

sacred." In the relationship between men and women, love was considered to be only secondary, while the core relationship remained economic, and was thus controlled by capitalism. In antiquity, eating was a simple affair. People picked fruit and caught wild animals and fish, and were easily satisfied. Men and women were equals, and economically women asked nothing of men and men asked nothing of women. Men and women sought of each other only "love." Thus woman sometimes, on the contrary, used her physiological strengths (physiologists say that in sexual physiology women are stronger than men) to control men. Later, as population increased, and food supplies became inadequate, the competition for survival made it necessary to emphasize work, and with this arrived the terrible age in which women became subjugated to men.

In doing physical labor, women are not inherently inferior to men, but because women cannot work during the period of childbearing, men took advantage of this weakness, exploited this single flaw, made "submission" the condition of exchange, and used "food" to shut them up. This then is the general cause that has kept women subjugated and unable to emancipate themselves. On the one hand, what member of the human race was not born of woman? Childbearing by women is an indispensable element in the survival of humanity. That men should have forgotten this supreme act of benevolence, and on the contrary should have wantonly and unscrupulously oppressed women, merely for the sake of petty economic relationships, is truly a case of resuming evil for good. On the other hand, childbearing is an extremely painful event. "The pangs of childbirth" is a term that frightens every woman who hears it. Despite the medical discoveries that have changed the "difficulty of childbirth" into the "ease of childbirth," we should show great reverence and compassion. How can we instead take advantage of trivial economic benefits to press the other down?

Having presented the "reasons" above, we can now turn to the "methods." The methods by which women can become free and independent and never again be oppressed by men may in general be listed as follows:

1. A woman must never marry before she is physically mature.
2. Before marriage, at the bare minimum, a woman must be adequately prepared in knowledge and skills to live her own life.
3. A woman must prepare herself for living expenses after childbirth.

The above three items are the basic prerequisites for a woman's own personal independence. In addition, there is a further condition of "public child support," to which society should pay close attention. If women themselves are able to fulfill the above three conditions, and if society, for its part, provides for the public rearing of children, then marital relationships centered on love can be established. This will depend on the efforts of all of us young men and women!

Note

1. This is the term used after 1946 to characterize the transformation of the lives of the peasants as a result of land reform, which William Hinton took as the title of his book on the subject.

16

Commentary on Miss Zhao's Suicide

Tao Yi (November 21, 1919)

Originally published in *Women's Bell Special Edition*, no. 1, under the name Si Yong.

No one who has heard about Miss Zhao's suicide can avoid tears and heartache. Her death was too painful. Why would anyone be willing to die, much less die in such an agonizing way, unless she felt there was no other way out? Who would have thought that such a tragedy would be enacted before our eyes today, just when cries for women's emancipation are on the rise? Why was there no place in all the world for this one woman? Why was she forced to her death? What was at the root of this? Alas! Is it not this vile marriage system? This vile marriage system has also smothered countless other young women to death. I refer only to young women because a young man has some room for discussion about the girl his parents betrothed for him. Thus, there were many answers to the *China Times'* question, "What should today's young man do about the woman his parents betrothed for him?" A young man has complete freedom to decide whether to marry his betrothed or break off the betrothal. But a young woman has no

freedom to decide anything other than whether to hang herself; she has no possible answer besides the words "I would rather die." No matter how strong she is, she cannot resist those time-honored bright lights of Confucianism and paternal authority. If she tries to resist, she will immediately be slapped with the labels "unchaste" and "unfilial," and there will be nowhere on earth for her to go. Miss Zhao was clearly unwilling at the time the betrothal was made, but her parents did not seek her consent. Afterward, it was not as if her parents did not know that she had expressed her opposition. Indeed, they even knew that she was willing to die rather than go through with the marriage; that was why they searched her for weapons right before she entered the bridal sedan. They clearly knew that she was unwilling; they clearly knew that she would rather die. Alas, this young woman was unwilling from the start, totally unwilling; it was impossible for her to seek a life for herself, so she sought death instead. Even death itself was nearly out of her reach. If her parents went so far as to search her right before she entered the sedan, one can only imagine what the security measures must have been like when she was living at home. Alas!

"What should today's young woman do about the man her parents betrothed for her?" Didn't Mr. Wen Tian raise this "question" in the *China Times* news column and ask for young women to respond? Through her death, Miss Zhao became the first to offer a response to this question. Miss Zhao is dead, but I think there are countless women like her in the world, as well as countless parents like her parents. When faced with the same problem, must death be their only means of resolution? Is there any other way to save them? Must parents hold fast to that kind of "no resistance to tradition will be tolerated" attitude and force their daughters down the path of suicide? Or is there room for discussion? I can only pray and hope every day for a satisfactory answer.

Though we should not say that Miss Zhao died "for love of freedom," we must recognize her as "one who sacrificed herself to reform the marriage system." If she were just a passive person trying to protect her own freedom, then why did she not commit suicide at the time she hid the knife, or while she rode in the sedan with her family to her sister's home? Why did she wait till she was in her bridal clothes, and sitting in her bridal sedan, to commit suicide? I doubt that so many people would have known about her suicide or felt so deeply troubled

by her death if she had killed herself a day earlier, when she was dressed as a regular daughter, sitting in a regular sedan! When this free spirit declared war on the demon of despotism, she may have sounded an alarm to awaken ordinary people to the realization that the days of the monstrous practice of selling women against their will are numbered. At this point I feel neither exhilaration nor discouragement, but I feel as if I hear countless voices crying out for freedom—sacrifice—struggle. We must make our own choices—my ears are inundated with the cry that we must make our own choices. I cannot help but cry out with my pen, "Long live freedom!" It is the glory of humankind's future!

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"The Evils of Society" and Miss Zhao

Mao Zedong (November 21, 1919)

First published in *Public Interest*.

My friend Mr. Yinbo,¹ in his editorial comments published the day before yesterday in this paper, criticized my article, "Commentary on Miss Zhao's Suicide," saying that I had placed all the blame on circumstances, letting Miss Zhao off scot-free, and that this was not right. He wrote, "The action of Miss Zhao was a weak and negative action. Such actions must never, never be advocated." I am basically in total agreement with this positive critique, forcefully put forward by Mr. Yinbo. On the question of the suicide of Miss Zhao, I had originally intended to criticize her on several different small points. Among the several small points that I was considering, one was precisely "against suicide." Mr. Yinbo's view and my view are really identical.

In the end, however, I cannot let "society" off. No matter how weak you might say Miss Zhao's act of committing suicide was, you cannot say she "died without cause." And the "cause" of her death, to one degree or another, indisputably did come from outside of herself, from society. Since society contains "causes" that could bring about Miss Zhao's death, this society is an extremely dangerous thing. It was able to cause the death of Miss Zhao; it could also cause the death of Miss