

# A Study on the Communist Party of China's Expressions in Discourse on Women's Liberation During the War of Resistance Against Japan: Taking the *Xinhua Daily* as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

Since its foundation in the 1920s, the Communist Party of China (CPC) had paid substantial attention to women's liberation problems in China under the guidance of Marxist theory on women's liberation. During the War of Resistance against Japan, *Xinhua Daily*, as the only publicly-issued CPC party newspaper in Guomindang (GMD)-ruled areas, continuously publicized and reported on women's actual living conditions, which then correspondingly formed specific expressions in discourse. From a historical perspective that the CPC attempted to guide the Chinese women's liberation movement into the Chinese national liberation movement, this paper presents a study on the contents, characteristics and impacts of specific expressions in discourse in *Xinhua Daily's* propaganda reports on women's liberation during the War of Resistance against Japan.

**Keywords:** Women's liberation, *Xinhua Daily*, China's War of Resistance against Japan, Expressions in discourse

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since its foundation, the Communist Party of China (CPC) had paid substantial attention to women's issues. With the guidance of the Marxist theory of women's liberation, it affirmed the "importance and significance of class struggle" among working women, and clearly stated that "our responsibility is to guide the women's movement into an important part of the national liberation movement" [1].

As the only CPC party newspaper publicly published in Guomindang (GMD)-ruled areas during the War of Resistance against Japan, the main purpose of the *Xinhua Daily* was to fight against Japan and save the nation, and to consolidate the United Front against Japan. By taking advantage of media, this newspaper spared no efforts in propaganda in order to encourage women to liberate themselves and promote women's liberation movement. In this process of guiding the majority of women to participate in the liberation of the Chinese nation, the *Xinhua Daily* formed some particular expressions in discourse about women's liberation during this period. This paper presents a

multidimensional study on the contents, characteristics and impacts these expressions in discourse.

## 2. CONTENTS OF EXPRESSIONS IN DISCOURSE ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Since its foundation in Hankou on January 11, 1938, *Xinhua Daily* continuously expressed concerns on the issue of women's liberation under the founding purpose of "broadcasting Anti-Japan thoughts and consolidating the Anti-Japanese National United Front". It also made significant efforts in advocating women's participation in social affairs. The discourse expressions used by the *Xinhua Daily* in the news reports on women's emancipation showed a strong and revolutionary meaning. Generally, the discourse expressions of news reports on women's liberation can be summarized into the following three aspects.

### 2.1. "Celebrating International Women's Day": to guide women to find their own true values

During this period, *Xinhua Daily* paid significant attention to women's festivals including the

International Women's Day on March 8th every year and the Mother's Day. It published a large amount of news reports about women's festivals, including a number of editorials, in order to awaken Chinese women's self-consciousness and make them to find their own value.

The contents of these news reports were mainly focused on how women at home and abroad celebrated these festivals and held commemorative activities. For example, on March 9, 1939, a news report entitled "*March 8th Festival' was celebrated in various places*" wrote: "in addition to women in Chongqing warmly celebrating the 'March 8th Festival', other places are also full of festive atmosphere, such as Gansu, Wuhan and other places..." [2]; On April 9, 1940, another news report entitled "*Tens of thousands of women in Chongqing warmly celebrate the 'March 8th' festival, Mrs. Dequan Li insisted that alliance is required to win the war, and claimed that the hidden traitors should be cleared out*" pointed out that: "On March 8th,...their faces are filled with warm smiles,...a rich festival is prepared" [3].

In addition, *Xinhua Daily* usually wrote particular editorials to guide public opinions, in order to help women enhance social influences and strive for social supports and sympathy, especially during the women-related festivals. These editorials not only aimed to awaken women's self-consciousness and enhance their confidence and but also attempted to encourage women to participate in the social movements for their own liberation, thereby promoting the development of the women's liberation movement in GMD-ruled areas. On May 9, 1943, the editorial "*Respect mothers and protect motherhood: Celebrate Mother's Day!*" put it: "All mothers are also members of female compatriots. If we do not change our discriminated life, it is difficult to win our lives. We must unite and realize the liberation of all female compatriots" [4].

Women's liberation is a long-term historical process, in which not only women should be freed from class oppression and the oppression of the patriarchal system, but also gender discrimination should be corrected and the constraints imposed on women due to gender inequality should be removed. Only by demonstrating the dignity and value of women as individual people can women's living conditions be changed. The first step in helping women achieve their liberation is to help women find their own values and dignity. During the War, *Xinhua Daily* reported women's own value and strengthened their self-confidence by insisting on reporting news of celebrating women's festivals and publishing editorials on the annual Women's Day, and it also played an important role in increasing the recognition of women throughout the society. These efforts were of great help in guiding women to understand their value as "real humans".

## **2.2. "Fight for our rights": to encourage women to actively participate in social affairs**

During the War, due to the fact that a large number of men headed to the front line, women began to gain more employment opportunities. However, many firms explicitly prohibited female employees or made a variety of discriminatory restrictions on the employment of female workers. There were also some arguments that "women should go back to kitchen". In this circumstance, women's employment was still low. *Xinhua Daily* immediately responded to these discriminative arguments by publishing multiple editorials to support women's employment, and also launched a series of reports for women's equal employment rights, leading to a very positive propaganda effect.

First, *Xinhua Daily* criticized the discrimination against women and supported women's opportunity of employment. The editorial on February 13, 1940 "*Protect Professional Women*", calling on the society to pay attention to women's employment problems. At the same time, it published many reports regarding social concerns about women's employment. For example, on September 20, 1940, an article named "*Soong Meiling's report to young women all over the country for the development of women's employment*" denounced the General Post Office for not employing female workers. This article also pointed out that women are not worse than men at work, and can even do better. Another article "*On Post Offices Do Not Employ Married Women*" by Kang He was published on October 18th of the same year, which argued that "there is no evidence that women show poor abilities and lack the sense of responsibility and married female staff are more likely to be distracted by housework and children" [5]. *Xinhua Daily* also reported the attitudes of women themselves. For instance, on November 13, 1940 an article entitled "*A serious symposium in the field of women-discussions on Chongqing women's career issues*" by Yang Huilin pointed out: "Women's ability is not worse than men's. At this time, we women should unite together and fight for our rights to the authorities. In the meanwhile, all women compatriots must strive to improve their own professional skills, which is the only way to ensure the smoothness of our work" [6].

Secondly, *Xinhua Daily* emphasized that the discrimination in women's employment is harmful to the interests of the entire country, since suppressing women's participation in work can result in the weakening of the strength of resistance against Japan. In this sense, this discrimination cannot simply be regarded as an economic problem. An article by Zhang Xiaomei On December 13, 1940, "*How to Solve Women's Occupational Problems*", clearly stated that discrimination against women's employment is "a morbid phenomenon in the society in wartime and a

crisis that cannot be ignored.” On December 15 of the same year, the newspaper published “*Recognition of Women's Occupational Problems*” by Lu Jin, arguing that “restricting women’s participation in social works means that a powerful force is withdrawn from the United Front in the War of Resistance against Japan, leading to significant losses.” [7].

Thirdly, *Xinhua Daily* also attempted to guide the direction of public opinions on women’s employment. The special issue “Women’s Road” initiated an extensive discussions on the discrimination against women’s employment. On December 3, 1940, “*Editorial Office Announcement*” called on everyone “to join us to confess, bravely tell the discouragements and demands of professional women, disclose all the discrimination and ignorance in society” [8]. This announcement was influential with a large number of female readers writing letters to the editorial office to participate in the discussion. Impactful articles such as “*I Have No Way Out*” on November 14, 1940, “*Depression of Marriage and Career*” on December 3, 1940, and “*You Are Too Short!*” on December 13, 1940, appeared in the newspaper, making the voices and appeals of women’s noticed by more people. These article successfully aroused the public’s attention to women’s occupational discrimination.

*Xinhua Daily* loudly appealed to the whole society to care for working women, help them to lift the obstacles they encountered, and fully understand the importance of working women’s problems. These propaganda reports on the issue of women’s employment in *Xinhua Daily* had created a lot of momentum and urged the whole society to pay attention to the issue of women’s employment. More importantly, *Xinhua Daily* had evoked the consciousness of the majority of women to strive for independent economic rights and to be self-respecting and self-reliant.

### **2.3. “Strengthen self-cultivation”: to help women enhance their self-confidence**

The imprisonment of women in ancient China made them basically “not out of the door” and lack opportunities to learn and exercise, which created the social illusion that “women are not as good as men” and severely hindered the development of women’s professional careers and participation in politics. The improvement of women’s self-cultivation can add weight to their fight for all kinds of equal rights. During the War, *Xinhua Daily* also paid great attention to women’s own cultivation issues.

First of all, *Xinhua Daily* constantly reminded women to overcome their weaknesses, improve their work ability, and achieve self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-improvement. On January 31, 1940, “*The position and cultivation of professional women*” in this

newspaper pointed out: “there is another issue that cannot be ignored, that is, the training of professional women.... We must strengthen our unity,... strengthen our self-cultivation.... Professional women are cooks who have just stepped out of the kitchen. We must keep in mind that we must step up to exercise ourselves so that we can manage the country.” Later, *Xinhua Daily* also successively published a series of articles such as “*How professional women should study* and *A brief talk on professional women’s self-cultivation*”, calling on professional women to pay attention to their own self-cultivation issues and improve their own quality, along with practical advices on how to strengthen self-cultivation and how to proceed learning new things. The editorial “*Women’s employment issues*” on August 16, 1943 admonished female compatriots more eloquently to “not only regard occupation as a means of earning a living, but also to further learn and master all skills from occupation. Learning things bit by bit from the beginning to the end, using our meticulous mood and tenacity. This is then a good start of women’s self-respect and self-reliance.” *Xinhua Daily* also encouraged professional women: “Getting a job is just the beginning of women’s liberation. From now on, we should be firm and brave, keep going down-to-earth, learn technology and improve our knowledge. One day we will be truly equal.”

Second, *Xinhua Daily* also paid attention to women’s political awareness and helped them express their political demands, in order to promote women to grow into an active political force in the democratic movement in the GMD-ruled area. On the fourth page of November 5, 1944, *Xinhua Daily* published “*The direction of Chinese women’s efforts-commemorating the October Revolution Day*”, expressing the desire of women for democracy and freedom and conveying the demand that women want to have the equal political rights as men. Moreover, two editorials, entitled “*Working for women’s democratic rights-commemorating the March 8th Festival* and “*Unite Women’s Power and Fight for democracy!*”, were also published on March 8, 1944 and March 8, 1945 respectively with the same appeal. These two articles further expressed the CPC’s views on the development direction and focus of the Chinese women’s liberation movement at that time, and believed that the women’s liberation movement should ensure that women should have the equal political rights as men.

Notably, *Xinhua Daily* pointed out: “The fruits of victory in the War of Resistance against Japan over the past eight years have been gained through the sacrifices of millions of people. We must not allow a few careerists to sit back and enjoy these fruits.”[9]. *Xinhua Daily* further called on all women to strive for building an independent, free and democratic new China. It also vigorously supported the women’s community to fight against civil war and demand peace.

In a word, *Xinhua Daily* not only focused on women's professional skills, but also reminded women to strengthen their political awareness and self-confidence. It also encourage women to strengthen their studies in social sciences, and establish a basic understanding of international and domestic affairs. Therefore, *Xinhua Daily* conveyed that women's liberation is a part of national liberation, and women's real liberation can be achieved only after the entire nation is completely liberated.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In summary, from a historical perspective that the CPC attempted to guide the Chinese women's liberation movement into the Chinese national liberation movement, this paper presents a study on the contents, characteristics and impacts of specific expressions in discourse in *Xinhua Daily's* propaganda reports on women's liberation during the War of Resistance against Japan. The contents of these expressions in discourse emphasized the independence of personality, economics and politics of women. These expressions also showed a strong connection with the national liberation movement in the War against Japan. These expressions in discourse had facilitated the liberation of women in GMD-ruled areas, and promoted the development of women's liberation movement. In this sense, the efforts of CPC for expanding the United Front, augmenting the national cohesion, and promoting national liberation can be clearly seen.

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