

Between Feminism and Socialism: Comparative Study of Lily Braun and Ding Ling

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Abstract

Women have a contradictory relation to socialism: on the one hand, the Bolsheviks came to power with a principle of equality for both sexes; On the other hand, communist women enjoyed less and less autonomy and power within the political organizations in the course of the 1920s and 1930s. The contradiction first arose as a result of Bolshevization of the political line since 1924 – the Soviet Communist Party declared the “woman’s question” as settled, as women were now on equal footing with men in the process of production. This paper examines this unresolved tension in socialist theories (through writings by Marx and Engels and August Bebel) and organizational practices within the socialist parties, before it introduces how two communist women Lily Braun (1865-1916) and Ding Ling (1904-1986) had carefully revised the class-struggle-based party-line from within by incorporating a call for liberating femininity that was otherwise lost or de-alienated. Similar family and educational backgrounds landed both with highly similar thoughts: first, their common commitment to socialism puts them on continuous searching, (re-)thinking and (re-)framing a way to organically incorporate the role of women in socialist revolution; second, while doing so, they both pushed the boundaries of the Party’s official footing on women by liberating, instead of suffocating, unique qualities of femininity. The questions they tried to tackle are not only how to bring the woman to the Party but also how to bring the Party to the woman: to the first category belong questions like how should women be better incorporated into production? How is domestic work (housework and child rearing) to be treated? How can women receive better education to advance to posts and even key posts in the communist regime and to serve the socialist cause? To the second category are questions like how should women’s ‘unique’ qualities (such as beauty, adornment etc.) be dealt with if they are treated as workers on equal footing with men? How should issues like reproduction and motherhood be dealt with?

Keywords: Socialism, feminism, Ding Ling, Lily Braun, gender, class, SPD, CCP

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Introduction

Heart-wrenching images of abused female and child laborers have become an iconic representation for the degradation of human labor under capitalism. The pre-war portraits of the hungry women peasants and dying children by Käthe Kollwitz had at least helped catalyze the Russian Revolution by provoking revolutionary spirits. Soon after Lu Xun introduced Kollwitz's portraits to China in the early 1930s, visual themes of a mother's love, a dying child, and female laborers have been carried further in various forms of art as a concentrated representation for the oppression of the proletarian class. In *Capital*, Marx devoted an entire chapter discussing capital's ability to depress wages by substituting the skilled male worker with unskilled women and children through machinery – "The labour of women and children was, therefore, the first thing sought for by capitalists who used machinery".¹ The consequence is capital's mighty power in destroying the family structure by enrolling every member of the workman's family as wage-laborers, "without distinction of age or sex". "Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of free labor at home within moderate limits for the support of the family".²

Despite apparent acknowledgement of oppression for working women both in theory and in artistic representation in the socialist movement of the early 20th century, the "Woman Question" remains out of systematic theorization in *Capital* and must be reconstructed from scattered mentioning in the works of Marx, Engels and other socialist thinkers like August Bebel. Within the communist institutions, the actual number of women employed within the establishment of socialist parties in Soviet Russia, Germany and China remained very low and they were usually restrained to "technical" functions (secretariat, translation, courier service).³ There had existed a number of organizations devoted to address women's needs in direct or indirect relation to Western communist parties; the names of female socialists - Ottilie Baader, Clara Zetkin and Helen Crawford are still known to us. Yet women's emancipation had never been taken as a dominant task in the workers' movement, and had been subjected to party directives, which firmly prioritized class over gender. The organizations of the communist women experienced a decline since the Party's "bolshevization" (a policy that requires all national branches of the Communist Party stick to the principles set forth by the Soviet Union) in 1924,⁴ and had at best become, in Stalin's term, "a simple 'transmission belt' between the Party and the 'masses'".⁵

A closer look into women's relationship to socialism reveals a contradictory picture: on the one hand, the Bolsheviks came to power with a principle of equality for both sexes. The new regime laid out a variety of political and social innovations, including communal kitchen and child care to free women from being "housework slaves". Working women's unions and committees were established to protect female workers' rights; schools were also established to educate women to come to terms with their oppression as well as preparing and promising them to advance to the paid posts within the Party.⁶ On the other hand,

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critic of Political Economy*. Based on first English edition of 1887. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> (accessed on 12/12/2018).

² Ibid..

³ See Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 43-44

⁴ For a specific study of women's association within the Communist international, see Elizabeth Waters, "In the Shadow of the Comintern: The Communist Women's Movement, 1920-1943", in Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp, and Marilyn B. Young ed. *Promissory Notes. Women in the Transition to Socialism*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989), 29-58.

⁵ Quoted from Studer, *The Transnational*, 48.

⁶ For a detailed presentation of developments of women's rights, see Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

communist women enjoyed less and less autonomy and power within the political organizations: the International Congress of Communist Women, active advocate for advancing women's rights in domestic and industrial domains since 1920, lost its autonomous status to become a department of the Comintern in 1926; along with the downgrading was almost-complete disappearance of communist women's movements by the mid-1920s,⁷ culminated by the resignation of the active leader of Clara Zetkin from the international secretariat in 1926. The latter's official journal *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* stopped publication a year before.⁸

The contradictory picture was firstly a result of Bolshevization of the political line since 1924 –the Soviet Communist Party declared “women's question” as settled, as women were now on equal footing with men in the process of production. This could be best characterized in the words of Lazar Kaganovich, the first leader of then the new committee for women in Moscow: “propaganda was henceforth to treat the Soviet women ‘not as woman but rather as party worker, fully equal’”.⁹ The previous requests by women communist advocates were thus seen as deviating from the Party's principle line by demanding rights and needs of one gender. On the other hand, the contradictory picture arose from social standardization that in turn relates back to the Stalinization process in the late 1920s. Policies now recognized housework as part of production, and women were supposed to do better than men and hence encouraged to undertake such work. Reproduction, in the post-war construction of the new socialist regime, was treated by propaganda as not only “helping the nation” but also necessary. The adoption of policy to abolish abortion rights from the Party cadre led to massive scale protest from the Communist women under the slogan “our bodies belong to us”- a movement that marked conscious separation of communist women's movement from the workers.¹⁰

It is in such background of a contradictory situation facing women socialists that our protagonists of Lily Braun and Ding Ling lived and wrote. Both were highly committed communists, made their way to key posts within the socialist parties of the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) respectively and fully committed to advancing the socialist course of their country. Yet both came from well-to-do families and advanced their intellectual career first as feminists. These backgrounds led to similarity in their thought on two levels: first, their common commitment to socialism puts them on continuous searching, (re-)thinking and (re-)framing a way to organically incorporate the role of women in socialist revolution; second, while doing so, they both pushed the boundaries of the Party's official footing on women by liberating, instead of suffocating, unique qualities of femininity. Their revisionism of the party line puts them on precarious relations with the parties. The questions they tried to tackle are not only how to bring the woman to the Party but also how to bring the Party to the woman: to the first category belong questions like how should women be better incorporated into production? How is domestic work (housework and child rearing) to be treated? How can women receive better education to advance to posts and even key posts in the communist regime and to serve the socialist cause? To the second category are questions like how should women's unique qualities (such as beauty, adornment etc.) be dealt with if all are treated as workers? How should issues like reproduction and motherhood be dealt with?

⁷ See both Elizabeth Waters, “In the Shadow of the Comintern”, in *Promissory Notes*, 43-45 and Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational*, 48-49.

⁸ For more details regarding the journal, see H. Sturm, “Past and Future of the International Communist Women's Movement”, in *International Press Conference*, no. 17 (1922),125.

⁹ Studer, *The Transnational*, 49.

¹⁰ John Riddell. “The Communist Women's movement”, in *International Socialist Review*, issue 87. Available at <https://isreview.org/issue/87/communist-womens-movement> (accessed on 12/12/2018).

Both Lily Braun and Ding Ling, in their uncomfortable positioning between feminism and socialism, had come to a similar vision of an ideal communist revolution: transcending the mundane party line of class struggle (of building the dictate of the proletariat) through femininity. The idea of a transcendental revolution through womanhood neither purely seeks to advance women's specific needs and interests by underlying the uniqueness of women, nor does it seek to mitigate qualities of femininity to merge into the male-dominated discourse of the parties. The fact that they were doing both suggests that despite the different priorities the various national communist parties set, and the varied degrees they divided labor by gender, the communist movement of the early 20th century could be seen as transnational in the way it aroused similar thoughts on Marxism's contradiction in its proclaimed fundamental principle of men and women equally benefiting from the building of socialism. This following section will be devoted to the discussion of the unsolved theorization of women's role in Marxism, upon which our two thinkers made their revision and tried to fill the gaps. The section will be followed by a section on Braun and Ding Ling's similar precarious situation within institutional practices, where the male-dominated parties adopted straight-forward class struggle line that further down-graded the gender role. The last section is a close reading of some of Braun and Ding Ling's seminal works and an analysis of the similar female image both thinkers envisioned. This last section will analyze how such an image combines femininity with the patriarchal revolution based on class-struggle, and by extension, humane emotions with "cold" economic confiscation.

Gender vs. Class – the Place of Woman

The long-time leader of SPD August Bebel was one of the earliest socialists to theorize the role of women in socialist movement. He published *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Women and Socialism) in 1879, in which he made a broad examination of human societies from the primeval time to the present day and into the socialist future and traced how women became oppressed and exploited in propertied and capitalist societies and could be liberated in the class-less socialist stage.¹¹ Bebel started by depicting, quite nostalgically, the freedom women enjoyed in primeval societies, where society was structured upon kinship, and where men, women and children lived in matriarchal communities with polygamy.¹²

With advancement of production came division of labor and diversification of profession. Man took the lead along these lines of development and accordingly became master and owner of these new sources of wealth.¹³

Hence came the clash between the propertied and the unpropertied classes, where the former united to set rules in reorganizing society in the interests of his own against the latter and hence forced women to prohibit intercourse with other men in order to have legitimate children to inherit his property for protection of his lineage's interests.¹⁴ The society based on private properties hence oppressed women on both sexual and social fronts as they were treated as property of the husband. Bebel listed the numbers of women's suicide and abnormalcy rates in different countries to prove the severe consequences in suppression of

¹¹ August Bebel, *Women and Socialism*, translated by Meta L. Stern, (New York: Socialist Literature Company, 1910). Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bebel/1879/woman-socialism/index.htm> (accessed on 12/12/2018).

¹² Ibid., "Chapter I".

¹³ Ibid., "Chapter II".

¹⁴ Ibid.

female sexual impulse. He accused the monogamian family form in capitalist society as an unhealthy suppression of the “human instinct of race preservation” through “social hindrances and restrictions”.¹⁵ On women’s role in social production, Bebel acknowledged the significant extension of women in industry in capitalist states, but fully endorsed Marx’s view in *Capital*, where machinery was accused to have reduced labor strength and allowed capitalists to exploit women labor through both long working hours and cheap wages. It was Marx who criticized capitalism for bringing down the family structure in a bad way by putting the entire family onto the industrial line for exploitation through wage reduction.¹⁶ While *Capital* describes the dissolution of the family through a macro politico-economic perspective, i.e., seeing family structure as a small constituent of the general change in production and social relation, *Women and Socialism* aims to focus on degradation of women in Bebel’s contemporary society. Bebel challenged the nineteenth century claims that women were inferior to men in physical and intellectual abilities, and called for “release of woman from her narrow sphere of domestic life, and her full participation in public life and the missions of civilization”. In his most radical feminist claims, Bebel asserted that “women [are] better qualified for politics than men” and that “woman will rise to a height of perfection that [men] can hardly conceive to-day, because until now no such conditions have existed in human evolution”.¹⁷ This would be the situation for the future state of socialism. This utopian view of women would soon be embraced passionately by his contemporary feminists to advocate equal pay and equal work opportunities for women.¹⁸ Although supporting women’s participation in politics through education, Bebel differed from his contemporary feminists on the point of absolute equal working conditions with men. He recognized the that there were jobs that were harmful to women and children, and the utopian socialist state he envisioned is one that respects not only equal social relation between the genders but also the natural law that defines differences between the sexes:

Man should no longer regard himself an exception to natural laws. He should finally strive to recognize the laws underlying his own thoughts and actions, and should endeavor to live in accordance with these laws. He will eventually learn to arrange his life with his fellow-beings, that is, the family and the state, not according to the precepts laid down in centuries gone by, but according to the rational principles derived from an understanding of nature. Politics, morals, laws, that are at present drawn from various sources, will be shaped according to natural laws. An existence worthy of human beings, that mankind has been dreaming of for thousands of years, will become a reality at last.¹⁹

Despite his denunciation of monogamy as oppressing women’s sexual impulse and against nature of reproduction, Bebel did not specify what the “higher form... of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the old gens” was, nor did he mention whether the form of family should be dissolved. The mention of danger at work for women workers was brief and threatened reverting back to gender division in production and even the domestication of women that he was criticising in the first place. Similar contradiction was carried over to

¹⁵ Ibid., “Chapter VII”.

¹⁶ See note 1.

¹⁷ Bebel, *Women and Socialism*, Chapter IX.

¹⁸ The Gotha program, for instance, an early party platform of the SPD to advocate universal suffrage, freedom of association and healthy working condition for all workers adopted the demand for equal work and equal pay for women and men in the Gotha party congress in 1896.

¹⁹ Bebel, chapter XXVIII.

Engel's well-known *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which was first published in 1884.

Engels adopted Bebel's theorization of matching development of the family according to stages of the society as well as his call for equal legal rights between the genders, but positioned the development of family with a pronounced Marxist spin of social production. Engels spent less space on tracing how impact of changing social production on relation between man and woman had led to change in the structure of the family in society. He set up the family and the society as contradictory forces at the preface:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. ... the social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other.²⁰

The social order was seen dominated by kinship-based family structure at the lower development of labor. Increase of production in all branches – “cattle-raising, agriculture, and domestic handicraft – gave human labor-power and capacity to to produce a larger product than was necessary for its maintenance”, which then arose “the first great cleavage of society into two classes: masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited”.²¹ In terms of the family, this process, which Engels saw as entrance into civilization, brought the down-turn of women's previous supremacy in the house as her activity was accounted only in terms of providing the man with life necessities. The process also meant a growing of man's supremacy in the house. The emergence of the state, according to Engels, did not originate from external forces but was an “organization for the protection of the possessing class against the non-possessing class”. The state came to exist out of two contradictory needs: “to keep class antagonism in check” and to “acquire new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class”.²² The new family structure corresponding to a state-dominated society was monogamy, “the domination of the man over the woman, and the single family as the economic unit of society”.²³

Accordingly, Engels advanced the theoretical and historical claim that social production has exerted an increasing influence on the family. Production gradually came to substitute reproduction and state-oriented class-based society with differentiated political systems came to substitute the kinship based primitive society.

Unlike Bebel's article, Engels' text does not particularly discuss the antagonisms of the sexes or the oppression of women. For Engels, the woman's question is knitted as part of the problem of the class-based capitalist society:

...to emancipate women and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. ...

²⁰ Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Zurich, 1884, translated into English by Alick West in 1942. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf (accessed on 12/12/2018).

²¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, “Chapter IX”.

²² Ibid..

²³ Ibid..

The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything, but an insignificant amount of her time.²⁴

Engels stopped short on commenting further on women workers like Marx did in *Capital*. Whereas Engels seems to believe the dissolution of the family is a necessary and good thing that could potentially lead to the emancipation of women, Marx sees the modern industry as essentially evil by bringing the entire working family onto production line, allowing capitalists to exploit the oppressed at even lower costs. They probably reach a common ground on the point that women's entry into the public workforce is a necessary condition, a catalyst, for the emancipation of the class as a whole, and that though family is a negative institution as product of the class society, the dissolution of it in high capitalist society of machinery is a positive precondition for building a socialist future with new forms of human association- "in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all".²⁵

What remains unresolved is the sexual division of labor. Engels examined the pre-class-based primitive society with so much passion in "Origin" that it reads like that the socialist future would be a dialectical regression to it, where both sexes enjoyed equal freedom. Like Bebel, Engels does not endorse absolute equality between the sexes. The nostalgic primitive society he depicts is apparently sexually divided:

...the man fights in the wars, goes hunting and fishing, procures the raw materials of food and the tools necessary for doing so; the woman looks after the house and the preparation of food and clothing, cooks, weaves, sews.²⁶

The labor division that leads man to be the master in his domain of the forest and woman to be the master in her domain of the house is hardly compatible with his critique of the capitalist society on enslaving the woman in the domestic world. Engels used the vague word "natural" for labor division in the former while resorting to "alienated" to describe the relation between sexes in the latter. These unresolved tension led to Marxist followers in actual political organizations vacillating between two poles: either viewing women as the blissful natural and ethical master of the house (as an unalienated natural being) or mounting a Utopian socialist attack on the property-based family life and cheap labor within the capitalist society. In either way, an unoppressed woman only exists on the two ends of a large bracketed history – the primitive and the socialist societies, leaving the long period from early civilization to late capitalism in the middle as the degradation process for women. What is apparently missing from the picture is woman's agency in fighting for their own emancipation. As from "Origin", women seem to be a group that has passively waited for an unfair fate to befall upon them and for socialism to come and liberate them. This unfortunately leads to the marginalized role of women within the socialist parties in the coming decades, and has led socialist women like Lily Braun and Ding Ling to carefully revise and liberate the voice of women to contribute to the socialist movement in their own way.

²⁴ Ibid..

²⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party", 1848, translated by Samuel Moore in cooperation with Friedrich Engels in 1888. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>, 26 (accessed on 12/12/2018).

²⁶ Engels, *Origin of the Family*, "Chapter IX".

On the Margins of the Party

Similarities in the educational and career backgrounds of Lily Braun and Ding Ling not only lead to their similar rethinking of the woman question but also put them in a similarly awkward situation in relation to the male-dominated party directives. An account of Lily Braun's life experiences can be found in her auto-biographical novel *Memoiren einer Sozialistin*²⁷, which describes Alix's (Braun's fictional name) life trajectory as being sympathetic with women and later with proletarian women from early aristocratic childhood on, leading her onto becoming a fervent socialist. As a member of the declining Prussian *Junker* class, the young Lily was a frivolous aristocrat who enjoyed a good education.²⁸ She inherited from her grandmother a passion for literature and writing - talent which enabled her to establish her reputation as an orator and agitator in the SPD. Likewise, Ding Ling came from a declining upper landlord class, which fell in the social turmoil of the early twentieth century. Family and drastic social changes in their childhood urged both to break with social conventions and actively pursue lives in metropolitan settings. In Shanghai and Beijing, Ding Ling's inherited rebellious character met with the iconoclastic May Fourth thoughts, leading her to establish her literary identity as a rebellious feminist featured by bold confessions of female sexual desire.²⁹ Similarly, for Braun, the intellectual stimulation of Berlin more than made up for the poverty of her family and inspired her to become a feminist with a critical view of social issues.³⁰

Braun joined the *Verein Frauenwohl* (Association for the Well-Being of Women) in 1894 as an activist feminist along with radical feminists like Minna Cauer and Helene Lange. She established the official journal of the association *Die Frauenbewegung*³¹ and advocated for women's suffrage and legal rights. By contrast, Ding Ling's feminist stance was demonstrated through her identity as a writer with bold confession of female desires, emotions and deep exploration of female sexuality. Her renowned novella “莎菲女士的日

²⁷ *Memoiren* consists of two parts – “Lehrjahre”, published in 1909 and “Kampfjahre”, published in 1911. Despite Braun's removal of real names (she labels herself as Alix Brandt, Clara Zetkin as Wanda Orbin, Ottilie Baader as Martha Bartels and so on), the work is seen by scholars like Alfred Meyer as autobiographical, with the precise reference to her own background and to the different battles she had with other SPD leaders at the time. The use of fictional form might have saved Braun from being criticized for romanticizing her own life.

²⁸ Lily's father's was suddenly dismissed from the Kaiser, which only leads to Lily's total disappointment about aristocracy and her deeper disgust with the aristocratic life. The family downturn also burdens Lily with huge debts from her father. In the same year, 1890, Lily's grandmother Jenny passed away – an intimate emotional comfort and support of Lily was now gone. The Lily of 1890 was further shaped by another frustration – her secret lover, referred to in the fiction as Gottfried, (according to Lischke, Lily's real lover was her distant cousin, widowed with two daughters) with whom Lily develops a relation for some time, tells her that he cannot marry her because of hesitation to her downward going family. For more details about Braun, see Ute Lischke. *Lily Braun, 1865-1916: German Writer, Feminist, Socialist* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000).

²⁹ Ding Ling's rebellious character is unimaginable without her mother Yu Manzhen, a feminist activist. Yu received her education at a local women's college, where she developed a deep friendship with other motivated women on issues of women's liberation. She called for abolition of the practice foot-binding and god-honouring for women and proposed education for women from poor families. Her whole life is indeed devoted to women's liberation when she later adopted the leading role at the local women's movement counsel in Hunan. Without surprise, Yu sent her only daughter to a women's college for a liberal education.

³⁰ In Berlin, the centre of literary and political debates, Braun “made friends easily, took sides in the current literary discussion, and immediately produced review articles on literary subjects”. (Lischke, *Lily Braun, 1865-1916*, 21) More and more, Braun focused her attention on social themes, such as “poverty, capitalism, the oppression of women, and the hypocrisy of sexual mores” (Lischke, *Lily Braun, 1865-1916*, 22) and often criticized the naturalists (who were very popular at this time in Germany) for not being critical enough towards social evils.

³¹ The journal is published by Ethische Kultur, the publisher of which – Georg von Gizycki – was Braun's first husband.

记, (Miss Sophia's diary)" frankly explores the interiority of a sickly (tuberculosis infected), middle class woman, Sophia. With a highly nuanced and detailed depiction of her psychology, Ding recounts the story of a complex woman who indulges in her inmost desires in a somewhat distorted and sickly manner.³² Ding Ling can be seen as a forerunner in capturing a subtle female subjectivity that is, in her translator Tani Barlow's reading, filled with stark incongruities between a richly libidinal interior and coldly indifferent exterior, between inner thoughts and outward action.³³ Using a narrative tone of pity and scorn, these contradictions could be read as the author's own agonies and frustrations on failed revolutions and national upheavals as well as the increasing doubts on the future for the rebellious new women like herself.³⁴ The indulgent bourgeois new woman can end up in nowhere else but in death, as becomes clear at the end of the novella. Braun shares a similar scornful skepticism toward the new women characters at the end of the nineteenth century, as becomes clear in her *Die Neue Frau in der Dichtung* (The New Woman in Literature). She sees them as lacking human warmth and femininity and only halfheartedly committed to self-fulfillment.³⁵ Their cold and unchecked self-indulgence will only result in failure in a society which is not ready to accept them. This understanding clearly echoes Lu Xun's concern for the reckless home-leaving new women – "where can the Chinese Nora go after she leaves home". For the rebellious Sophia, it becomes a literal question as she drifts here and there in Beijing and ends up having to look for a place to squander away the rest of her life. She is caught between the passionate iconoclastic May Fourth era and its aftermath when revolutionary passion had ebbed; she is thus, like the new women for Braun, a victim of the schism between the new and the old, and between socialism and feminism.

Both Lily Braun and Ding Ling came to embrace socialism from a marked feminist background. Questions they asked were not only how to liberate the working class as a whole but also how socialism can help liberate women. Once holding posts within the socialist parties, the more immediate question they asked was what role can women play to advance the male-dominated socialist movement – a key question that would legitimize their own posts in the male-dominated political parties. This hence distanced them from the new women movement – what Socialist women leader like Clara Zetkin scorned as "bourgeois feminism".

³² The story can be briefly summarized as follows: written in the form of diaries, Sophia confesses how she plays about the love from her faithful pursuer, Weidi, to whom she feels a complex mix of sympathy and annoyance; she yearns for the beautiful physique of an exotic man from Singapore, Ling Jishi, on whom she projects an ideal image that only leads to her disappointment and disgust in the end that denies her desire; her relation to her female companions are also featured with stark egoistic moody swings.

³³ Tani Barlow, *I Myself Am a Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, "Introduction".

³⁴ The very last thing Sophia cries out in her diary – "我狂笑的怜惜自己：‘悄悄的活下来，悄悄的死去，啊！我可怜你，莎菲’" (I laugh wildly, I feel so sorry for myself. Life sneaks on. Death too. Oh, how pathetic you are Sophia!) (Barlow, 81) only echoes Ding Ling's own heart-wrenching pity and scorn for the new women.

³⁵ Braun reads critically of the liberated women in several European works of her time: Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Marzella* (1894), Sara Grand's *Heavenly Twins* (1893), Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895) and Ibsen's *The Doll's House*. She views the protagonists as representatives of new women, whose image is often ridiculed in various caricatures circulated at this time. She criticizes Ibsen's Nora for lacking the desire for self-cultivation and having no human warmth and femininity, which are the major topics she brings up in her later essays. Braun's definition of femininity is by no means confined to the narrow concern of a woman's selfhood, but rather a more life-engaging dedication to changing the social condition for women. She criticizes *Marzella* for half-heartedly committing to a larger self-fulfillment and proposes that new women should wholly commit themselves to social change instead of settling for dilettantism. Her reading of Herminia, the heroine of *The Woman Who Did*, who yearns for free marriage, brings Braun to the awareness that free love and free marriage will only be possible through a social change. (Lischke, *Lily Braun, 1865-1916*, 26-30).

In her major theoretical work *Die Frauenfrage*, published in 1901, she made explicit complaints about her bourgeois feminist colleagues for being revisionist and refusing to think big. Lily saw western civilization in the last few hundred years as a “history of a developing society which more and more defined a person’s worth by his or her material and intellectual contributions”.³⁶ She was in line with Marx and Engels in the way Capitalism had alienated women – either turning them into cheap exploited sweatshop labor or making them completely subordinated to the producer in the household. Here she stepped away from Marx’s and Engels’ pure economic and social analysis by adding her close examination of the bourgeois family and its housewife: within bourgeoisie, modern mass production released the housewife of the joy she previously enjoyed in housework, and they had become more and more useless like a mere object of decoration. Bourgeois feminism, so accused by Braun, was “self-consciousness of the woman as a mere doll”.³⁷ Yet she saw in the socially abandoned bourgeois women as mighty force to fight for their own rights that they would potentially serve as the driving force for socialist revolution. A recurring theme of chapter 3 of the book is “work liberates”, a call in line with Engels’ view on employing the women in production as a necessary step towards emancipation of the gender. For Braun,

...work converts the female – this most conservative element in the life of nations – into a striving and thinking human being; it alone is her great emancipator which will lead her from slavery to freedom.³⁸

Not surprisingly, at this juncture Braun had in mind an idea of joining bourgeois feminists with their proletarian counterparts – as is the path the broader European feminist movement, as in England and Sweden, had taken.³⁹ Her ideal image of the proletarian women, as can be seen in some of her seminal essays like “Die Entthronung der Liebe (The Dethroning of Love)”, “Das Problem der Ehe (The Marriage Problem)”, and “Weiblichkeit (Femininity)”, is based on her argument that the proletarian women are the only ones that can marry out of love.

Love, marriage and children were still the major concerns for Braun, which she saw the bourgeois housewives had been alienated from. These concerns, she believed, would lead to political and economic change, and not the other way round. Capitalism, in her view, needed to be overthrown because of its suppression of motherhood and femininity. These two aspects, as Braun concludes in *Die Frauenfrage*, are by contrast deeply rooted in proletarian women, while the bourgeois women needed to be de-alienated by way of participating in work and should hence to joined hands with their proletarian counterparts.⁴⁰

³⁶ Quoted from Alfred Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 120.

³⁷ Braun believed Bourgeois women marry out of money since economic equality of the spouses is of central concern. At one point, she calls bourgeois wives “the vase of the household”, since they do not have love and are not independent. Ibsen’s Nora is for Braun but another tragic example of marrying out of wealth.

³⁸ Lily Braun, *Selected Writings on Feminism and Socialism*, translated and edited by Alfred G. Meyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 87.

³⁹ As Richard J. Evans finds in his study of women’s emancipation in Europe, women’s movements in these countries are usually intertwined with socialist movements, not like the situation in Germany where radical feminists and socialists mutually exclude each other. See Richard Evans, *The Feminists: Women’s Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920* (Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁰ After describing the hellish working condition of thousands of women workers in factories, she concludes with an urgent plea to overthrow Capitalism, since it “undermines the old form of family ([Die Frauenarbeit] untergräbt die alte Form der Familie)” “shakes the concept of morality (erschüttert die Begriffe der Sittlichkeit)” “endangers the human species which depends on healthy mothers (gefährdet die Existenz des Menschengeschlechts, deren Bedingung gesunde Mütter sind)”. Braun concludes with a strong note that “if humanity does not want to give itself up, it will have to give up the capitalist economic system (Will die

Braun's suggestion encountered strong objection from bourgeois feminists,⁴¹ causing her to turn to Socialism for profound social change that would solve the problem of suppression of all women. Indeed, the SPD did emphasize the task of liberating working women, especially through above-mentioned writings by Bebel and Engels. These might have given Braun the wrong signal to continuously emphasizing the woman question within the Party. But SPD's primary concern, judging even from theoretical works on the woman's question, was without doubt the political one – i.e., to unite the working class in overthrowing Capitalism. These are the ideas also believed by female activists within the SPD, like Otilie Baader and Clara Zetkin.⁴² These women were mainly active in Berlin, and were highly outspoken for socialist women.⁴³ Yet as leaders of the Party, they were radical advocates for socialist ideology, perhaps even more so than their male colleagues, and were openly dismissive of the woman question per se. Zetkin believed that there was no “special women workers’ question” at all – “the proletarian women’s struggle for her right to fully become a human being is not primarily a women’s movement at all, but is a socialist workers’ movement”.⁴⁴ “Bedroom matters”, Zetkin commented contemptuously on the narrow-mindedness of the bourgeois women, “should not be discussed in public”.⁴⁵ Braun's ideas (at this point, she believed that the bourgeois women could be politically educated and still adhered to the idea of joining them with proletarian women), replete with ideas of (idealistic) feminine agency, thus deviated from Zetkin's hard-core class-struggle-based Marxism. In her letter to Braun, Zetkin openly rejected Braun's suggestion of joining force:

...the more bourgeois the source from which the commission's conclusions emanate, the less they seem to be mixed up with agitator/revolutionary forces, the more effect they will have on the authorities, and the more telling they will be in our agitation. ... I would criticize and oppose all co-operation between our comrades and the bourgeois elements on an official level.⁴⁶

Even if it is not for her ideas, Braun's idealistic view, just like her romantic and passionate personality, is incompatible with the functional party superstructure with pragmatic and immediate goals. Maybe Lischke is right to characterize Braun as a desirable but dangerous party agitator based on an account of the effects of her public speech: “‘An Exceptional woman’, ... ‘But ambitious! She's consumed with passion, she doesn't do it out of love for us’”.⁴⁷ The result is thus a pitiful double rejection (from the bourgeois feminists and from the socialists): for the bourgeois feminists, she is a “traitor” who diverts attention from the feminist focus; for the socialists a “reformist”, “creating socialist enclaves within the capitalist system”.⁴⁸

Ding Ling's transition to Communism is also accompanied by her vision of an energetic collective proletarian force that can recharge and revive the moribund bourgeois

Menschheit schließlich nicht sich selbst aufgeben, so wird sie die kapitalistische Wirtschaftsordnung aufgeben müssen)”. Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14075/14075-h/14075-h.htm> (accessed on 12/12/2018).

⁴¹ Radical feminists like Helene Lange believed such an act will divert their focus.

⁴² Once converted to Marxism by her Russian husband, Clara Zetkin became a radical socialist, a strict follower of orthodox Marxism. Her admiration for the soviet socialism is evident in her talk with Lenin. Although she was known for being a leader of socialist women, her major concern was to urge working women to work together with men to overthrow the capitalist system.

⁴³ Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun*, 49-52.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 51-52.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Evans, *The Feminists*, 52.

⁴⁷ Lischke, *Lily Braun, 1865-1916*, 45.

⁴⁸ Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun*, 69.

new women, and Chinese women in general. From its inception, the Chinese socialist movement foregrounded the issue of women as both a symbolic and a central issue. Social reformers like Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) placed the task of educating women at the center of national saving long before Marxist and socialist ideas travelled to China. The proposal for his reformist agenda “变法通议 (A General Discussion on Reform)”, published in several installments in the reformist organ 时务报 (Current Affairs) between 1896-1897, included a particular chapter on women’s education. The chapter almost blamed the weakness of China completely on the weakness of the Chinese women and claimed that in order to “re-strengthen the nation from its two or three thousand years’ decadence (振两三千年之颓风)”, one must first of all “cultivate women’s intelligence (开女智)”. Liang drew the conclusion that women was the main cause that decided the country’s life and level of prosperity (妇女实天下存亡强弱之大源).⁴⁹ The iconoclastic May Fourth generation produced voluminous writings lambasting Confucianism for oppressing Chinese women. Most of the writers were male intellectuals.

Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), icon of the May Fourth intelligentsia, published numerous essays on the flagship magazine *New Youth*, attacking Confucian values for relegating women to social inferiority, crippling them into physically and mentally ill beings, and forcing them to subjugate to the patriarchal authority. When Chen Duxiu went on to establish the first Communist group in Shanghai, the May Fourth attacks on Confucian oppression merged with Marxist ideas on women. Engels’ “Origin” was particularly referred to in the early Chinese communists’ discussion on the structure of the family and its social relation, women’s production and reproduction, and gender equality.⁵⁰ This had led to the flourishing of women’s associations following the First Party Congress in 1921 – women’s associations were established, feminist journals were launched and schools for women were founded. Ideology was the main reason for the advancement of such programs, as then the fledgling Communist Party seemed to be the only channel for liberated modern women to advance an actual public life. Christina Gilmartin’s study of the early Chinese communist women and the programs they established provides a picture of the prosperous innumerable schools and magazine that actually advanced women’s interest in the communist movement significantly.⁵¹ Gilmartin found out that the early program was featured by the combination of women’s emancipation and their political identity under female leadership like Wang Huiwu - a foreign educated woman returnee. When the Shanghai Common Girls’ School opened its doors in 1922, it was intended to provide women with basic education to cultivate their consciousness of class and gender oppression. Ding Ling was among the first batch of students to be enrolled in the Shanghai Common Girls’ School. Women’s active participation led to establishment of Women’s Bureau at the Second Party Congress. As the Party’s leadership shifted from these early liberal intellectuals to Soviet trained communists in the mid-1920s, the program of women’s liberation in China gradually gave way to the central political task of a national anti-imperial revolution. After breaking up with the Nationalist Party in 1927, the communists turned to the rural lands, and women reemerged into historical picture as propaganda was now made to call for everyone’s contribution in “self-sufficiency” movement while the central political line remained to be class struggle through organized workers’ and peasants’ revolts.

⁴⁹ Liang Qichao, 饮冰室合集 (Collective Writings of Ice Drinking Hall) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989).

⁵⁰ Shen Zemin was perhaps the early Chinese communist that most extensively discussed Engels’ essay. He amplified Engels’ critique on family and marriage in the bourgeois society and claimed it analogous to prostitution. *Funu pinglun* 妇女评论 (Women’s Review), no.26, Feb. 1922.

⁵¹ Christina Gilmartin, “Gender, Politics and patriarchy in China”, in *Promissary Notes*, 82-105.

When Ding Ling joined the CCP in 1931, she was already a famous left-wing feminist writer through publication of *Miss Sophia's Diary*. Her education background (from a communist girls' school) as well as her network with major left-wing male writers quickly landed her at the leadership role for cultural affairs of the CCP. She was appointed chief editor of *Beidou*, the organ of the League of the Left-Wing Writers in 1931 and was in leadership of the League along with the actual leader Lu Xun. She was well known for her ardent support of the Party and Mao through active contribution to the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. Despite her sincerity with socialism, Ding Ling, like Lily Braun, walked precariously at the margin of the Party's political core. Her continuous attempts in advancing women's interests in the socialist regime almost brought her in prison after the publication of a short essay "三八节有感 (Thoughts on March Eighth)", in which she criticized the conservative social climate against women in Yan'an. Neither her commitment to the socialist cause nor the leadership in the Party's cultural sector protected her from being down-cast as a rightist during the Cultural Revolution.

The ups and downs of Ding Ling's relation with the Party is a result of, precisely like in the case of Braun, contradictions between the party's core political interests and those of women's emancipation. Also like Braun, she was fascinated with a healthy image of the proletarian woman that can humanize the dry political struggle and guide the revolution, however abstract that image is. Her transition from dedicated feminist to a socialist woman is best marked by the sequel story she wrote about the bourgeois woman character Sophia. In "Sequel to Miss Sophia's Diary", the sickly and self-indulgent Sophia does not fall into "squandering her life in an unknown place", but returns as an active and hopeful fighter against suppression - just like a female revolutionary.⁵² The transition was blatantly laid out in the novella *Shanghai, Spring 1930*. This two-part novella puts forth a contrast between a bourgeois femme fatale who is actively seeking to be enlightened by "lively proletarian forces", and a retrogressive and materialistic bourgeois woman who refuses to be enlightened.⁵³ Ding Ling's writings in this transitional phase are often scorned by literary critiques either as being elementary in narrative technique or as self-censoring her feminist voice to flatter Maoist discourse. Li Tuo has, however, cautioned us of the danger of reducing the way of thinking about complex writers like Ding Ling to a binary model of "suppression

⁵² The story depicts a renewed Sophia who leaves behind the apartment, and "一步步走向光明了, 走向我所希望过的生活中去了: walks towards a bright future step by step, towards the life I hope to live" (My translation). She no longer indulges in her fancy whims and subjects herself to her unpredictable desire; she decides to fight back the boundaries society sets on her: "我要抗争, 人生只有一次, 没有轰轰烈烈的一生, 至少不能让自己活的有遗憾: I will fight, since there is only one life. If I have no vigorous life, I should at least not live with regrets" (My translation).

⁵³ The novella, in its first part, recounts a Shanghai femme fatale, Meilin, who is trapped in a depressing marriage with a bourgeois writer eight years in her senior. The text stresses Meilin's beautiful body, which she is obsessed with, as well as the fetishistic bourgeois lifestyle she and her husband are living. When gradually becoming disgusted with the shallow bourgeois life as well as Zibin's moody personality, she joins the workers' association with her friend's help and devotes herself to the proletarian revolution. Contrasting to her egoistic obsession with her beauty and materialistic life, the women workers are depicted as wearing plain coats but highly attractive; compared to Zibin's palely "beautiful" and sentimental language, the simple language of the worker strikes Meilin as penetrating, critical, and highly convincing. It is the vital force of the simple workers that revives and excites Meilin's heart, which has long been depressed in her gloomy home. The second part of the novella, which is exactly the opposite in narrative, tells of a bourgeois woman, Mary, equally indulged in material life, fails to be converted by her revolutionary boyfriend, Wangwei. The novella ends with a dramatic scene: Wangwei is beaten up when leading the proletarian protest in the streets and shouting the slogans while Mary, the "charming lady", is seen walking out of a department store accompanied by a handsome young man. The scene leaves a lasting contrastive visual impression of a beautiful egoistic and materialistic lady against the passionate and selfless proletarian mass.

and resistance” “individual and the Party” “feminist and socialist”.⁵⁴ Her fervent embrace of the CCP is based upon not-losing her characters’ flesh and blood individuality to the socialist collectivism; her commitment to the revolutionary discourse is based upon rediscovering female subjectivity. Like Lily Braun, she disliked dogmatic political messages the Party prescribes to individuals but continuously searched for a natural way of connecting the unique femininity and the female body⁵⁵ to the proletariat revolution. In the words of Feng Xuefeng,⁵⁶ Ding Ling is good at “advancing ideas while altering them”. She resembles Lily Braun in her attempt to humanize/dynamize the revolution with femininity. Both explore the profound and sometimes contradictory relation between femininity, revolution, woman, man and the collective.

Breathing Life into Revolution – visions of a transcendental revolutionary woman

What distinguishes Ding Ling and Lily Braun from other socialists is the stance they take – the most important thing is not merely to succeed in the workers’ demonstrations, but to de-alienate social relations, especially that of women, and to humanize the revolution. In this sense, their thoughts are perhaps closer to the utopian communist views of Marx and Engels than the actual practitioners of the revolution, i.e. socialist party members. The humanization aspect of the revolution is precisely what Liu Jianmei’s etymological research has examined in regards to the word “革命 (*geming*, or revolution)” in the Chinese context. The word *geming* was first used in the Confucian classical text *The Book of Changes (Yijing)*, to mean “the dethronements of kings Xia and Shang by kings Tang and Wu” and was only later “incorporated into a diverse syntax of modern revolution”.⁵⁷ Modern revolutionist Sun Yat-sen adopted the meaning of a violent ousting, whereas late Qing reformist Liang Qichao expanded its use to mean “changes in all societal affairs”, including not only economic, political changes but also those in people’s minds and everyday lives.⁵⁸

Both Braun and Ding Ling adopt this latter meaning of revolution, i.e., revolution not in the sense of violent political change of ruling class and regime but one that derives from passion and commitment from individuals. Ding Ling’s typical woman protagonists, like Meilin in *Shanghai, Spring 1930*, fully converts to the cause of socialist revolution not because of political (class-) awareness, but because of the something from the proletarian women resonates with their inner minds and arouses their passion for revolutionary; Braun

⁵⁴ He notes Ding Ling’s accounts on her visit to University of Iowa: questions from American scholars focus on her great suffer in exile and its harm done to a talented writer like her; Ding Ling, however, disappointed them when she started to tell them how interesting it was to raise chicken in north China.) Li Tuo detects Ding Ling’s sincerity in believing in the power of the Maoist discourse, which demonstrates China’s alternative to the dominating western discourse of modernity.

⁵⁵ The depiction of the body plays a central role in the novella: bourgeois body of Meilin and Mary are depicted as pale, delicate; they are highly sexualized and often become the object of the male gaze, just like a delicate doll; while the proletariat woman’s body, on the contrary, is healthy and lively. The focus on the body downplays the surface political propaganda and looks into the substantial women’s transition to the proletariat revolution through the very real interiority and sexuality. As Tang Xiaobing rightly notes, this is a real question Ding Ling herself is facing during the process of her own conversion to Communism with a pregnant female body. Although Ding Ling’s works after this transitional piece are usually marked with obvious pro-communist message, (partly because of her strong personal inclination after her husband Hu Yepin was shot by the nationalists in 1931.) the exploration of the female interiority has always been an important question for Ding Ling, which is never submerged by the surface political message.

⁵⁶ Poet, Ding Ling’s lover.

⁵⁷ Liu Jianmei, *Revolution plus love: literary history, women's bodies, and thematic repetition in twentieth-century Chinese fiction* (Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press, c2003), 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

also envisions an ideal “female mind” that resonates organically with the ethos of the proletarian revolution in a way that true femininity and the emancipation of the oppressed workers mutually enhance each other. In their gradual challenge to the party principles, the abstract collective identity of the proletariat is substituted with local and specific personal passion – and this, they believe, could only come from women.

Two essays - “*Weiblichkeit*” (Femininity) and “*Das Geistige Leben des Weibes*” (The Female Mind) – best capture Braun’s vision of a true woman revolutionary. The essays, just like others by Braun, were written with literary tropes and descriptive sentences that read more like prose than political treatise. This is the reason why Braun was able to rise to become a successful orator within the SPD and why others find her manner more inclining towards educated bourgeoisie than the proletariat. In “*Weiblichkeit*” (Femininity), Braun tries to redefine what it means by femininity – a concept she accused of being distorted from ancient societies and further alienated in modern society:⁵⁹ for ancient Greeks and Romans, “slavishly servile women (die sklavisch dienende Frau)” who never left the female rooms of the house is a model for femininity; for the Christians, it referred to a highly suppressed model of “mute subordination, blind obedience, unresisting humility (stumme Unterordnung, blinder Gehorsam, widerstandlose Demuth)”.⁶⁰ In the capitalist society, femininity was deemed as almost lost to the increasing work hours outside the house by more and more women and thus aroused the fear of men about dis-integration of traditional society. Braun thus associated it with her current intellectual split between nostalgic call for the Christian “weepy sentimentality which gives alms to the poor (thränenfällige Sentimentalität, die dem Armen ein Almosen spendet)” and the radical call for “stubborn struggle against conditions that produce poverty (zähe Kampf gegen Zustände, die die Armuth hervorbringen)”.⁶¹ Braun was equally critical of her contemporary feminist movements like the new women for “shooting past the target (am Ziel vorbeischießen)” since they interpret freedom and independence as the renunciation of all and any kind of self-discipline (im vollkommenen Verzicht auf jede Art von Selbstzucht, Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit).

For Braun, to be feminine means to develop and effectively use woman’s best traits, be they internal and external. It is thus neither “to disregard their bodies”, –i.e., by selling their love through a bourgeois marriage - nor to give up motherly love in forced devotion to factory work, “nor to distort them into caricatures”, like the new women who emulate men. Braun had tried to tackle the essential contradiction between the socialist course and the woman question that Engels and Bebel remained unresolved. That is, the questions of whether employing women to work outside of the household is good and whether women should work in completely equal terms with men, and whether the traditional family structure should be abolished and how to preserve unique feminine qualities.

“The Female Mind” provides a more detailed vision for Braun’s ideal female revolutionary – at once feminine and active. In her pre-eighteenth century expoundation, women’s intellectual development was seen as suppressed by the Catholic Church, except the few exceptions like *Catarina Cornaro* in Venice, *Isotta Malatesta* in Rimini, *Emilia Pia* in Urbino, *Veronica Gambarra* in Bologna and, above all, Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara, daughter of a pope and a whore. On the latter she described: [H]er erotic feelings were passionate, as was her motherliness profound, and whoever traces the real source of her being, which roars and rushes past us like a mighty river, will discover that its source was the richness of her emotions.⁶² Here Braun’s difference with Zetkin is most apparent.

⁵⁹ Lily Braun, “*Weiblichkeit*”, *Die Zukunft* 41 (1902): 413-419.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 136.

⁶² Lily Braun, “The Female Mind”, in *Selected Writings on Feminism and Socialism*, translated and edited by Alfred G. Meyer, 147.

Her ideal woman could include prostitutes as long as the woman's inner and mental being fits the criteria; for Zetkin, the proletarian woman's cause should be fighting against class exploitation and not sex oppression, and hence the "proletariat" should not include housewives and sexual workers – the latter she had no sympathy whatsoever.⁶³

Roaming into the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Braun saw female rulers and salon ladies as the prototype of her feminine revolutionary: the intimate connection between the satisfaction of women's erotic needs and their individual intellectual development and creative potential.⁶⁴ She described salon life as both satisfying female erotic needs, and allowing women to exert heavy influence on domestic and foreign policies.⁶⁵ Hence, "the salon ladies of the *ancien regime* helped pave the way for the heroines of the revolution".⁶⁶ The short distance these salon ladies would have to travel to become true revolutionaries is the one last element of alienation of femininity: their "natural body" is suppressed and they were like "pretty toys next to a classical work of art". These great lovers celebrated love not as "the supreme driving force of life" but turned it into "a mere source of pleasure".⁶⁷ Furthermore, these women artificially repressed specifically feminine nature insofar as they despised motherhood and denied the child. Indeed, motherhood is where Braun locates women's deepest social instincts (perhaps more so than women's erotic needs) – "compassion and the courage to make self-sacrifice"⁶⁸ is deemed as the qualities that give rise to women's initiative motivation and devotion to the revolutionary cause. Braun foregrounds Rousseau to support her argument. In her view, it is Rousseau's redeeming words for the "tightly laced-up souls of women:" "Become a mother"! that unmercifully exposed the weakness of "woman's vital nerve".⁶⁹ Salon ladies, however intelligent, were "not independent" and "remain in the background"; it would be the Rousseauian women like Sophie de Grouchy who bravely marched at the centre of the French revolution, who could show courage and devotion to the revolution just like they did for their children. Hence the utopia Braun imagines with the ideal female mind: "all social life was replete with that electrifying aura [the feminine love] that envelops everyone who comes under its influence and stimulates all slumbering intellectual energies into vivid activity".⁷⁰

In her liberalization of Marxist political theory, Braun defines the proletarian woman's movement as "a struggle against the mode of work".⁷¹ "Its main principle is the adaptation of work conditions to the nature of women" and "the nature of human being in general", and "not the adaptation of women to given work conditions".⁷² Thus, the "condemnation of an economic system (*Verurteilung einer Wirtschaftsordnung*) and workers' revolt "is only one step" of the revolution. Braun's humanizing and de-ideologizing the revolution is precisely what Ding Ling does in her short essay "三八节有感 (Thoughts on March 8)".

The short essay was written for Women's day in 1942 to address women's issues in Yan'an, the red base of the CCP. The essay was written in a plain critical and suggestive tone as opposed to the romanticized language of Lily Braun. Her critique of Yan'an's social

⁶³ Meyer, 52.

⁶⁴ Braun, "The Female mind", in *Selected Writings*, 153.

⁶⁵ Braun quoted Montesquieu in regards to female influence on politics: whoever sees the ministers make decisions but does not know the women who dominate them is like someone who watches a machine at work but does not know the forces that move it. Braun, "The Female mind", in *Selected Writings*, 155.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁷² *Ibid.*

climate for hindering women's advancement almost brought her imprisonment.⁷³ In contrast to the mainstream of romantic socialist realism that aimed to serve the revolution, "Thoughts on March 8" was written intentionally in mundane tone dealing with trivial matters. She frankly laid out the gossip and insults facing the socialist women in Yan'an: they are scorned for lacking feminine beauty before marriage; they become the target of gossip forever if they remain unmarried to pursue a political career; they are subjected to rumors and slanderous gossip if they remain single; they will be doubted for political correctness if they get married; they are ironically labeled as Nora returning home if they rear their children after giving birth; they will have to secretly look for abortion pills if they are politically ambitious and will then be doubted in regards to their revolutionary commitment, as well as their own sense of responsibility. These are precisely what Lily Braun was most concerned about –forced alienation of proletarian women in all situations, except Ding Ling is not accusing religion or capitalism as the causes but Yan'an's social environ. Alienation of women takes place in two ways: those who no longer fight and stay home will become "hollow, feeble and in decay (空白, 枯萎, 疲软)"; those who abandon femininity for political pursuit are, as Braun sees it, overshooting the target. Braun calls for a re-integration of "true femininity" in to women's intellectual/political pursuits, so does Ding Ling.

Against the "大话 big talk/bragging" about "acquiring political power first (首先取得我们的政权)", Ding proposes her "small talk 小话" about four pieces of advice for Yan'an women: take care of your body; make yourself happy; use your mind; fear not hardships and insist till the end. These "small" pieces of advices about daily lives will eventually add up to Ding Ling's vision of an ideal for woman revolutionary: having an enjoyable life, without losing the forces to fight and progress (生活的战斗和进取); to be energetic and active, have a fulfilled life, be brave and hopeful for the future and live an enjoyable life. More importantly, such a woman will not waste her passion and life, and is modern and politically conscious, who actively seeks for happiness through "the struggle in the midst of the raging storm (暴风雨中的搏斗)".⁷⁴

The essay was written at the peak of the Yan'an Rectification Movement (1942-1944), where Mao famously declared the sole purpose of art to be serving politics. The essay was Ding Ling's meticulous revision of the revolutionary rhetoric of Yan'an and to challenge the abstract identity of the proletarian collective – the "big I"⁷⁵ - by incorporating femininity and individuality. It is through her "plain little hopes (小小的企望)" that Ding Ling tries to re-vitalize/rescue the "fallen" women and turn them into healthy cheerful revolutionaries with high beliefs. In this way, Ding Ling, like Braun, attempts to de-alienate femininity and human emotions from the hard-lined revolutionary ideology. Both carefully advanced their revision of the party line by channeling the abstract revolutionary ethos through lively personal interiority/emotion.

The specifics discussed in the essay are embodied by the female character of the novella "我在霞村的时候 When I was in Xia Village", written a year earlier in 1941 – a character that shared many qualities Braun put forth as the ideal female mind. In "Female Mind", Braun identified the real female models that lived up to her standards were Louise

⁷³ Another writer Wang Shiwei 王实味 at this time was not as lucky, since Mao blamed him for being a Trotskyite; his essay "野百合花 Wild Lily", which criticizes the abnormity of Yan'an life, is treated as anti-revolutionary.

⁷⁴ "Thoughts on March 8", available at <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/reference-books/yanan1942/2-02.htm> (accessed on 12/12/2018).

⁷⁵ For more discussion on collective vs. individual of Chinese revolutionary discourse, see Wang Ban, *The Sublime Figure of History: aesthetics and politics in twentieth-century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Germaine de Stael and George Sand, whom, like Braun herself, were “synthesis of writer, politician and agitator”.⁷⁶ She lauded Sand, the active promoter of the 1848 revolutionary ideas, with the following: “Storms of passions raged through their hearts and shook up their lives; their erotic energy seemed inexhaustible”.⁷⁷ She laid particular emphasis on the qualities she found in Mme. de Stael and George Sand:

not only love’s pains and love’s ecstasies but is destined, in accordance with the essence of femininity, to find the most stirring and moving tones also for the great suffering of all humanity.⁷⁸

This view harks back to Braun’s earlier idea: the emancipation of true femininity and the proletarian revolution are two sides of the same coin.

Just as women develop all their inner resources only as mothers for the sake of their child, so it is only as helpers to the poor and the disinherited that women have perfected those talents that today enable them to play leading roles in the great social clash of cultures that is shaking the world, taking the form of two parallel movements – that of women and that of the workers.⁷⁹

Käthe Kollwitz’s famous mother-son artwork would have naturally come to Braun’s mind:

[T]hat poor emaciated proletarian woman with an infant on her flabby breasts is more moving and more provocative in its effect than all mass oratory or pages for description of misery could ever be.⁸⁰

The value of woman for revolution becomes clear: a true female mind, with its profound passion and emotions and its universal caring, will *breathe life* into the dry revolutionary doctrines, producing ethos that reverberates profoundly with everyone and urges the proletarian revolution onwards. Zhenzhen is someone who does not talk much, and keeps her profound emotions and secrets deep inside. The scene that Zhenzhen was driven mad by her conservative fellow villagers was depicted to intentionally present her as a goddess of revenge, after small scenes that reveal her self-suppression of her identity and sacrifice:

[her] face was hidden in the disheveled long hair, with two wild eyes glaring out at the people gathered there. ... Her appearance had changed entirely with nothing compares to her liveliness and bright pleasantness I had found before. She was like a cornered animal. She was like a goddess of revenge.⁸¹

It was Ding Ling’s vision that the rolling interiority of Zhenzhen be merged onto an abstract utopia of revolution in Yan’an, where Zhenzhen joins the Party and immerses herself to new learnings with peers in the place of collective progression and transcending above

⁷⁶ Braun, “The female mind”, in *Selected Writings*, 172.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸¹ Ding Ling, *The Complete Work of Ding Ling* 丁玲全集, edited by Zhang Jiaong ect. (Shi Jiazhuang: He Bei People’s Publishing House, 2001), 311.

mundane trivial. Transcending life's entanglements and conservative ethical judgments is what Ding Ling wants to achieve through critique of social environment in "Thoughts on March 8", and such transcendence of the revolution comes from the passionate, brave and independent women like Zhenzhen. Ding Ling's feminization of the revolution could not be better characterized than in Braun's words: "the penetration of the spirit of motherliness into hitherto purely masculine culture"⁸² and "the breathing of life into the dead material (dem toten Stoff eigenes Leben einzuhauchen)".⁸³ The result is a highly affective socialist revolution, not based on the vague collective, but on the innumerable committed individuals.

In conclusion, against the increasing male predominance in socialist parties in Germany and China, and against the short-sighted revolutionary practice for immediate economic or political victory, women socialists like Lily Braun and Ding Ling carefully pushed outward the parties' boundary via the 'woman's question'. Their push forward in small steps only underscores their minds that 'think big': the vision of a true revolutionary woman seeks ultimately to transcend the early revolts, and transform them into a humanizing revolution. Across time and space, the two woman socialists reach the same hope of feminizing and humanizing the earthly revolution – a view that perhaps puts them closer to true Marxist Communism than many claimed heirs of Marxism were actually able to achieve.

⁸² Braun, "The female mind", in *Selected Writings*, 159.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 179.

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