

A Reexamination of the Specialized Path Theory of Women's Liberation—A Review and Reconstruction Based on Historical Materialism

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Abstract. Contemporary feminist theory takes *patriarchy* as its core concept, constructing gender as an axis of oppression independent of class, from which it derives the political strategy of a cross-class feminist alliance. Based on historical materialism, this paper traces the evolution of the concept of *patriarchy* from Engels to contemporary feminism, and points out that the specialization of women's liberation from the overall process of social liberation is a fundamental theoretical error, which violates historical materialism and dialectics, and confuses the principal contradiction with the secondary contradictions. The root cause of women's oppression lies in private ownership and class division, and the concept of private ownership, as a remnant of private ownership, persists in the form of *bourgeois rights* under socialist conditions. The correct path to eliminate the remnants of gender oppression is not an anti-patriarchy movement independent of the whole of social liberation, but to integrate it into the overall practice of restricting bourgeois rights and preventing the restoration of capitalism. Taking the historical experience of China's socialist revolution as a case, this paper demonstrates the decisive role of the simultaneous advancement of ownership revolution and ideological revolution in disintegrating patriarchy, and thus responds to the challenges of feminist theory to Marxism. Therefore, this paper proposes that to resolve the dilemma of contemporary gender politics, it is necessary to take historical materialism as the methodological cornerstone, and critically absorb the micro-insights of feminism into gender experience on the premise of adhering to class analysis. The essence of women's liberation is an organic part of social liberation. Only by embedding the demand for gender equality into the revolutionary practice of abolishing private ownership and reconstructing social relations of production can we transcend the myth of identity politics and achieve the all-round liberation of human beings in the deepening development of socialism.

Keywords: historical materialism, patriarchy, bourgeois rights, women's liberation, class analysis

1. Introduction

In recent years, a striking phenomenon has emerged in China's internet space: feminism has provoked widespread social backlash. From the Zhang Wei incident at Sichuan University in 2023, to the Yang Jingyuan incident at Wuhan University, and then to classroom critiques of feminism based on historical materialism by students at Hangzhou Normal University, these phenomena reflect a deep-seated problem: as a social trend of thought, feminism is facing extensive doubts over its theoretical legitimacy and practical effects.

Judging from the objective effects of social practice, the proliferation of some radical feminist discourses in contemporary China has triggered two ideological reversals worthy of vigilance:

First, it has provided reverse impetus for the resurgence of feudal patriarchal ideology. When gender contradiction is abstracted and absolutized as the principal social contradiction, some male workers who are also in a vulnerable position in the class structure develop a strong sense of identity dislocation and relative deprivation, for they are one-sidedly labeled as "oppressors" in gender narratives. Without effective guidance from class-analytical discourse, such frustration can easily drive them to seek psychological compensation and theoretical justification from historically sublated feudal ethics (such as "male superiority and female inferiority"), thus objectively creating a "reactionary resonance" between residual feudal ideas and radical gender discourses.

Second, it has blurred class contradictions and induced ideological right-leaning among grassroots groups. Faced with gender discrimination in the labor market, abstract feminism attributes its root to a transhistorical "patriarchy". This analytical framework obscures the fundamental cause, namely the profit-seeking nature of capital. As a result, it not only fails to challenge the logic of capital, but also creates an illusion of "gender game" within the proletariat. Some workers thereby abandon their critique of the structural oppression of capital, and even subconsciously identify with capital's cost-accounting logic, weakening the internal unity of the proletariat.

These two trends show that the spread of feminist discourse in China has objectively not promoted women's liberation, but created new forms of oppression and division. This is not a "mistake" in practice, but an inevitable outcome of its flawed theoretical foundation.

Some scholars argue that this is a distortion that occurred when Western feminist theory was introduced into China [1, 2]. It must be pointed out that this is not the result of certain people misusing feminism; rather, feminism has been built on an erroneous theoretical foundation from its very inception. The error does not lie in its concern for women's situation — women's issues certainly deserve attention — but in its separation of "women's liberation" from the overall process of social liberation, endowing it with independent theoretical ontological status and political subjectivity. It is this specialized theoretical error that has sown the seeds for all its subsequent theoretical dilemmas and practical deviations.

Examining the theoretical basis of feminism from a Marxist perspective is not only an academic task, but also a necessity to respond to real-world ideological challenges. At a time when slogans such as "girls help girls" have garnered hundreds of millions of views online and gender antagonism has become a sharp blade tearing apart social consensus, returning to historical materialism to clarify the correct path of women's liberation is no longer a conceptual game in the study, but a practical mission concerning ideological struggle.

2. The development of early feminism and its Marxist turn

Feminism emerged during the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. In 1791, the French feminist Olympe de Gouges published *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, marking the advent of a complete feminist ideology. The following year, the British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft released *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, demanding education, employment, and voting rights for women, which further promoted the spread of feminism among the upper classes (for instance, in aristocratic salons) [3].

Although early feminism shared many political demands with later forms, the latter was far more distinctly influenced by Marxism, especially Western Marxism (hereinafter referred to as "Western Marxism"). When investigating the roots of women's oppression, later feminism departed from the intuitive moral perception of the Enlightenment adopted by early feminists, and systematically drew on class theory, alienation theory, economic theory, labor theory, and the theory of human essence [4]. This is directly reflected in the view that women's oppression is a systemic oppression rooted in social structure (patriarchy and the capitalist system), and that women themselves are structurally shaped. For example, in 1949, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* elaborated on the argument that "woman is the constructed Other" [5]; in 1963, Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* explained how patriarchy disciplines women's social roles [6]. These works traced the source of oppression directly to social structures and cultural systems, and their theoretical frameworks clearly bear the imprint of the developmental path of Western Marxism or Marxist structuralism. While these theories deepened the understanding of the cultural dimension of gender oppression, their limitation lies in regarding the cultural symbolic system as an autonomous sphere independent of material production, thus suspending the decisive role of the economic structure in gender relations. Although this theoretical orientation expanded the critical perspective, it ultimately weakened the revolutionary dimension of class analysis by failing to examine cultural mechanisms within the overall historical process of the capitalist mode of production.

Later, with the rise of new socialist social movements in Western Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement—especially the Black feminist movement—as one of its branches grew and expanded. The theoretical reflection of this development was the rise of Black feminism across various fields. This theoretical system emphasizes that the living conditions of Black women are shaped by multiple mechanisms of oppression, including racism, sexism, economic exploitation, and social marginalization. A major area of focus was textual and literary criticism. The anthology *Black Women*, edited by Bambara, officially launched the movement, and a wave of re-interpretations of earlier texts depicting the situation of Black women (such as *Ain't I a Woman?*) emerged in literary criticism, examining how Black women suffered from multiple forms of oppression. Coincidentally, during this period, structuralist methods of analysis gained popularity among the second generation of the New Left, who emphasized that "texts such as newspapers contain deep structures of meaning revealed through style, rhetoric, form, and language" [7]. Black feminism itself was also heavily influenced by Western Marxism, drawing on Bernstein's "code", Bourdieu's *Distinction*, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, and other works. Furthermore, as left-wing movements declined in the 1980s, Western Marxism as a whole underwent a Gramscian turn, a shift that was directly reflected in feminist theory. For example, Butler (1990) put forward the idea that "gender is a performative construction of discourse" in *Gender Trouble* [8], and Greer further criticized how culture cultivates women's sense of inferiority in *The Female Eunuch* [9]. These ideas bear a strong resemblance to Gramsci's argument that "language is an expression of power" and his theory of cultural hegemony [10].

Although this theoretical school often refers to itself as "Marxist feminism", its theoretical core has deviated from the basic principles of historical materialism and moved toward dualism and even idealist revisionism. Its fundamental fallacy is the reversal of the dialectical relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, and between fundamental contradictions and secondary contradictions. Gender oppression is no longer regarded as a historical product of private ownership and class division; instead, patriarchy is constructed as a transhistorical structure of oppression that coexists with capitalism, or is even more fundamental. This theoretical Copernican reversal demoted class analysis from a decisive position to merely one axis of oppression among many, thereby fundamentally hollowing out the revolutionary core of the women's liberation movement.

3. The position of the woman question in classical Marxism: embedded in the whole, never independent

To judge whether the theoretical foundation of feminism is correct, we must first examine how the woman question was treated by the classical authors of Marxism.

Engels presented the most systematic account in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Drawing on Morgan's anthropological materials, he outlined the historical evolution from matrilineal society to the patriarchal family and then to the monogamous family. The key point is not whether this anthropological schema is accurate in detail—anthropological research after the 20th century has indeed proposed many revisions to Morgan's unilinear evolutionism—but the methodological principle by which Engels approached the woman question: he strictly embedded changes in women's status within the entire historical narrative of the emergence of private property, the division of classes, and the formation of the state.

In Engels' account, women's shift from equality to oppression was not the result of "men" as a unified subject actively imposing domination, but a product of transformations in the mode of production and property relations. "The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage" [11]. The emphasis of this sentence lies in "coincides with", indicating that gender oppression is a concomitant phenomenon of class oppression, not an independent historical process.

Based precisely on this methodological principle, Engels never treated "anti-patriarchy" as an independent political goal. Within his theoretical framework, the path to women's liberation is clear: the abolition of private property and the reintegration of women into social productive labor, thereby dismantling the material basis of economic dependence within the patriarchal family. It is thus evident that women's liberation is subordinate to the overall emancipation of society, not a specialized agenda to be advanced through independent theories and independent movements. This methodological principle received a sharper political formulation in the work of Rosa Luxemburg. In *Women's Suffrage and the Class Struggle*, Luxemburg stated unequivocally that cross-class "sisterhood" does not exist: "Bourgeois women... are parasites among the parasites of the social body." She further argued that bourgeois feminists' struggle for women's suffrage merely sought a share of power within the existing system, whereas proletarian women could only follow the path of working-class struggle, "winning every step of real power in the opposite direction" [12].

Luxemburg here accomplished a crucial theoretical cleavage: not all claims concerning women's rights are worthy of affirmation; only work on women's issues integrated into the overall practice of proletarian class struggle is correct. The significance of this cleavage lies in the fact that it blocked the most dangerous deviation within the ambiguous concept of "Marxist feminism"—the illusion that gender analysis could be placed on an equal footing with class analysis, that women could form

political alliances across class boundaries, and that women's liberation could be achieved through rights-based struggles within the capitalist framework.

Of course, the above classical statements were formed under specific historical conditions, and the concrete forms of women's situation have changed considerably today. The core issue is not whether the specific judgments of the classical authors can still be directly applied, but whether the methodological principles they established remain valid. That principle is: the woman question cannot be specialized; it must always be analyzed and resolved within the overall framework of social emancipation.

4. The detour of specialization: how "patriarchy" was constructed as an independent core of oppression

The term "patriarchy" is a loanword translated from the West, traceable earliest to Locke's "paternal power", a political metaphor critical of the divine right of kings [13]. Its translation as "父权制" (fùquánzhì) or "父权" (fùquán) was itself influenced by traditional Chinese feudal Confucian cultural concepts such as "君主如父" (the ruler as father). In contemporary internet discourse and feminist theory, "patriarchy" derives from the term "patriarchal family" in Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (despite the influence of radical feminist discourse leading some leftists to argue it should be literally translated as "patriarchal family").

Engels used the concept "patriarchal family" to describe a family form tied to specific modes of production and property relations. However, in the theoretical journey from Engels to contemporary feminism, "patriarchal family" was quietly replaced by "patriarchy," transforming it from a historical concept constrained by the economic base into a transhistorical structural concept [11].

The pivotal text for this shift is Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970). Millett wrote: "Our society, like all other civilizations in history, is a patriarchal society... the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political institutions, finance—in short, every avenue to power—is entirely in the hands of men" [14]. Here, "patriarchy" is no longer a product of private property and class division, but an oppressive structure that permeates all civilizations and is independent of the mode of production. Men as a group rule women as another group, dividing the subject and object of oppression along gender lines, while the dimension of class is completely evacuated.

This represents a theoretical rupture, not an extension. Engels stated that "class oppression and gender oppression coincided," while Millett argued that "gender oppression is the template for all oppression." The former treats gender oppression as a secondary contradiction; the latter elevates it to the primary and even fundamental contradiction.

Once this substitution was complete, a complete discourse system unfolded automatically: patriarchy was endowed with an independent material basis—not private property, but "male domination over female labor power"; patriarchy was given an independent political expression—not class antagonism, but "sexual politics"; patriarchy was assigned an independent path to liberation—not the abolition of private property, but "changing institutions and power structures" [15].

Within this discourse, the critique of capitalism was not abandoned but repositioned: it became a subset of the critique of patriarchy. The "dual-system" theory represented by Chizuko Ueno attempts to treat "patriarchy" and "capitalism" as two independent yet intertwined systems of oppression. On the surface, this theoretical model achieves dual attention to class and gender; in reality, it falls into mechanical parallelism methodologically. It fails to recognize that, from the perspective of historical materialism, the capitalist mode of production is the "all-embracing light" that illuminates all forms of oppression in modern society, including gender oppression. The modern manifestations of

patriarchy are precisely reshaped and utilized by capitalist relations of production. Placing the two side by side not only blurs the primary contradiction theoretically but also leads to a reformist detour in political practice—attempting to "tame" patriarchy and capitalism separately through cultural critique and institutional tinkering without fundamentally challenging capitalist private property, which is tantamount to fishing for the moon in the water. Subsequent theoretical developments—whether Butler's theory of gender performativity or Crenshaw's intersectionality theory—did not correct this error but merely added complexity along its trajectory. Intersectionality theory appears to account for factors such as class and race, but it treats class merely as "one among many axes of oppression" rather than the ultimate root of all oppression. In this way, the original error of "gender as an independent axis of oppression" is not only uncorrected but packaged more elaborately.

This theoretical analysis does not negate all feminist movements outright, nor does it claim that feminism has only negative effects. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx once satirized that feudalists, at specific times (such as opposing the bourgeoisie), could also stand from the perspective of the proletariat to express criticism of capitalism and sympathy for laborers, showing "progressiveness," yet "when they turn around, the feudal tail faces the proletariat" [16]. Similarly, despite their many flaws, these feminists can also be progressive under specific historical stages and conditions.

This is essentially a question of "minor benevolent governance versus major benevolent governance" [17]. Women's liberation is not simply subordinate to class liberation; rather, it is the concrete manifestation of the universal contradiction of class liberation in the gender sphere. It belongs to the general problem of class liberation but possesses a specificity that cannot be simply reduced. As Mao Zedong pointed out in *On Contradiction*: "The universality of contradiction resides in the particularity of contradiction" [18]. Universality (class contradiction) is not an abstraction hovering above or outside particularity (gender oppression), but is precisely manifested and realized through particularity. Therefore, studying women's issues precisely means revealing and resolving the class contradiction that runs through the specific sphere of "gender."

5. The inevitable endpoint: from "specialization" to "girls help girls"

An erroneous theoretical foundation inevitably leads to an erroneous practical logic. Starting from the premise that "patriarchy is an independent structure of oppression," the conclusion of a cross-class female alliance in the form of "girls help girls" follows logically by necessity. The reasoning proceeds as follows:

First, if patriarchy is an independent structure of oppression running through all civilizations, then all women—regardless of class, race, or nationality—are oppressed within this structure.

Second, if all women are oppressed, then all women share a common interest in resisting oppression.

Third, given this common interest, a cross-class political alliance of women is reasonable, even necessary.

Fourth, the slogan offers the most straightforward expression of this political logic: "girls help girls." One need not ask whether a girl is a worker or a capitalist, only that she is a woman.

The absurdity of this logic in a class society is self-evident. On what material basis can "sisterhood" exist between a female capitalist who owns a factory employing hundreds of women workers, and the women laborers working twelve hours a day in that factory? When the women workers go on strike for higher wages, will the female capitalist side with her "sisters" at the cost of her own profits, or will she prioritize profit and hire scabs to break the strike? Rosa Luxemburg provided the answer more than a century ago: bourgeois women will not only fail to help proletarian

women but will even be "more reactionary" than bourgeois men, because they take no part in social production and are "parasites among parasites" [12].

To be sure, contemporary feminism has not ignored the challenge posed by class differences. The rise of intersectionality theory was largely a response to the criticism of whether "middle-class white women represent all women." Yet the way intersectionality theory attempts to remedy this is by "adding more axes of oppression"—gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, and so on—rather than re-establishing class as the fundamental axis. The result is that differences among women are acknowledged, yet the possibility of a cross-class female alliance is still preserved. It merely shifts from "all girls help all girls" to "girls in similar situations help girls in similar situations"—the logical structure remains entirely unchanged.

So long as the fundamental premise that "gender is an independent axis of oppression" goes unchallenged, the logic of "girls help girls" will never be truly abandoned. It will only reappear in different guises across various versions of feminist theory, for it is not an accidental deviation in theoretical deduction, but a logical necessity of the entire theoretical system.

6. The logic of dependency: why women's liberation can only be achieved within social emancipation

If the fundamental error of feminist theory is its "specialization" of women's liberation, then the correct approach is to reintegrate women's liberation into the overall process of social emancipation. To put it more directly: women's liberation is dependent on social emancipation.

This proposition is not a dismissal of women's issues, but an inevitable conclusion drawn from the basic principles of historical materialism. Historical materialism holds that the basic structure of society is determined by the material mode of production and the relations of production formed around it. Class division is a direct product of private ownership and constitutes the fundamental social antagonism running through the history of civilization. The forms of gender oppression have changed over history—from relative equality in matriarchal clan societies, to the domination of clan and husbandly authority under feudal patriarchal systems, to the "modern family" in capitalist society that confines women to domestic consumption units. Yet the driving force behind these changes is not the will of "men" as a unified subject, but transformations in the mode of production and property relations. Gender oppression has no history independent of class oppression, and therefore has no path to resolution separate from class oppression.

This means that if the struggle against gender oppression is stripped of its class content, it reduces to an empty framework of gender opposition. Within this framework, both "men" and "women" become abstract subjects transcending class: female capitalists are "oppressed," while male workers are "oppressors." Such inversion is not an accidental rhetorical mistake, but the inevitable logical outcome of constructing gender as an independent axis of oppression.

Genuine women's liberation can only be achieved in the process of abolishing private ownership and eliminating classes. Only under public ownership can women generally return to social productive labor and thereby attain an independent economic position. Only after classes are eliminated will the ideology of gender oppression, which has clung to the body of class society for thousands of years, lose the soil for its reproduction. The subject of revolutionary practice is determined by class position, not by gender—this is the most fundamental and unshakable principle of Marxism.

An intuitive example is the conflict over bride price in the marriage market. As an important part of traditional Chinese marriage customs, the bride price carries the significance of family bonding and cultural recognition [19]: the groom's family pays the bride price and gains a "natural person" as

a wife and future heirs to the family estate. However, with the development of the market economy and shifts in gender attitudes, the problem of exorbitant bride prices has become increasingly prominent. Studies have shown that exorbitant bride prices arise through diverse pathways, among which deficit-driven high bride prices place particular hardship on grassroots men and bring multiple risks and challenges to families and society [20].

Yet the root of these risks and challenges is not the high price itself, but that men pay a market-driven high bride price without receiving the "security" implied in the traditional contract:

The wife is entitled to half the property upon divorce (a legitimate right); In judicial practice, the bride price is often defined as a "gift conditional on marriage"; once registration and cohabitation are completed, full restitution is rarely granted; [21] Wages earned during marriage are community property, yet in some families the husband hands over all his income while the wife squanders or transfers it, making evidence collection and recovery extremely difficult in divorce proceedings; In many cases, the biological paternity of children is even in doubt.

The generalization of bride-price disputes and marital calculation is essentially the full colonization of humanity's most intimate sphere—family and emotion—by the logic of capitalist commodity exchange. Under private ownership, marriage has long possessed the character of an economic contract. The various disorders in the contemporary marriage market represent the extreme alienation of this character in the era of consumerism. When the reproduction of labor power is fully atomized as the responsibility of the family or the individual, and social relations are reduced to cold cost-benefit calculations, marriage degenerates from an ethical community into a high-risk arena of interest competition. Neither demanding exorbitant bride prices nor calculating property meticulously in divorce is the "original sin" of one gender; rather, they are rational self-protective acts by atomized individuals under private ownership, responding to systemic existential anxiety. This predicament, in which everyone is a stranger to one another, precisely confirms Marx's thesis that capitalism has torn away the sentimental veil shrouding family relations and transformed human dignity into exchange value.

Furthermore, extreme cases have appeared on platforms such as Xiaohongshu, in which individuals "target soldiers approaching retirement, marry them, divorce, and claim their military severance pay along with keeping the bride price," or even specialize in "debt trapping." These are no longer simple "bride-price disputes," but premeditated property exploitation using marriage as a tool. Such cases share three common features:

Precise targeting: focusing on groups like soldiers with clear large severance packages, exploiting institutional loopholes such as the protection period for military marriages for reverse gains;

Professional tactics: equipped with tutorials, scripts, and legal evasion strategies, forming a kind of gray industrial chain;

Complete moral emptiness: marriage is thoroughly instrumentalized, devoid of any emotional or ethical meaning.

This is precisely the extreme expression of atomized individuals under the capitalist system. When social relations are fully commodified and "every person for themselves" becomes the sole creed, even the last "sentimental veil" of marriage is mercilessly torn apart. Although such extreme cases are rare, they act as a magnifying glass, revealing the pathological logic underlying the entire marriage market. When young people generally view marriage as a high-stakes gamble, "staying single and childless for safety" is no longer mere emotional venting, but a rational act of risk avoidance. The continuous decline in marriage rates and the collapse of fertility rates are directly linked to perceptions of this systemic risk.

Can these phenomena be explained by the concept of "patriarchy"? Obviously not. In the cases described above, the "oppressor" (if the term can be used at all) is female, and the "oppressed" is male. Applying the feminist framework of "male domination over women" leads to completely contradictory conclusions. Nor can one therefore claim this is "women oppressing men," because those carrying out such schemes may themselves be grassroots women driven to desperation by class hardships such as sky-high housing prices, low incomes, and inadequate social security. They engage in desperate "self-help" by exploiting another grassroots man equally trapped by circumstances.

The only framework capable of coherently explaining these phenomena is not gender analysis, but Marx's thesis that under capitalism all social relations tend toward commodification. Engels described similar phenomena in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*: men and women of the proletariat, trapped in extreme poverty, saw marriage degenerate into prostitution and transaction, sex separated from emotion, and the family become a naked money relationship. The various disorders surrounding bride prices today are merely a repetition of this age-old story in contemporary China, now compounded by new variables: the gender imbalance left by the one-child policy, marriage gradient compression caused by the household registration system (which pushes rural men to the bottom), and the real estate market devouring family savings.

7. Verification by historical experience: the practice of China's first thirty years of revolution

Theoretical "oughts" require the support of historical experience. The first thirty years of China's socialist revolution provided powerful practical verification for the proposition that "women's liberation is dependent on social emancipation."

The patriarchal clan structure of traditional China was not merely a cultural idea; it was built on specific material relations: private ownership of land, family-based agricultural production, clan-based local governance, and systems of property inheritance. Patriarchal authority, husbandly authority, and clan authority were tightly embedded in these material relations [22, 23]. This means that merely criticizing the idea of "male superiority and female inferiority" without touching these material foundations could never fundamentally dismantle patriarchy.

The path of the Chinese revolution was fundamentally different.

Land Reform: It deprived the landlord class of land and eliminated the economic basis for clan elders to control clan lands and public property, emptying the clan of its function as an economic entity. Mao Zedong (1927) explicitly listed "overthrowing the clan authority of ancestral hall elders" as the seventh major task of the peasant movement in *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, linking it closely to overthrowing landlord power—not treating anti-clan authority as an independent goal, but embedding it in the overall practice of social emancipation through land revolution [24].

Cooperation and Collectivization: The unit of production shifted from the family to the production team. Women earned work points through collective labor, gaining an independent source of income and no longer being completely dependent on their husbands' or fathers' earnings. This was the concrete realization in Chinese conditions of Engels' dictum that "women participate in social productive labor." Statistics show that by 1956, 120 million rural women nationwide were participating in collective production labor—not as the outcome of an "anti-patriarchal movement," but as a natural product of the ownership transformation of agricultural cooperation.

Ideological and Political Movements and the Cultural Revolution: On the basis of ownership transformation, feudal patriarchal ideologies such as "clan authority, husbandly authority, and divine authority" were systematically criticized. The liquidation of the "Three Cardinal Guides and Five

Constant Virtues" during the Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius movement was not an independent "gender consciousness awakening movement," but an organic component of class struggle in the ideological sphere under the dictatorship of the proletariat [25, 26].

These three transformations followed a single logic: ownership revolution destroyed the material basis of patriarchy, ideological revolution cleared away the ideological remnants of patriarchy, and the two advanced simultaneously and inseparably.

A powerful counterevidence to this logic is that Europe took over a hundred years to transition from a traditional clan society to a modern atomized society. This transition was passively and slowly driven by capitalist development—the Industrial Revolution stripped individuals from clans, and urbanization broke extended families into nuclear ones. China, however, completed structural destruction in the first thirty years and morphological transformation in the twenty years after Reform and Opening. Why could China cover in twenty years what Europe took a hundred years to walk? The answer is simple: the revolution of the first thirty years had already destroyed the foundation of the old structure.

Without land reform eliminating clan lands and public property, without cooperation shifting the production unit from family to collective, without the Cultural Revolution liquidating clan ethics—without these simultaneous advances in ownership revolution and ideological revolution—traditional clan forces could easily have revived in new forms under the market economy. Indeed, such a revival has occurred to varying degrees in some regions with deep clan cultural roots. This precisely illustrates that the survival or demise of clan-patriarchal relations does not depend on an independent "anti-patriarchal" movement, but on the ebb and flow of the ownership base and ideological struggle.

8. Theoretical dilemma in the socialist period: why residues persist

Critics may ask: If the Chinese revolution had already destroyed the material basis of patriarchy, why do residues of gender oppression remain perceptible today?

This question must be answered; otherwise, the proposition that "women's liberation is dependent on social emancipation" remains incomplete. The theoretical tools to answer it are precisely Mao Zedong's exposition on restricting bourgeois rights and the Communist Manifesto's argument that "the state will not immediately wither away."

In his directives on theoretical issues during his later years, Mao Zedong pointed out: Bourgeois legal rights still exist in socialist society. Distribution according to work is equal in form (since labor is used as the standard for all), but unequal in substance (due to differences in workers' abilities and family responsibilities). As long as commodity production persists, and as long as the three major disparities—between workers and peasants, between urban and rural areas, and between mental and physical labor—remain, bourgeois legal rights will have a basis for existence [27].

In the primary stage of socialism, the persistence of gender inequality residues is not due to an independent "patriarchal" structure at work, but should be understood as a concrete manifestation of bourgeois rights in the gender dimension.

First, the formal equality of the principle of distribution according to work masks factual inequality. This principle presupposes workers as abstract individuals free from the burdens of reproduction and housework. Yet women, due to physiological characteristics and traditional social division of labor, objectively bear more reproductive and domestic labor. When this labor remains unsocialized and exists as private labor, women are structurally disadvantaged in participating in social labor distribution. This factual inequality solidified by "equal" rights is a classic feature of bourgeois rights.

Second, the family's function as a consumption unit and private sphere of reproduction persists. As long as housework and child-rearing have not been fully transformed into public social undertakings, gender-based domestic division of labor retains its material basis, making it difficult to eradicate the traditional concept of "men working outside, women inside."

Therefore, the correct path to eliminate these residues is by no means retreating to an abstract "anti-patriarchal" cultural movement. Instead, the struggle for gender equality must be integrated into the grand historical process of restricting bourgeois rights, advancing the socialization of housework, and ultimately transitioning to "distribution according to need." This is not only the fundamental way out for women's liberation but also the core content of the "second half" of the socialist revolution—the transformation of social relations and human consciousness—that must be written after the completion of the "first half" (ownership reform).

The *Communist Manifesto* points out that the state will not wither away immediately, and that the proletariat must seize the state apparatus and use it to transform society [16]. In his later years, Mao Zedong further pointed out that under the dictatorship of the proletariat, class struggle still exists, and there is a danger of capitalist restoration [28]. Combining these two points leads to a clear conclusion: during the socialist stage, the continued existence of residual gender oppression is not evidence of "patriarchy existing independently," but rather a sign that the revolution remains unfinished, classes have not yet been completely abolished, and bourgeois legal rights have not yet been thoroughly restricted. The only way to thoroughly eliminate these residuals is to carry the socialist revolution through to the end, rather than shifting to a specialized "anti-patriarchy" agenda.

9. Conclusion: returning to the holistic nature of social emancipation

The arguments of this paper can be summarized into the following logical layers:

First, classical Marxist theorists methodologically embedded the woman question strictly into the overall framework of social emancipation, and never endowed it with the status of an independent political agenda. This methodological principle is an inevitable requirement of historical materialism, rather than a secondary conclusion that can be arbitrarily revised with the changes of times.

Second, the fundamental error of feminist theory lies not in its specific descriptions of women's living conditions (which contain partial objective facts), but in its construction of "patriarchy" as a class-independent axis of social oppression. This theoretical specialization fundamentally negates class analysis and abstracts "men" and "women" into opposing supra-class subjects.

Third, the cross-class female solidarity represented by the slogan "girls help girls" is a logically inevitable outcome derived from this erroneous theoretical foundation. It is not an accidental practical deviation of feminism, but the inherent logical endpoint of its entire theoretical system.

Fourth, the correct path of women's liberation is subordinate to the overall process of social emancipation. In China's socialist revolution, the ownership revolution destroyed the material foundation of patriarchy, and the ideological revolution eliminated its ideological remnants, with the two advancing synchronously and interactively.

Fifth, in the socialist stage, residual gender oppression persists in the form of bourgeois rights. The elimination of these residues relies not on independent anti-patriarchal movements, but on integrating gender equality struggles into the overall practice of restricting bourgeois rights and preventing capitalist restoration.

This is not a theoretically comforting conclusion. From the Marxist perspective, the prevalent contemporary feminism that takes gender as the basic unit of analysis and political mobilization is not an ally to be guided and united, but a wrong theoretical line that requires fundamental correction.

The gender antagonism it triggers is not a practical mistake, but an inevitable result of its flawed theoretical foundation.

Returning to the online social phenomena mentioned at the beginning of this paper: why has feminism triggered extensive social aversion in China in recent years? Public perception is not always accurate, but the widespread public aversion reflects a real social contradiction. When a theory divides society by gender while eliminating class perspective, replaces private ownership with patriarchy, and dissolves class solidarity with cross-class female alliance, it inevitably leads to social division and mutual hostility, rather than realizing genuine women's liberation.

The fundamental way out for women's liberation is not to define women as an independent political subject through theoretical specialization, but to thoroughly reintegrate women's liberation into the overall practice of social emancipation. As Engels pointed out more than a century ago, with the arrival of a new social society organized on the basis of free and equal associations of producers, all remnants of class society including gender oppression will be relegated to historical relics, displayed alongside spinning wheels and bronze axes in museums.

Author contribution

All authors are listed in sequence of contribution. The preliminary research framework was proposed through discussions between the second and third authors, and further revised and finalized through joint consultations with the Spring and Autumn History Research Society of Xinchang High School represented by the fourth and fifth authors. All participants reached a preliminary consensus that Marxism inherently contains the theoretical connotation of women's liberation, while contemporary feminist movements inevitably lead to erroneous practices due to fundamental theoretical flaws. On this basis, the first author systematically sorted out the theoretical logic and put forward constructive research suggestions. The second author completed the first draft of the paper, and the first and second authors jointly revised and finalized the full manuscript.

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