women and their labor are marginalized as men's subordinate and private labor. Most men habitually regard housework as a woman's responsibility. And women, influenced by historical and cultural factors, also see domestic work as their own responsibility. Nevertheless, wives may still be subjected to violence by their husbands. Thus, "women in the family are both the bearers of violence and despair."^[1] Thirdly, in terms of the public sphere, the inherent differences between men and women have led to women being disadvantaged in the labor market, making it difficult for them to achieve the same social status as men. As the gender division of labor still exists, women are only exposed to some classic female occupational positions, which leads to unfair employment, and women in the workplace can hardly escape from the exploitation and oppression in the family.

2.3. Women's Emancipation is a Holistic Emancipation Premised on Economic Emancipation

Feminist socialism believes that women's emancipation should be a holistic emancipation premised on economic emancipation and supplemented by political and ideological emancipation. Economic emancipation lays the foundation for political and cultural emancipation, and economic, political, and ideological emancipation complement each other, and together they contribute to women's overall

emancipation. Economic emancipation is to enable women to gain economic independence; political emancipation is to improve women's political status so that they have equal rights in law and in reality; ideological emancipation is to improve women's autonomy so that they can free themselves from the long-standing patriarchal ideology and build up a sense of self-love and self-improvement. Feminist socialists regarded economic emancipation as a prerequisite for political and ideological emancipation and, through a series of women's activities, fought for women's rights and interests, such as equal pay for equal work, thus laying a solid material foundation for women's overall emancipation.

3. Problems Faced by Women in Contemporary China

Gender equality and women's development are inextricably linked to the liberation of all mankind. Since the founding of New China, our country has always insisted on equality between men and women, paid attention to women's development, and safeguarded women's rights in all areas, and has made corresponding achievements. However, in recent years, there are still many problems in the development of contemporary women in China.

3.1. Ingrained and old ideas

Feminist socialists believe that patriarchy and capitalism are the two major shackles oppressing women's development. Although our country does not have capitalism, we have a patriarchal society of more than 5,000 years, and traditional patriarchal concepts will, to a certain extent, influence people's thoughts and behaviors. In the thousands of years of historical development of the Chinese nation, feudal ideas such as the superiority of men over women and the preference for men over women have always existed. In the traditional concept, the offspring follow men's family name, the family property can only be inherited by men, and women are only tools for reproduction. The idea of raising boys for the purpose of carrying on the family line is deeply rooted in people's minds. Men see the birth of a boy as a woman's first priority. And most women would see this as their goal as well. Although women's status in society has improved through development. However, there is still such phenomenon that men, in order to carry on the family line, force their wives to give birth to more children without regard to their fertility, and even abandon female babies. This concept has not only done great harm to women's legitimate rights, but has also had a great impact on the country's long-term development.

3.2. Old model of division of labor

According to Iris Young, the "gender division of labor" refers to the division of labor according to gender differences among members of society, with women's work being mainly housework and child-rearing, and men's work being social work that provides a living for the family.^[2] The persistence of the "gender division of labor" has led to the increasing status of men and the decreasing status of women. However, with the advancement of science and technology, women have become more educated and have their own occupations, and the gender gap is narrowing. On the whole, women and men seem to enjoy the same job opportunities, but surveys show that the income gap between men and women is still wide, despite the fact that women get jobs. Moreover, the proportion of men in top jobs is still much higher than that of

women. Attitudes towards "strong women" and "strong men" are also quite different. Under the traditional gender division of labor, the most reasonable family structure is "the man outside the home, woman inside". Therefore, it is not advisable for women to be too powerful. This old division of labor still restricts the majority of women. To this day, many people still feel that career is not the best choice for a woman and that she should put her family first.

3.3. Impediment to reproductive function

Women's natural reproductive capacity is in great conflict with their own development. Reproduction is a physiological function unique to women, and it often takes several months from pregnancy to childbirth. At the same time, the State has opened up the two-child policy, which, while rejoicing, has made women once again experience the hardships and physiological effects of ten mouths' pregnancy. In a market economy, enterprises or organizations are often unwilling to pay for women's childbirth in order to pursue profits. Although the law explicitly prohibits employers from discriminating against women, it does not prevent them from recruiting more men. In addition, in the years following the birth of a baby, for reasons such as breast-feeding and traditional customs, the mother is usually responsible for the baby. Women often sacrifice their careers to ensure the healthy growth of their children and the harmony of the family. Therefore, the conflict between motherhood and personal career development has become an obvious problem in today's society.

3.4. Stigmatization of Feminism

In contemporary development, feminism is caught in the dilemma of being misinterpreted. As society develops, the status of Chinese women in society and family continues to rise, and women's living conditions continue to improve, many people and even women themselves believe that feminism should not continue to be advocated. Many people believe that feminism is about competing with men for power, thus oppressing and excluding men and creating a feminist society. Nowadays, women who say they are "feminists" are considered "radicals" or "extremists". Apart from the fact that the popularity of the feminist movement in recent years has deepened the public's aversion to the feminist movement, the main reason for this is that people do not correctly understand the significance and purpose of the feminist movement, and do not place men in the process of promoting women's development, and regard the two sexes as a kind of hostile relationship.

4. The Inspiration of Western Feminist Socialism to Solve the Problem of Women's Development in Contemporary China

In today's society, the survival and development of women in China are facing many problems. New problems give rise to new ideas, and the emancipation of women are related to the emancipation of all mankind. It is for this reason that we need to find a new path suitable for women's development with Chinese characteristics.

4.1. Developing the productivity to provide an economic basis for resolving the plight of women's development

Feminist socialists believe that only the elimination of private ownership and the overthrow of capitalist can bring about the liberation of women in the true sense of the word. China's social problems will inevitably be based on China's social realities. The low level of development of productivity at the primary stage of socialism is the fundamental cause of the low status of women in China, so the development of productivity is the fundamental way to liberate the majority of women. Judging from China's current employment rate, "the proportion of women in the workforce maintains a high level of 43.5 per cent of women and 56.5 per cent of men aged 18-64 in the workforce"^[3] This data shows that there is still a gap between men and women in employment. In the face of this problem, we must further deepen the reform and develop the productivity. Firstly, the development of productivity can promote women's participation in social labor. The development of the tertiary sector can make up for women's physiological shortcomings. However, since gender discrimination still exists in the current labor market, it is necessary for our government to take measures to regulate it and to give certain support to industries and companies which are favorable to women, so as to safeguard women's employment rights and interests. Examples include lower taxes for women's enterprises, maternity allowances for women, maternity leave, and so on. Secondly, the development of productivity can promote the socialization of housework so that women's family burden can be eased. Margaret Bengston believes that the socialization of housework is a more effective route to emancipation than women's participation in the public labor of society. "According to the survey, women spend 154 minutes, about twice as much as men, on household chores such as caring for family members, cooking, cleaning and daily purchases, and 76.1 per cent, 67.5 per cent and 63.6 per cent of mothers are primarily responsible for the daily care, homework assistance and transportation of children aged 0-17 years, respectively. The proportion of those with children under the age of 3 who had a need for childcare services was 35.1 per cent, but only 2.7 per cent of children under the age of 3 were mainly cared for by childcare institutions during the day, and 63.7 per cent were cared for by their mothers."^[3] From this, we can see the heavy burden of family care for women and the insufficient support of public services, which requires further improvement of the legal policy and service system to support family development. For example, the establishment of comprehensive nurseries and the sharing of household chores by relevant enterprises and institutions. Finally, the development of productivity will break the shackles of traditional patriarchal thought. The development of productivity will be accompanied by an increase in women's occupational level and a rise in their wage level, thus enabling people attach importance to women and free themselves from the gender prejudice.

4.2. Building socialist political civilization and enhancing women's political participation

The political superstructure is the embodiment of certain social and economic interests, and the level of women's political aspirations and political participation in certain social relations reflects the degree of women's emancipation.

Indeed, at all levels of government and society, true social equality cannot be achieved without women's participation. In modern China, successive Party and State leaders have attached great importance to the fulfilment of women's right to political participation. Deng Xiaoping pointed out, "The Party must train and promote women cadres with great determination, and encourage them to keep moving forward."^[4] Xi Jinping emphasized that women enjoy common political rights with men in the country's political development process, participate in state management equally, give full play to women's aspirations, safeguard women's rights and interests with increased political participation, and enhance women's sensitivity to politics and their ability to political participation. "We should attach great importance to the cultivation and use of female cadres"^[5]. Since the reform and opening up to the present, the number of women participating in politics has gradually increased, and the overall level of women's political participation has continued to move forward. Data show that the proportion of female party representatives at the 20th CPC National Congress of the Communist Party of China reached 27 per cent, an increase of 2.8 percentage points over the previous session. At present, the majority of women engaged in political work in China are highly educated and possess certain political qualities. In the process of building a socialist political civilization with Chinese characteristics, it is important to be adept in identifying and cultivating women cadres who are highly qualified, so that they can play an important role in political management and decision-making. Women's participation in politics is a product of combining the Marxist view of women and feminist socialist with the practice of nation-building, and it is also indicative of the further advancement of women's status, enabling women to participate equally in decision-making on important national political, economic, cultural and social issues, thereby enhancing women's ability to participate in politics.

4.3. Dispelling misconceptions and building women's values for a new era

The absence of women's self-consciousness is a serious obstacle to the discovery of their potential and the development of their abilities. Therefore, women should take the initiative to get out of the confinement of feudal ethics and traditional thinking, to know themselves objectively and soberly, and to build up a sense of subjectivity. Women in the new era of China must insist on arming themselves with the latest theoretical achievements of the sinicization of Marxism, and under its guidance, they must constantly shape themselves, improve their own abilities, and cultivate sound personality and emotions. At the same time, society needs to construct the cultural value of equality between men and women, form a good value-oriented atmosphere in the whole society, pay attention to the development of women, and make more people realize the important role of women. In addition, it is necessary to correctly guide men's understanding of women and women's rights. Firstly, we should eliminate the idea in men's minds that men are born to dominate everything. Secondly, the ultimate goal of women's liberation is to achieve the liberation of all mankind, not to engage in gender opposition. Therefore, while learning from feminist socialism, we should not separate men and women. If separating women's emancipation from proletarian emancipation, we are likely to push the women's movement into an isolated situation and exclude many men who are in favor of the women's movement, which is not conducive to

the development of women's emancipation. "Perhaps we should think about bringing men into the movement so that they do not just remain in superficial numbers, because the second stage is not just for women, but also for men. We should be open-minded about that." [6] Both men and women are the ones who create social history, and it is of great importance to emphasize women's rights as well as men's rights. The ultimate goal of feminism is to realize the rights that are compatible with women's own characteristics, so as to establish a truly harmonious gender relationship.

5. Conclusion

In today's society, if women want to be completely emancipated politically, economically and culturally, the most crucial point is to have an independent mind. Women must learn the most advanced science and technology and cultural knowledge, so as to think independently and make their own judgement. The viewpoints in feminist socialism have a certain degree of progress, fighting for women's economic rights and equal status in politics, and making women's independent consciousness awaken. However, feminist socialism also has its own shortcomings, so we must objectively examine it, learn from its essence, base on national conditions, and resolutely take the road of women's

emancipation with Chinese characteristics, so as to contribute to the global emancipation of women with China's programs and Chinese strength.

References

- [1] Juliet Mitchell, *Women: the Longest Revolution*, Li Yinhe, Translation [M], Beijing: China Women Publishing House, 2007: 9.
- [2] Iris Young, "Beyond Unfortunate Marriage - A Critique of Dualistic Theory" *Women: Longest Revolution*, Li Yinhe, Translation [M], Beijing: China Women Publishing House, 2007: 84.
- [3] The main data of the fourth survey on the social status of Chinese women [J]. *Women's Studies Series*, 2022, No.169 (01):1+129.
- [4] Deng Xiaoping. *Selected Writings of Deng Xiaoping (Volume 1)* [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1994:251.
- [5] Xi Jinping. *Doing in Practice and Walking in the Forefront-Thinking and Practice of Promoting the New Development of Zhejiang* [M]. Beijing: Central Party School Press, 2006:408.
- [6] Betty Friedan. *The Second Stage* [M]. Xiao Yi, Translation. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2007: 15.