

Comparative Study of Feminist Movements in China and the United States in 1920

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Abstract: The year 1920 was a year of significant progress in the women's rights movement in China and the United States. In the United States, women gained the right to vote through a long struggle, while in China, the May Fourth New Culture Movement promoted the development of the women's liberation movement. Although the movements in both countries were constrained by traditional notions, they laid the groundwork for subsequent gender equality and social change. This study analyzes the situation and comparative analysis of the feminist movement in China and the United States in the 1920s, reveals the challenges and achievements of the two countries in the process of fighting for women's rights, and aims to provide useful reference for the future protection of women's rights and interests and the development of gender equality.

Keywords: China, United States, Women's Rights Movement, 1920s, Women's Rights and Interests.

1. Introduction

(1) The women's rights movement in the United States in 1920 was an important period that marked a phased achievement after a long period of struggle. The achievement was primarily focused on striving for women's right to vote, and was seen as the end of the first wave of feminism and the prelude to the second wave. On August 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was officially passed, signifying that American women had obtained the right to vote on an equal footing with men. The achievement of this milestone was the result of years of efforts, including the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848, which adopted the Declaration of Sentiments, as well as numerous parades, demonstrations, and petitions from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. Although women gained the right to vote, their status and roles in society were still restricted by traditional concepts, with women being expected to play the roles of wives, mothers, and homemakers. However, the women's rights movement of this period laid the foundation for subsequent feminist movements and the development of gender equality, prompting society to begin paying attention to women's equal rights in politics, the economy, and society.^[2]

(2) In 1920, China's women's rights movement flourished under the impetus of the May Fourth New Culture Movement. At that time, society was undergoing drastic changes, with deepening national crises and acute social contradictions. Women's issues became increasingly prominent, and women were in a lowly position, bound by feudal ethics. The May Fourth New Culture Movement made the ideas of Western democracy, equality, and freedom widely spread in China, and Marxism also entered China, providing a theoretical weapon for women's liberation. Urban female students, influenced by new ideas, organized associations, gave speeches, and wrote articles, actively participating in the women's rights movement. Intellectuals and revolutionaries such as Li Dazhao, Cai Hesen, and Xiang Jingyu also promoted the women's liberation movement by publicizing women's rights ideas. ^[1]The goals of the women's rights movement were to strive for women's political rights, achieve economic

independence, education equality, and advocate marriage freedom. The methods included organizing associations, submitting petitions to the National Congress, soliciting the support of celebrities and scholars, entertaining the press, and issuing publications such as "Women's Voice" and "Women's Weekly". The 1920 women's rights movement made more women aware and actively participate in the women's liberation movement, laying the foundation for the later women's movement. The status of women in politics, the economy, and culture was improved. They began to receive education, participate in social work, and become economically independent. The rise of the women's rights movement impacted feudal ethics and traditional concepts, promoted the emancipation of social thought, and injected new vitality into social change.

1920 was the key point of the breakthrough of women's political rights in the United States, but its social rights and cultural equality were still lagging behind. China is in the early stage of modernization transformation, and women's rights have not yet formed institutional protection. The differences between the two countries reflect different historical backgrounds and social structures: the United States achieved partial breakthroughs through progressive reforms, while China had to wait until the revolution to systematically promote gender equality through legislation. This paper will use literature analysis, comparative research, historical background analysis, and case study methods to investigate the similarities and differences between the women's rights movements in China and the US in the 1920s and their impacts. The research aims to reveal the similarities and differences between the women's rights movements in China and the US in the 1920s and to explore their far-reaching impact on social change and the development of gender equality.

2. Literature Review

(1) Regarding the overview of the American feminist movement in the 1920s, Gao Jiachun pointed out in her book "Research on the American Women's Suffrage Movement from 1848 to 1920" ^[8]that before 1920, American women's

awareness of the feminist movement was generally low, and only a few women actively participated in the struggle for the right to vote. The feminism in that period was not yet mature. Although women gained the right to vote, their status and role in society were still limited by traditional concepts, and society generally expected women to play the roles of wives, mothers, and housewives. Zhou Liping, in her study "The development of feminism in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s and its causes"^[3], proposed that 1920 marked an important turning point in the American feminist movement. Although women were subject to various constraints, the movement for gender equality and its development prompted society to start paying attention to the women's equality movement in this period, laying the foundation for the subsequent development of feminist movements in politics, the economy, and social rights. Zhou Liping^[4] pointed out that although the struggle for women's rights in the United States was mainly driven by a few women, the movement for gender equality and its development still made women recognize the importance of political rights.

Regarding the background of the Chinese feminist movement in the 1920s, Sun Jie, the author of "Research on Women's Participation in Politics in China in the 1920s"^[7], believes that the development of women's rights in China has many similarities with that of the United States, such as being constrained by traditional concepts. However, the May Fourth New Culture Movement in China promoted the wide dissemination of Western democratic, equal, and free ideas in China, and the introduction of Marxism provided theoretical support for the liberation of Chinese women. Urban female students were inspired by new ideas, organized associations, gave speeches, wrote articles, and actively participated in the feminist movement. The feminist movement in 1920 made more women realize and actively participate in the women's liberation movement, laying the foundation for subsequent feminist movements. Sun Jie described the goal of the feminist movement as striving for women's political rights, achieving economic independence, and educational equality. The progress of this movement challenged feudal ethics and traditional concepts, promoting the liberation of social thought, and injecting new vitality into social change.

(2) The 16th verse of the third chapter of "Genesis" records God's words to Eve: "Your desires will be subordinate to your husband's desires, and he will have full authority over you." This narration provided a sacred basis for the concept of "men superior to women" in the church, and consolidated the notion of women's subordinate status. In his representative work "The Great Harmony", Kang Youwei devoted one-third of the text to discussing women's issues, revealing the reality of the oppression and lack of political rights suffered by women in traditional Chinese society. Kang Youwei's discussions on women's liberation, especially his thoughts on women's participation in politics and the issue of gender equality, played an important role in enlightening and mobilizing Chinese women's awakening.^[6]

3. Comparison of Famous Chinese and American Feminist Movement Events

(1) In the United States, a two-day meeting was held in July 1848 in a village called Seneca Falls in New York. Over 300 participants gathered to discuss the "Declaration of Sentiments" drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the

pioneers of the American women's rights movement. Mimicking the drafting of the "Declaration of Independence," the "Declaration of Sentiments" stated that "human history is a record of men's constant injury and plundering of women" and called for a series of reforms, such as women's suffrage. The Seneca Falls convention was the first women's rights gathering in the United States, and since then, feminist gatherings have become annual events where women come together to discuss issues like educational opportunities, divorce reform, and property rights.^[5] In 1869, Elizabeth Stanton and American feminist pioneer Susan B. Anthony founded the National Woman's Suffrage Association. They also launched the weekly magazine "Revolution," which focused on women's rights. The magazine's motto was "Men have their rights, not more; women have their rights, not less." Since 1878, Congress has received an annual proposal for a women's suffrage amendment. In 1919, victory finally came when Congress passed the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was officially ratified on August 26, 1920. The 19th Amendment prohibits the denial of voting rights to any American citizen based on gender, but many non-white women, immigrant women, and poor women still face voting barriers. It wasn't until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned discriminatory voting restrictions in U.S. states, that all American women, regardless of race, were granted the right to vote.^[6]

(2) In China, during the Hundred Days 'Reform period, leaders such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao Reformists placed great emphasis on women's issues. Theoretically, they believed that women's liberation was an essential part of equal citizenship rights; in practice, they addressed women's problems from two aspects: foot binding and promoting women's education. On May 4, 1919, under the influence of Marxist thought, a group of people emerged in the May Fourth Movement who fought for women's rights in China, such as Deng Yingchao. Deng had been determined to save the country since childhood and actively participated in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. She co-founded a progressive youth organization called "Awakening Society" with Zhou Enlai and others. On May 25 of the same year, she responded positively to the call of patriotic organizations and joined the "Tianjin Women's Patriotic Association," which propelled the patriotic movement among Tianjin women to a new level. Xiang Jingyu, studying at Montaigu Girls' School in Paris, was further strengthened by the tradition of the Paris Commune struggle of the French working class. From 1920 to 1921, Xiang Jingyu and Cai Hesen jointly proposed the name and plan for the "Chinese Communist Party," making her the sole female founder of the Chinese Communist Party. After the cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party in 1923, the Shanghai Women's Movement Committee was established. Xiang Jingyu led the Shanghai women's movement, implemented the policies of the Chinese Communist Party regarding women's movements, and organized various women's groups into a united front. In addition, she drafted the "Resolution on Women's Movement at the Third National Congress of the Communist Party of China," explicitly stating that "women have the right to inherit," "social freedom for both men and women," "freedom to marry and divorce," "equal pay for equal work," "equality in education," and "equal career opportunities for men and women." These provisions aimed to ensure equal rights between men and women and protect women's rights, helping more women break free from the constraints of their

times. After the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949-1978), the Chinese government incorporated gender equality into the constitution and introduced a series of policies to safeguard women's rights in education, employment, and family life. The level of women's participation in productive labor and social activities continued to rise, significantly enhancing their status.

4. Summary

The American women's movement in 1920 had many similarities with the Chinese women's movement, but they were also different in that both were influenced by traditional ideas and later awakened by several politicians and thinkers who fought for women's rights. The difference is that the awakening process in the United States was much longer and the struggle for women's suffrage in the United States probably began in the first half of the 19th century and was finally won in 1920. Moreover, due to the issues of faith and law, such as Christianity and other churches have a very far-reaching influence on people, and some laws clearly stipulate that women are completely dependent on men. The law of following one's father before marriage and one's husband after marriage is not an easy process. Women's rights in China can be traced back to the Reform period at the end of the Qing Dynasty. The reformists represented by Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Tan Sitong introduced western ideas of women's rights and women's political participation into China in the process of seeking the truth of saving the country and the people. They tried to save China through women's awakening, which laid the foundation for the later women's movement and accelerated the speed of awakening in 1920. After the climax, a hundred thinkers from all walks of life bloom. Despite the differences in the historical background, cultural traditions and social systems of the two countries, the women's rights movement has experienced a long and tortuous development process in both countries. Through comparative analysis, this study further explores the factors

affecting the development of women's rights movements in the two countries, including politics, economy, culture and so on. With the deepening of the research, the author's team hopes to deeply study the significance of women's rights movement for promoting gender equality and promoting social progress, and provide useful reference for the protection of women's rights and interests and the development of gender equality in the future.

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