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The Jiangxi Chinese Soviet Republic Marriage Regulation (CSR, 1931-1934) not only regulated marital and familial affairs for individuals in the newly established party-state but was also an overture. It sought to liberate women from familial burdens, to recruit women join the revolution, to transfer labor and power from family units to the government and to restructure society around class-gender equality.1 Most importantly, Marriage Regulation was an ideological discourse. By ideological discourse I mean the effort to imbue, educate, and invigorate illiterate, rural peasants with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideas. It intended to recode rural value systems to create a revolutionary force with “revolutionary minds.”

My thesis, that the Marriage Regulation of 1931 was a vehicle for educating rural people into revolutionary equality, is clarified in the following arguments. I pose the following questions: What ideologies did the Jiangxi CSR Marriage Regulation intend to teach? Why did the CCP intend the CSR marriage regulation to enforce their general position? How exactly were ideologies encoded in the legal clauses and official interpretations? In this paper, I will argue that the promotion of gender equality and women’s status were means to achieve unified support for the CSR and vice versa: the goal of expansion in the short-lived CSR initiated and laid foundation for the progress of gender equality in China via the 1931 Marriage Regulation.

INTRODUCTION

The new regime in Jiangxi established and led by CCP was a foundation for further expansion into a national regime. With this national framework as a blueprint, the CCP launched class struggle, liquidating the bourgeoisie and transferring the power to the proletariat, in order to narrow the scope of potential supporters of the CCP and purify the potential revolutionary force. Within the eligible citizens, the CCP intended to maximize labor power of the state by assigning tasks in nation building and war preparation to both genders with equal significance.

The generalizations above are explicitly stated in Article 1, sentence one, of the General Constitution of Chinese Soviet Republic, “The mission of the General Constitution of Chinese Soviet Republic is to guarantee the sovereignty of the dictatorship of peasants and workers in Soviet region and to achieve its victory in the whole China [1].”2 The self-declared regime did not contain its ambition within a few counties in Jiangxi but set the goal of ruling to the whole China. Understandably, this goal did not only require party members’ effort but, more importantly, due to the limited scale and influence of this young party, it required people’s support. Unlike the Nationalist or KMT-led Republic of China, which only asked for people’s acknowledgement and conformity, the CCP expected and needed nearly every citizen’s active physical participation in specific state-building tasks including war affairs. And moreover, by initiating class struggle, the CCP narrowed their potential supporters to poor people, including poor peasants and workers, middle peasants, Red Army soldiers and their family members and so forth. In order to make the proletariat men and women devote their labor and commit to those changes voluntarily and wholeheartedly with minimal monetary return in a short time period, the CCP had to consistently and determinately implement their ideologies to its citizens. Nation building tasks, as promised in the General Constitution, welcomed and included women in heavier labor and intellectual work that aimed for economic construction and war preparation. For example, in terms of war preparation, while men were encouraged to join the Red Army, women were encouraged to provide food for Red Army, to do laundry for Red Army soldiers, sometimes even to deliver military information of the enemies for the Red Army and to personally persuade “White Army” soldiers to defect by talking to them as a woman. While men continued with their traditional role in heavy labor such as ploughing, women who participated heavy labor together

1 The term “class-gender” suggests that gender is always divided by class and class is always divided by gender. In the CSR case, not all women are eligible for the privilege of gender equality. Only the impoverished women or women in qualified classes were deemed as citizens of CSR and could enjoy the benefit of laws and policies.
Gender division in labor in CSR demonstrated how the Soviet government intended to encourage people to participate in a political and economic life in society outside the household. Within the framework of labor division, gender equality in CSR can be understood as equal opportunities for men and women to take on political and economic roles and equal credit for their participation, regardless of differences in physical contribution. The important point here is that using the principle of gender equality, tasks assigned to women were adapted to women’s physical situation. While women’s tasks were separated from men’s, both genders received the same labor credits. It means, although women were assigned to do light labor work, the significance of the work was deemed no weaker than heavy labor conducted by mostly men. Note that it was the first time that the concept of gender equality was introduced to the Jiangxi Soviet area. The new concept was integrated in labor to empower women as well as to teach people the benefit of gender equality as part of the CCP ideologies.

Under the premises above, this paper will focus on the why and how the 1931 Marriage Regulation implemented CCP ideas to citizens in CSR, especially women, and will evaluate the effect and meaning of this marriage regulation. To this date the ideologies and ideology implementation in CSR have not been fully studied. M. J. Meijer’s 1971 Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People’s Republic, for instance, summarizes and analyses the history of the PRC marriage laws, policies and their applications from the late Qing period to 1950. I accept Meijer’s analysis of the Marriage Law of People’s Republic of China 1950, particularly his general thesis that the CCP “does not apply the law only [to maintain social order], but applies it with the purpose of building socialism and instilling ideology [3].” However, he does not focus as tightly on the 1931 CSR law as I do.

Lucie Cheng’s “Women and Class Analysis in the Chinese Land Revolution,” has also proven helpful to my research [4]. Particularly her analysis of why women’s class status was not independent from family has provided insights into particular parts of the CSR. In her argument there were three approaches to distributing land from the Land Law in Jiangxi Period: the proto-feminist approach, the familialistic approach and the synthetic approach. Cheng’s work provided evidence for that argument that in 1931 some originally poor women may have used the law to divorce their rich husbands. The freedom to choose to divorce for sentimental or for practical reasons might have given rich and abused women way to leave a husband and the landlord class as the marriage policy evolved.

IDEOLOGIES OF THE CSR IN THE CONSTITUTION

At The First National Congress of the Communist Party of Chinese Soviet Republic 中华苏维埃第一次全国代表大会 in 1931, the General Constitution of CSR was enacted to state the missions of this newly established regime. Apart from setting the tone and principles of this new regime, when presented to the public, those principles became political discourse that intended to educate people of CCP ideologies. Since there is rarely concrete or explicit evidence for the ideology implementation function of laws of CSR, it is my hypothesis that the rules and concepts in the General Constitution did not just intend to regulate people’s behaviors and to structure the society but, more importantly, to restructure people’s minds with CCP ideologies in order to ultimately win people’s absolute support and expand the regime to the entire China area. As stated in the first clause of the Constitution, “The mission of the General Constitution of Chinese Soviet Republic is to guarantee the sovereignty of the dictatorship of peasants and workers in Soviet region and to achieve its victory in the whole China [1].”

As implied in Article 1, winning the absolute support of peasants and workers and expanding the CSR regime are the ultimate ideologies to be accepted and internalized by the public but there are as I define “transitional” ideologies serving as not only as ends but also as means to achieve the victory of the regime at this period: class struggle, gender equality, racial equality and so forth.

The tone of the Jiangxi Soviet government was not peace and stability but struggle and war against everyone who was against the expansion of CSR until the final victory. Stated in Article 1 of the General Constitution, the purpose of the regime is to “eradicate all feudal remnants, cast out imperialists powers in China, unite China, systematically restrict the development of Capitalism, develop state’s economy, promote the union power of proletarian and ideological level (jue wu cheng du), and unite the vast poor peasants around it, to transfer to the authoritarian regime of proletarians (wu chan jie ji zhuan zheng) [1].”

Though not explicitly expressed, the focus of the statement on the purpose of the CSR regime was not building a new totalitarian regime for the poor peasants but, quite the opposite, uniting the poor peasants for state building. Although, as I indicated in the introduction to this paper, CSR promised and worked efficiently to emancipate poor peasants and workers from slavery and to give them the rights of a legal citizen, the emancipation was not the ultimate goal for CCP. Instead, CCP expected to acquire people’s support in return for the expansion of the state and transformation of social structure. However, physical support out of mere reciprocity was not enough for the foundation of a newly-established state. In this process, reciprocity became a strategy beginning with changing people’s attitude towards CSR, and thus ideology implementation was a vital component that intended to transfer people’s motivation to join...
the uprising from self to the state and thereby to create the first army of true supporters of the CSR out of the people.

The General Constitution stipulated the eligibility of Soviet citizen:

The Soviet regime belongs to workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers and all laboring people. Under the Soviet regime, all workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers and all laboring people enjoy the right to elect representatives in charge of the management of the regime. Only warlords, bureaucrats, landlords, despotic gentry, capitalists, rich peasants, monks and all exploiters anti-revolutionaries do not have the rights to elect representatives to participate in the regime and the right of political freedom [1].

People were classified by social class and only certain classes workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers and poor people could take part in the state’s affairs. Even if the regime supported religious freedom, as stated in Article 13, it also gave people the “freedom to go against promotion of religions” (反宗教的宣传之自由). Here the regime even classified religions together with landlords as “exploiters” and “revolutionaries.” This phenomenon suggests that the regime required people’s full support both physically and mentally, which is probably why the CCP needed people to fully absorb its ideologies. The CCP also expected the ideologies to justify themselves when people started to believe them as truth instead of analyzing them logically.

With state-building being the important mission for CSR citizens and the state’s main ideology, the claims of emancipation of poor people, the equality of people and emancipation of women are means to state-building process at this period and, as I define, “transitional” ideologies of CCP.

The concept of equality appeared the first time in the General Constitution in Article 4:

In the area of Soviet Regime, workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers and all laboring people and their families, regardless of gender, race (Han, Meng, Hui, Zang, Miao, Li and in China’s Taiwan, Gaoli, Annan, etc.), religion, are all equal in front of the Soviet laws and are all citizens of Soviet Republic [1].

This article suggests that equality is not universal. Only the legal citizens, as discussed previously who belonged to certain social classes, were entitled to be equal in front of the Soviet laws.

In conclusion, stated explicitly in the General Constitution of CSR, the ideologies of CSR that were intended to be implemented to the public as political discourse are to win absolute support from citizens to ultimately establish regime across China by eradicating feudal remnants from the outside and class struggle from inside. Inequalities were only to be eliminated on gender and racial levels but class struggle was in itself unequal. It means that, although gender and racial equality was promoted in CSR, the definition of equality was not universal. Also, it is worth noticing that freedom and equality (on gender basis) probably will become or have become higher ends of the regime under CCP. However, in Jiangxi period, the beginning of the CSR regime when those grand goals were not able to be fully realized, were means or ideologies to be implemented in order to win people’s absolute support for state-building.

In the next part of the paper, I will discuss why and how these ideologies were implemented through Marriage Regulation in 1931 as discourses in both the content of law and in conversations between citizens and government.

INTRODUCTION TO 1931

MARRIAGE REGULATION

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the CCP Marriage Regulation in 1931 was its conciseness. The Marriage Regulation only covers 23 articles in total and all of them only stated general principles instead of detailed stipulations, different from family legislations in Soviet Russia or in Nationalist China. This characteristic of Marriage Regulation in 1931 extended to most of the subsequent regulations and laws promulgated by CCP even in later periods [3]. Even though the lack of clarifications in the Marriage Regulation may suggest that the legal system of Jiangxi recognizes cases as source of law, for the public, the enacted law and other legal documents could be easily understood and internalized as guiding principles by general public. Since the public was mostly uneducated and with rare access to others forms of education or ideologies outside CCP region, assisted with practical benefits, those CCP ideologies could be easily interpreted as “justice” or even “truth” for many people, particularly the young. Therefore, the conciseness of the law is the first clue pointing to the argument about ideology implementation.

However, I will not be able to present evidence on how the CCP propagated the law to CSR citizens and whether the local people truly embraced and supported the CCP rule. No documents that I have studied so far explained the propagation process and people’s reactions. The research on this question is not included in this short paper but will be part of my larger research project. In this paper, I am only postulating such intentions of ideology implementation from laws and official documents.

6 Translated by the author. See note 2.
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Chinese text: 苏维埃全政权是属于工人,农民,红军战士及一切劳苦民众的。在苏维埃政权下,工人,农民,红军战士及一切劳苦民众一律享有选举权利和被选举为政府工作人员的权利,只有军阀,官僚,地主,豪绅,资本家,富农,僧侣及一切剥削人的人和反革命分子是没有选派代表参加苏维埃政权和政治上自由的权利的。
AUTO-CRITIQUE OF EFFORTS TO CARRY OUT WOMEN’S EMANCIPATION

Despite the great effort in restructuring people’s mind and society, CCP did not succeed in completely freeing women from the household and gathering their support for the Red Army. Both contemporary scholars and authorities of the period found/acknowledged that the efforts to empower women were unsuccessful. As a document said, “So long after the Marriage Regulation was enacted, not only did the counties execute it carefully, they also did many things violating the Marriage Regulation [2].” The evaluation from the authorities may suggest that CSR government did attempt to enforce the marriage law practically and strictly but the critique also suggests that the ideologies involved in the marriage were not successfully implemented and accepted by women either.

For example, only the pioneering female revolutionaries started to or were able to follow the terms on the General Constitution and contribute to state-building process by propagating socialist ideologies, taking care of the Red Army soldiers or even joining the battles. However, some women were still living under the pressure of patriarchal power, as it was even stronger than the revolutionary tide. As reported in the January 1933 “Report from the Department of Youth Women of the League Bureau in Hunan and Jiangxi Area” 1933年1月 湘赣苏区团省委青妇部报告, tongyangxi (foster daughters-in-law) are still abused. Among the 15 fatal incidents caused by abuse, some were beaten by husbands and one was brutally murdered by parents-in-law. Also, some women did not form the revolutionary and socialist mind. In the same report, in some cases women threaten to divorce her husband who wanted to join the Red Army [2]. From the evidence above, I cannot give much credit to the statistics of divorce rate presented by officials since the numbers could be mere propaganda.

However, knowing that the work on women was not successful, the administrative did not give up on ideology implementation.

In another critique:

The women-work in the Soviet region, among all the work on people, is the worst. No matter in the Party or the League of Youth, seldom were women rising up against all feudal traditions and conventions. Only by making them, like men in the land reform, eliminate feudal traditions in the land reform, struggle against rich peasants, is the only way to emancipate them. Therefore, women in soviet region has a very weak concept about joining the revolutions… These odd phenomenon prove that women in soviet region are still controlled by feudal thoughts. It proves our fault of the negligence to women’s movement, not attracting them to join the anti-feudal struggle and freeing them from feudal influence [2].

The above evaluations indicate that women were also expected to join the class struggle but they were not successfully motivated to do so. However, even this critique was used as a method of ideology implementation. The idea and logic behind the words completely deserted traditional social norms and attempted to enforce a CCP norm by claiming the habitual actions as “odd phenomenon” and by criticizing the lack of revolutionary minds among women in Soviet region. Therefore, the government seized every chance to promote CCP ideologies even in the critiques of the work on ideology implementation for women.

The 1931 Marriage Regulation, as the first formal statewide marriage legal policy laid foundation for later marriage and laws and was only the starting point of a series of prolonged trials of marriage policies. Despite its problems and shortcomings, the 1931 Marriage Regulation of CSR in Jiangxi formally initiated the CCP’s campaign and devotion to female empowerment and gender equality as means to expansion in soviet period or possibly as higher end in later periods.

On the basis of the reports above, I hypothesize that using ideologies to unite people and gather military forces is probably a constant strategy, independent from practical changes of politics or results of the policies. One must realize that ideologies implementation is a difficult and prolonged but necessary process at the beginning of state-building, especially when government expected its citizens in Jiangxi area to interpret real loss, such as man losing control over decisions of his wife or losing life in a battlefield, as necessary sacrifice for higher purpose. Therefore, despite of the obstacles from my observation, the CCP never forwent their effort in ideology implementation and the CCP seized every conversation with public as a chance to enforce the political discourse into their minds.

FREEDOM OF MARRIAGE AND EMANCIPATION WOMEN

In the next sections, I will explain how ideologies were implemented in 1931 Marriage Regulation via its content and related official documents. With the evidence, I attempt to show that the CCP intended to use the 1931 Marriage Regulation, marriage policies and other documents to convince the public of the justice of policies and legitimacy of the CCP rule.

Stated in Article 11 of the General Constitution is the following:

The Chinese Soviet Republic aims to completely execute the emancipation of women, acknowledges marriage freedom, practices various methods to protect women, to enable women to practically gain material foundations to gradually disengage with household constraints and to participate the economic, political and cultural life in society [1].

This clause suggests that the purpose of the sovereignty and the law is not promoting women’s wellbeing in a...
lifestyle of their choice but to motivate women to take a political life which is the revolution. CSR gives female liberation a direction which is motivating women to participate the state-building process. In other words, state-building is the ultimate purpose of female liberation which also proved my argument that in Jiangxi Period, the goal of emancipation of women is mere means and an ideology to achieve the expansion of CSR.

This article in the General Constitution stated the reason for marriage freedom and described the goal for the Marriage Regulation. The first article of Marriage Regulation underscores freedom of marriage as the principle upon which the whole marriage regulation builds and claims to abolish the feudal system of marriage signified by those involuntary contractual marriages.

Article 1:
The principle of freedom of marriage between man and woman is established and the entire feudal system of marriage arranged by persons other than the parties themselves, forced on the parties and contracted by purchase and sale is abolished. The practice of taking a ‘foster daughter-in-law’ is forbidden [2].

According to Meijer, “in the ‘feudal marriage system’ was included the system of paternal arrangement of marriage, marriage concluded under coercion, and marriage ‘by purchase and sale;’ all the elements that typify the traditional family in the Communist view as ‘feudal [3].’” However, this “feudal” system of marriage is not just a set of physical rules and rituals but more importantly, the conventional or “traditional” ideology centered on parental and patriarchal power within family unit. In this first clause, the CCP attempted to convey the changes they intended to make on marital affairs was not a peaceful process but a reconstruction of the whole marital rules and power systems after completely destructing the existed one for right purposes. As Meijer argues, “Article 1 of Jiangxi law is a political battle cry [3].” Therefore, by pitting old marital practices against freedom and by instilling the concept of “fighting for freedom” as good, the change that the new regime was about to make on women’s life suddenly became exciting instead of terrifying. The elevated fighting spirit among women might have led to the divorce rate initiated by mostly women in the Soviet region.

AGE LIMIT FOR MARRIAGE

The law created opportunities for young people to fully absorb CCP ideologies so that ideological implementation on an individual level could be amplified to the family level through new marriages of the next generation. In Article 4, CSR specifies the age limit for marriage as fully 20 for men and fully 18 for women. Compared with either Qing law, where there was no legal age limit and young girls could be married off as foster daughters-in-law (tongyangxi) and betrothed to another family at early age, or Republican Marriage Law, where girls could engage at 15 and marry at 16, this higher age limit set by CSR could protect young people’s marriage and autonomy from being intervened in by parents [3]. More importantly, by postponing the age of marriage, individuals would be exposed to government propaganda for a longer time before forming a family. Since economics of CSR still operated under the family unit, on the one hand, the newly established families united under CCP ideologies were able to conduct coordinated economic construction and war preparation under CCP’s instructions or guidelines. On the other, citizens of CSR could be better controlled and united by the party-state.

Moreover, the cultivation of socialist minds was not confined to formal education and regulations but also permeated in leaders’ conversations with citizens. The administration received complaints from male citizens on the adjustment of the age limit since because of the enactment of the law, they had to marry later than we could before. Mao responded to such complaints presented by a delegate in On the Conclusions of the Report from Central Execution Committee and People’s Committee 关于中央执行委员会和人民委员会报告的结论:

About the age limit for marriage, quite a few comrades suggest that it should be lowered. This kind of opinion is not appropriate. For our state’s and class’ benefit, legal age for marriage should be no lower than 20 for men and 18 for women. We should be clear that early marriage is extremely harmful. Comrades! Please be patient! In old days under the rule of landlord capitalist, some poor peasants and workers couldn’t even marry until their fortieth or fifties. Why can’t you wait one or two more years? [5]

In administrators’ view, the meaning of class struggle transcended individual needs and individuals should sacrifice for the sake of the revolution and the class. However, the purpose of such statements is not just a conclusion for the current policies but more importantly, it is a conversion with people that directly convey CCP ideologies and educate the public by enforcing such a socialist ideology into citizens’ mind to artificially build their socialist mindset. Not only was the discourse built in the laws on state level but also permeated in the communications between the authorities and the public in the context of many cases other than age limit.

BANNING DOWRIES AND MARRIAGE PRESENTS: A CONSCIOUSNESS RISING

While Article 1 stated that the purchasing of marriage was banned, Article 8 re-enforced this stipulation

13 Marriage Regulation of CSR 1931 is provided in Selected Works of Historical Documents of Women’s Movement in Jiangxi Soviet Region. See note 3 above. Translation is provided by Meijer in his book. See note 4 above, Appendix I. Chinese text: 确定男女婚
by banning marriage presents and dowries, which were deemed as monetary transactions in marriage and a price tag for brides. The whole idea of banning purchasing marriage was to emancipate women from contractual marriage and also to diminish the clan power system formed through marriages. Thus, Article 8 also required marital registration as a symbol of government-approved marriage that replaced the authorization from patriarchal leaders in both families [3].

Under the requirement to register marriage, a contract is only effective when authorized by the municipal soviet. Practically, the registration process keeps track of marriage record of each person and thereby strictly guarantees monogamy. It also transfers the right of authorization from parents to government to prevent parental interference. However, the process of registration was more than an additional condition for marriage that physically guaranteed the freedom of marriage. Symbolically, the registration process with local government allowed marriage to be deemed as a right given by government instead of a natural right and put CSR government in a powerful place that controlled people’s life. Marriage, in Qing dynasty and further back, had been contracted by parents from two families. It was more than forming an individual relationship but tying the relations between clans more closely to increase the power of clans and patriarchal controls. Marriage rules and rituals were stipulated by Li (a series of rites and rituals that were established to enforce a social order and morality) and should be carried out properly by worshipping Heaven or god, ancestors and parents. Thus in Qing or namely “feudal society” in CCP’s definition, a marriage was authorized by parents or clans, Heaven and li, which separately represents patriarchal power, godly power and the power of social convention or morality. The CSR government, by stipulating marriage registration as the only authorization for a legal marital relationship, attempted to replace those three powers with the CCP authority so they might ideologically destruct feudal beliefs and transfer the power to the regime. A simple stipulation in law, again, did not only intend to regulate people’s marital affairs but also build a powerful image of CSR in people’s mind.

The same article states that marriage presents and dowries are completely abolished. There are several practical meanings for this stipulation. Firstly, marriage presents were often viewed as price of a bride and dowries were a monetary weapon to protect the bride in the new family. When “purchase and sales” was forbidden, ideally, both the harm from money and the need for protection with money were eliminated in marriage. Secondly, in old society, the amount of wealth decided people’s eligibility to get married, hence why most poor peasants were not able to get married [2]. By banning the terms on wealth, all legal citizens had equal opportunities to get married and thereby freedom of marriage was guaranteed and strengthened. However, it is worth noticing that the stipulation appears right after the marriage registration clause in which the government intended to guarantee monogamy and replace the power of clan, god and ritual. Note that the 1931 Marriage Regulation might only be proof that the government’s policies and the CCP’s ideologies were beneficial in theory instead of in reality because nothing in this law could force people to physically abide by it. Punishments for violating the regulations were never specified in this law, except that in Article 22 - “Whosoever contravenes this law shall be duly punished according to the criminal law [3].” To my knowledge there was no separate canon of criminal law on state scale. The conditions suggest that military law covered civil criminal infractions but this matter must lie beyond my scope for the moment. What can be said is that the real function of the 1931 Marriage Regulation was educational rather than punitive. It was ideology implementation instead of direct behavioral modification.

**FREEDOM OF DIVORCE**

Also unique to the CSR Marriage Regulation compared with previous marriage laws in China is the statement on divorce. According to article 9, instead of an eventual mutual agreement or a formal divorce litigation procedure initiated by one party, divorce could be decided and enforced by either party of the couple immediately while the other party has no right to refuse such a claim [3]. This article responded to the General Constitution perfectly since the freedom of divorce gave women concrete opportunities to escape from traditional female roles within the household to participate the “economic, political and cultural life in society [1].” Also, with freedom of divorce, women who suffered in silence from an unsatisfactory marriage and a controlling husband, especially foster daughters-in-law who were sold to another household at young age to serve the household until she and her husband were able to consummate the marriage, were able to seek new possibilities in their lives other than taking care of domestic affairs.

Secondly, according to Meijer, “the Regulations not only abolished the shackles of the traditional family but in fact it did away with the shackles of the family altogether and created the possibility of a family-less society [3].” This argument is only partially true in legal codes. I would argue to the contrary that the state did not intend to create a family-less society because the economy of CSR still operated under the family unit as stated in the previous section. Leaders of CSR only intended to eliminate traditional families under clan power via Marriage Regulation. Therefore, newly established families that might have benefited more from CCP policies and were better
educated with CCP ideologies were more likely to be composed of supporters of the regime. Under the new structure, the new regime led by CCP would be able to expect a purer and stronger support from its citizens of both genders for war preparation and economic construction.

Freedom of divorce could also be an opportunity for women to disentangle themselves from their identity as a landlord or part of the rich peasant class and thereby benefit from land policies. As Cheng explained in her paper, policies on women’s class status had been modified multiple times from 1928 to 1933 in Jiangxi Soviet period. The land was confiscated by the government and redistributed indiscriminately by “the number of population in an area, regardless of age, gender, or class background [4].” Under these regulations, women were entitled to the same amount of land distribution as men despite of women’s relatively smaller labor force. However, the 1931 Regulations of the Jiangxi Soviet Provincial Government for the Confiscation and Redistribution of Land stipulated that “wives, daughters-in-law and daughters of landlords should not receive and land in the redistribution. This also applied to those who married poor peasants [4].” At this point, inter-class marriage would not help reclassify wives or daughters from landlord class or rich peasant class and retain their family’s property because class of one’s original family was the only criterion. This situation changed in 1933 when “How to Analyze the Classes and Decisions Concerning Some Problems Arising from the Agrarian Struggle” authored by Mao included three factors to decide the status of a woman in inter-class marriage: the time of the inter-class marriage (before or after the Uprising), the class of a woman’s original family, the amount of labor contributed by a woman [6]. The new policy implied that a woman was able to change her class through interclass marriage when she labored or ceased laboring for a certain amount of time in the new family.

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A document drafted in October 1933 by the Central Government of the CSR, “How to Analyze the Classes and Decisions Concerning Some Problems Arising from the Agrarian Struggle,” described the change of class due to marriage in great detail. For example, as stipulated in Article 15.4, if a woman from a landlord family married a poor peasant and contributed her labor as a source of income of the family for five years, she was able to be recognized as a member of the poor peasant class. For another example, in Article 15.3, if a woman from a poor peasant family married a landlord family before the Uprising, she would not be considered as a member of landlord class unless she ceased laboring for five years. And if she married after the Uprising, according to Article 15.4, she did not have to change her class status at all [6]. The examples illustrated that the 1931 Marriage Regulation gave married women an opportunity to change their class by divorcing their landlord husband and marrying a poor peasant. This benefit for women was not predisposed in the 1931 Marriage Regulation intentionally for class struggle but consequently the policy on marriage did not only give women additional physical protection in class struggle with marriage policy, but also encouraged and assisted women to follow the CCP ideologies.

Interestingly, the discourse did not stop there. Again, the authority took the opportunity of communicating with public and furthered the ideology implementation in their conversation. In February, 1932, “Inquiries on the Marriage Regulation,” someone wrote an anonymous letter questioning some clauses in the CSR marriage regulation, including a clause about freedom of divorce. “If one is allowed to divorce without reasonable
excuse, based on the insufficient level of education of people, many people will constantly change partners. This situation had already happened many times in Yongding County. How do we solve this problem after all?"

Xiang Ying, the Vice President of the CSR, addressed this issue publicly:

This is KMT view. It is a pedantic old man’s words to support feudal system while insulting women. Those male comrades, please don’t be afraid, we are exactly intending to eradicate feudal remnants completely and eliminating the feudal thoughts from our minds using cases like those. There are some women who are unwilling to divorce but it is the minority. Most people against (freedom of divorce) are men. [2]

In Xiang Ying’s explanation, it clearly interpreted the matter “constantly changing partners as liberation” and “staying in one family” as feudal thoughts that is used to control women. Again, similarly to the communication on the matter of legal age, the authority attempted to educate the public that they were supposed to take satisfaction in the success of revolution in general which is the eradicates feudal remnants and establishing new order, instead of obsessing with personal loss and gain. Even in front of doubts, the CCP never ceased cultivating revolutionary minds in the public.

CONCLUSION

“A single spark can start a prairie fire,” a classical allusion to the Confucian classic Shangshu, became a popular proverb after Mao Zedong used it in his public letter to Lin Biao in 1930. In the letter, Mao recognized the increasingly intense conflicts between classes such as strikes and uprisings. He was convinced that the chaotic situations were like “dry wood” that could be lit by a hint of revolutionary ideas and could unavoidably evolve into “an anti-imperialism, anti-warlords, anti-landlords revolution [7].” With the ambition to expand the regime led by CCP to the whole of China, the CCP in Jiangxi soviet period set the fire with land reform that deepened the class conflicts and ideologically purified the CSR citizens. After that, the “women’s movement,” with the Marriage Regulation 1931 as a backing agency, created class-gender identity and attempted to implement CCP ideologies in individuals. Explained in this paper, the legal clauses on the freedom of marriage, freedom of divorce, the age limit and the ban on dowries intended to destroy clan power and restructure society with new families that benefitted from the CCP policies and supported the new regime. Besides the legal code, the CCP also educated the public through communications such as speeches, published documents, magazines, school education and so forth in order to unite people under the same belief and to strengthen the revolutionary army.

The strategies executed in Jiangxi were among the first round of experiments in recruiting supporters and managing local people. Only after years of strategy revisions in various regions did the CCP determine the strategy, “Encircling the Cities from the Rural Areas” (农村包围城市) to fulfill the CCP’s goal of building a national regime. However, even if the concept of gender equality was propagated to people mainly to encourage women to join the revolution as labor force, the process exposed women, especially the impoverished, to opportunities to escape traditional gender roles and duties, acquire a social identity, and find husbands of their own choice. The ideologies of CCP implemented in Jiangxi Soviet regions showed women a way and possibility to make changes in their lives in their own hands. ■

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