

Gender, Family, and Morality the Public Realm:
Southern Chinese Women, the 1930s and 1940s

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Quanzhou:

- Looking towards Nanyang –the Asian Mediterranean
- Family ethics, lineage authorities, marriage practices, and the chastity cult
- Overseas Chinese & their wives left behind in the 1930s and 1940s

Shi Zhi's Public Announcement:
'Becoming Decent' (*congliang* 從良)

- ◆ Husband imprisoned and indicted; poverty; entering prostitution
- ◆ Leaving prostitution: "I will immediately **sever the husband-wife relationship** (*tuoli fuqi* 脫離夫妻) with Lin Jiuli. From now on, I will formally **cohabit with** (*tongju* 同居) Mr. Xie Junying.
- ◆ "Therefore, I publish this announcement in newspapers."

Lu Xun, 1923

A woman in [traditional] Chinese society had only two options—dependence on a husband, or prostitution

Lin Geniang: The Announcement of Severing Husband-Wife and Familial Relations
脫離夫妻家庭關係啟事

- ◆ Absent husband who had a 2nd family in Southeast Asia; neither remittances nor letters for 20 years
- ◆ Expelled from the marital family
- ◆ "From the day the announcement was published, "man and woman each should have freedom to remarry (*nanhun nujia geting ziyou* 男婚女嫁各聽自由)."

Traditional Family Ethics & Republican Familism

- | Men | Women |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Emigration & family reputation 家風 ◆ Wifely way 婦道 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Absent husband & no economic support (conjugal responsibility?) ◆ Principle of individual freedom |

1931 Family Law:

If one party does not conform to this obligation [mutual obligation of communal living] by purposely deserting the other or disappeared, the other party can sue in court for a divorce

Inconsistency in the Family Law

- ◆ Article 982: “[A] marriage must be celebrated by open ceremony and in the presence of two or more witnesses.”
- ◆ Article 1050: “Divorce by mutual consent shall be effected in writing which requires the signatures of at least two witnesses, and by the divorce registration at the household administration authority.”

Morality Dispute

Father-in-Law

- ◆ Helping the widowed daughter-in-law adopt a son
- ◆ “Where was the Heavenly Principle 天理?”
- ◆ Resorting to laws if anyone marries her

Widowed Daughter-in-Law

- ◆ No economic support from marital and family
- ◆ Not allowed to return to the marital family
- ◆ “How could a weak woman like me steal and escape? ... Where is the Humanly Way 人道? I humbly beg for the examination of benevolent people from all four directions”
- ◆ “No one may intervene in my future behavior and freedom from now on.”

Marital vs. Natal Families

Mother-in-Law

- ◆ Accusing the daughter-in-law of unreasonable request for divorce
- ◆ The daughter-in-law should return home or she would resort to the law

Father of the Daughter-in-Law

- ◆ It was the age when men and women had equal rights
- ◆ *“It should be up to the couple to file a divorce suit and be decided by the laws if there is any condition of divorce. I would never get involved in it.”*

Announcement of ‘Becoming Decent’

- ◆ “I will immediately **sever the husband-wife relationship** (tuoli fuq 脫離夫妻).”
- ◆ “From now on, I will formally **cohabit with** (tongju 同居) ...”

- ◆ Family ethics as the foundation of social order and a major issue in the Chinese public sphere
 - ◆ Quanzhou’s lineage and emigration traditions
 - ◆ KMT’s Republican familism
- ◆ Reliance on newspapers and public opinion to provide moral and social support
- ◆ A “RATIONAL” debate of the public in society?
- ◆ The cultural period, the use of the presee media, legal reform, wartime economic difficulties contributed to the dissolution of traditional joint families and lineages and reshaped the concepts of marriage and family in public—emancipation of women
- ◆ The use of the social media today