

AN UNLIKELY TRAJECTORY

Literary and Cultural Leftism in Taiwan



Edited by **Pei-yin Lin** and **Po-hsi Chen**

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Identities, Genealogy, and Political Actions of Left-Wing Female Political Victims of the White Terror in the 1950s

LI SHU-CHUN

TRANSLATED BY ALEC MARTIN

This chapter¹ explores the intricate connection between the political consciousness of left-wing women who fell victim to the White Terror in the 1950s by exploring their political consciousness, socialist beliefs, and activism, with particular focus on networks and relationships they formed—what I term their “left-wing female genealogy.” Two factors make this study particularly significant. First, the historical taboo surrounding left-wing ideologies during the Cold War era has limited the scholarly understanding of left-wing female experiences. Second, while research on the White Terror has expanded in recent decades, studies focusing on female political victims remain relatively scarce, creating a significant gap in understanding how women experienced political persecution.

To address this lacuna, I focus on four Taiwanese women—Xu Jinyu (1921–2018), Zhang Jinjue (1923–), Feng Shou’e (1930–2022), and Xu Yueli (1912–2008)—all of whom were sentenced in the 1950s for their socialist beliefs and activities. All four participated actively in labor movements, demonstrations, political meetings, and the production of leftist publications.

Their cases provide a window into how women's political consciousness developed within the historical contexts of Taiwan from Japanese colonization through the postwar Nationalist government period. To reconstruct their stories and political development, this research draws on multiple sources: official documents including verdicts and interrogation records; oral histories and interviews with these women and their associates; and contemporary reportage. By cross-referencing these diverse materials, I analyze how these women's gender identities informed their political consciousness and how their political activities reflected their positions as women in mid-twentieth-century Taiwan.

Xu Jinyu, born in Taipei, was arrested in 1950 and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment in connection with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member Ji Meizhen (1915–1950) and the post and telecommunications workers' branch of the CCP's Taiwan Provincial Work Committee.² Her involvement with labor unions and advocacy for equal pay for Taiwanese postal workers led to her arrest during the early White Terror crackdowns. Zhang Jinjue, born in Changhua in central Taiwan, had connections to the anti-Japanese resistance through the Scorched Earth Society (*Jiaotu hui*) at Shouyang Farm, a literary retreat established by prominent leftist writer Yang Kui in Taichung in 1937. In 1951, she was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for “committing an overt act with the intent to overthrow the government by illegal means”—a common charge against suspected leftists during this period.³ Feng Shou'e (1930–2022), who attended Lanyang Girls' Senior High School from 1943 to 1949, was arrested for her involvement with the Yilan regional branch of the Taiwan Provincial Work Committee. Her case exemplifies how the White Terror affected families: Her brother, Feng Jinhui, was executed in 1950 due to this involvement, while Feng Shou'e herself was sentenced to prison for ten years in the case.⁴ Xu Yueli (1912–2008), the most senior among the four women who had been politically active since the Japanese colonial period, participated in the Workers' Assistance Association (*Gongyou xiezhuhui*) and women's rights movement.⁵ Her arrest in December 1950 resulted in a twelve-year prison term, from 1951 to 1963.⁶

This chapter explores several key questions: How did these women's political consciousness develop in relation to their identities as women? Did their female friendships and networks evolve into a political genealogy or were they confined to emotional ties? What socialist beliefs motivated their actions, and how did they translate these beliefs into concrete political activities? By examining these questions, this study illuminates the connections between

female identity and political consciousness in Taiwan's leftist movements during a critical historical period.

Socialism in Taiwan and the Formation of Left-Wing Female Thought

From the Japanese colonial period through the postwar era, Taiwan was a fertile ground for the growth of socialist thought inspired by multiple sources. Hence, to understand how the four women in this study developed their leftist political consciousness, we must first examine the transnational currents that shaped Taiwan's leftist landscape during this pivotal period. The unique historical position of Taiwan—colonized by Japan until 1945, then governed by the Kuomintang—created a distinctive environment where multiple socialist traditions converged. Leftist ideas reached Taiwan through three distinct trajectories: Japanese socialist movements, the CCP, and Taiwan's own communist organizations. Each of these trajectories influenced our four subjects in different but overlapping ways.

For Xu Yueli, leftist consciousness developed through her participation in the Workers' Assistance Association during the Japanese colonial period. This organization connected her with both Japanese left-wing women activists and local Taiwanese labor movements. Her collaboration with Ye Tao (1905–1970), a prominent female leader of the Taiwan Peasants Union under Japanese rule, exemplifies how women's networks facilitated the transmission of socialist ideas. These connections provided Xu with a foundation in labor activism that would later make her a target during the White Terror.

Zhang Jinjue's political development demonstrates another pathway to leftist thought. Through Ye Tao, Zhang established contact with Liao Ruifa of the Taiwanese Communist Party, who subsequently introduced her to Li Zhongzhi, another important figure in the underground communist movement in Taiwan.⁷ Zhang's intellectual journey was further shaped by her engagement with Japanese Marxist literature, particularly Kawakami Hajime's (1879–1946) influential work *Second Tale of Poverty* (*Daini binbō monogatari*), which analyzes capitalist exploitation of workers.⁸ After the war, these influences and connections led Zhang to join the underground Communist Party in Taiwan.

Xu Jinyu's path to leftist consciousness came through her interaction with Ji Meizhen, a CCP member working in the Postal and Telecommunications Bureau in Taiwan after 1945. Their relationship, formed in a Mandarin

language training class, would prove pivotal for Xu's political development. For Feng Shou'e, exposure to Chinese left-wing authors played a crucial role. She became politically aware through reading works by prominent Chinese left-wing authors, such as Lu Xun, Ba Jin, and Mao Dun, supplemented by Japanese-language socialist works from the 1930s that remained accessible in early postwar Taiwan. Her intellectual engagement with these materials inspired her to write her own essays on women's liberation and education.⁹

The postwar period between 1945 and 1949 was particularly significant for the development of leftist thought in Taiwan. After the Nationalist Party's relocation to Taiwan, political corruption and authoritarian oppression led intellectuals and young students to place their hopes in the promise offered by left-wing thought. Figures like Ji Meizhen and Qian Jingzhi at the Postal and Telecommunications Bureau became instrumental in spreading socialist ideas through organized study sessions. They repeatedly emphasized the need to "work day and night to enlighten the youth and the workers and to raise the consciousness of the workers, whether inside or outside the classroom, on or off campus," demonstrating their commitment to political education and worker solidarity.

These study circles introduced workers to a carefully curated selection of leftist texts. Participants read Mao Zedong's *Theory of New Democracy* and *On the People's Democratic Dictatorship*, alongside practical guidance like Chen Yun's *How to Be a Communist Party Member* and Ai Siqu's accessible *Philosophy for the Masses*.¹⁰ Literary works also featured prominently, including Lu Xun's satirical "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave" and his prose poetry selection *Wild Grass*, as well as essays by progressive Chinese authors Ba Jin and Lao She.¹¹

The systematic approach to political education employed by leftist organizers effectively cultivated socialist consciousness among workers. Ji Meizhen's teaching proved inspirational to many participants, including Xu Jinyu. The impact of these intellectual mentorships would become evident after Ji's arrest, when Xu voiced her deep indignation on behalf of her teacher and friend. This reaction exemplified a pattern seen among many political prisoners of that era—initial disillusionment with the Nationalist regime often deepened into more radical opposition following the persecution of respected mentors. Many expressed their discontent through increasingly pointed criticism and ultimately turned ideologically toward what they referred to as their "red" homeland, looking to mainland China as an alternative political model.¹²

The cultural dimension of leftist resistance showed the creativity and resilience of socialist activism. According to Feng's testimony, mainland

Chinese magazines and books containing leftist ideas were widely available in Taiwan during the early postwar years.¹³ Cultural organizations also became vehicles for political expression. The Mailang Glee Club (*Mailang geyongdui*), founded at National Taiwan University in 1947, incorporated popular Chinese songs into their performances while subtly satirizing the ruling regime. By singing politically charged songs like “March of the Volunteers” (*Yiyongjun jinxingqu*), which would later become the national anthem of the People’s Republic of China, and advocating for the Marxist principle “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need,” these student groups expressed resistance through cultural avenues that temporarily escaped censorship.¹⁴

The intellectual production of young female activists demonstrates how women actively contributed to leftist discourse rather than serving as passive recipients of revolutionary theory. Feng herself exemplified the intellectual engagement of young Taiwanese women with leftist ideas during this period. Drawing inspiration from both Chinese literature and Japanese-language socialist works of the 1930s, she authored three expository essays: “The Day of Taiwan’s Liberation,” which envisioned the political future of Taiwan; “On Taiwanese Women,” which argued that women’s liberation must go beyond simply reversing gender-based privilege and disadvantages, emphasizing the importance of women developing their own abilities; and “Education in China and Japan,” which offered a comparative analysis of educational systems.¹⁵ Unfortunately, following her arrest, her family members burned these works to avoid further political persecution—a common fate for politically sensitive materials during the White Terror period.¹⁶

These examples illustrate how left-wing and socialist ideas from both the Japanese colonial era and postwar China converged in Taiwan, providing a foundation for the socialist beliefs of these four women, who absorbed, interpreted, and acted upon these ideas within Taiwan’s specific historical context, ultimately leading to their persecution during the White Terror.

“The Personal Is Political”: Women’s Experience-Informed Politics

The feminist principle that “the personal is political”—a cornerstone of twentieth-century women’s movements—provides a conceptual framework for understanding how the lived experiences of leftist Taiwanese women shaped their political consciousness. As feminist theory has demonstrated, everyday experiences of gender-based oppression form the foundation for

broader political awareness. The four women in this study exemplified this principle, as their political consciousness developed directly from their personal experiences as women, particularly related to childbirth, miscarriages, orphanhood, and poverty. Their life stories show how structural gender inequalities within Taiwanese society led them toward socialist politics as a means of addressing these injustices.

Xu Jinyu's case demonstrates how the systematic devaluation of female children in economically vulnerable families directly fostered left-wing consciousness. Her father worked as a rickshaw puller, earning barely enough to support his family. After suffering multiple miscarriages, her mother gave birth to eight children—four boys and four girls. Unfortunately, all four girls, including Xu herself, were given up for adoption, reflecting the patriarchal devaluation of female children.¹⁷ The pattern of gender-based sacrifice continued as Xu's mother endured four more miscarriages before tragically dying during the fourth one. This traumatic family history deeply affected Xu, making her acutely aware of women's vulnerabilities and unequal status within Taiwan's patriarchal structure.¹⁸

The connection between Xu's personal experiences and her political activism became explicit during her interrogation by authorities, where she admitted that her decision to join the underground party stemmed directly from her desire to fight for women's independence and equality. Her political consciousness further expanded after the war when she met Ji Meizhen in a Mandarin training class. Their shared experience as adopted daughters from poor families created an emotional bond that influenced Xu's political development. Through Ji's mentorship, Xu came to recognize that women's subordination and economic poverty were interconnected aspects of the same societal structure—a realization that embodied the feminist insight that personal experiences reflect broader political realities.¹⁹

Zhang Jinjue's experience of near-infanticide demonstrates how economic desperation intensified gender-based vulnerability and ultimately fueled her commitment to systemic change. Born into an impoverished family, Zhang's early life was marked by family desperation. In one harrowing incident, her father, overwhelmed by the burden of providing for seven children after losing his job, instructed Zhang's sister to place the crying young girl in an irrigation ditch—essentially abandoning her.²⁰ Fortunately, this attempted infanticide was prevented only when her aunt happened to intervene. Subsequently, Zhang was first sent to live with a foster mother before being adopted by a wealthy couple in the same village. These early

experiences of disability based on her gender and economic status profoundly influenced her later commitment to addressing systemic inequality.

Similarly, Feng Shou'e's political radicalization stemmed directly from witnessing her mother's exploitation as both a reproductive vessel and agricultural laborer within patriarchal rural economy. Despite having received a public school education, Feng's mother experienced the physical toll of patriarchal expectations through fourteen pregnancies over a span of thirty years, resulting in five stillbirths, seven sons, and two daughters. Even during pregnancy, her mother was required to perform physically demanding agricultural labor, such as preparing food and harvesting millet, as the daughter-in-law in a peasant household; this strenuous work likely contributed to her miscarriages.²¹ These observations heightened her awareness of women's issues: She believed that improving women's lives required equal educational opportunities and professional development, and advocated for workplace accommodations including childcare and eldercare facilities—remarkably progressive positions for 1950s Taiwan.²²

The connection between Feng's personal experiences and political commitments became even more poignant when her mother passed away while she was in prison, and she was denied permission to attend the funeral. Feng had discussed the hardships faced by women with her mother, who expressed a fervent hope that society would one day address these problems.²³ In interviews and during her interrogation, Feng emphasized that her decision to join the Communist Party was driven by her commitment to gender equality.²⁴ This serves as a testament to her unwavering dedication to women's issues and the pursuit of equality.

Xu Yueli also came from a poor family of many children. When she was six years old, her mother gave birth to a fifth baby girl and was asked by Xu's uncle to send the child away. Even before turning six, Xu shouldered responsibility for looking after her younger siblings.²⁵ From 1925 to 1926, figures in the women's movement viewed bad habits and education as the key reasons for the oppression of women. The Workers' Assistance Association, of which Xu was a part, engaged in the women's movement at the proletarian level. For Xu, the key reasons for the oppression of women lay in the organization of the economy and the order of society, and she argued that women would not be able to reach their goal of complete liberation except by struggling against that order.²⁶ She said, "Once the social order in which some oppress others is rectified, the emancipation of women can come about naturally."²⁷

In separate interviews, each of the four women highlights their own female identities, birth families, and experiences as adoptees. In their efforts to change the condition of women through the structure of society, they hoped to achieve the emancipation of women through the liberation of society as a whole. The above context shows that the female identities of left-wing women gave a gendered dimension to their political concerns, encapsulating the meaning of “the personal is political” and the idea that political consciousness stems from everyday life.

Female Genealogy, Political Consciousness, and Political Activity of Left-Wing Women

Through interviews and accounts by Xu Jinyu, Zhang Jinjue, Feng Shou’e, and Xu Yueli, this chapter proposes that women’s friendships and mentorships transcended mere personal connections to form networks of political consciousness-raising, knowledge transmission, and collective action. In her influential anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, Robin Morgan suggests that women’s shared experiences of oppression creates natural linkages between their lives.²⁸ Building on Morgan’s insights, this chapter argues that the exchanges and connections between Taiwanese left-wing women were not confined to mutual recognition of common structural position, but their sisterhood of friendship actively formed a political genealogy that generated and sustained left-wing female thought and action across generations and geographic boundaries, even under conditions of extreme political repression.

XU JINYU AND JI MEIZHEN: MENTORSHIP AND LABOR ACTIVISM

The relationship between Xu Jinyu and Ji Meizhen demonstrates how mentorship between women created pathways for political consciousness and labor activism that challenged both class and gender hierarchies. In 1937, while employed at a Japanese textile company in western Shanghai, Ji Meizhen and Qian Jingzhi started working at a refugee shelter, where they educated their female colleagues and encouraged them to attend night school.²⁹ After relocating to Taiwan in 1946, they established Mandarin training classes where Xu Jinyu was invited to participate. These classes transcended mere language instruction—Ji discussed international affairs, social issues, and women’s rights with her students, empowering them to assert their own

autonomy.³⁰ The political consciousness fostered in these sessions bore fruit in Xu's subsequent involvement in the Taiwan Provincial Postal Workers' Union and her classmates' publication of Lu Xun's *Wild Grass*, activities that demonstrated their growing commitment to improving working conditions and stimulating debates about various forms of resistance.³¹ Ji's influence profoundly transformed Xu Jinyu, awakening her left-wing consciousness and reshaping her character and sense of political agency.

Xu's political development was further deepened through her direct experiences of labor exploitation, which complemented her earlier personal insights into gender inequality. Beyond the formative experiences with her birth family that had heightened her awareness of gender issues related to childbirth and orphanhood, Xu gained an understanding of class exploitation through her own physical experiences as a laborer. At the Longquan soft drink factory in Taipei, she witnessed frequent gas explosions without worker protections.³² Her subsequent employment at a palm-fiber brush factory, where payment was determined by output, exposed her to the realities of labor fragmentation and the repetitive nature of tasks assigned to female employees.³³ Later, at a soap factory, she performed monotonous packaging duties that further illuminated the dehumanizing nature of industrial labor.³⁴ These experiences exposed the precarious, tedious, and fragmented nature of female industrial labor. They ultimately led Xu to become involved in the labor movement, where she recognized the oppressive conditions faced by both women and workers. Influenced by Ji Meizhen, Xu's political consciousness evolved with a focus on "struggle," "study," and "labor,"³⁵ driving her to actively participate in the labor movement, including its frontlines.³⁶

Xu's political activism culminated in addressing structural inequalities within Taiwan's postal system, demonstrating how women's leadership challenged both ethnic discrimination and labor exploitation. The postwar Postal and Telecommunications Bureau maintained two separate compensation systems: one established by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications for postal workers from mainland China, and another carrying over regulations from the Japanese regime for Taiwanese workers.³⁷ This wage disparity reflected and reinforced social stratification between these groups. Recognizing the need for worker solidarity across ethnic lines, labor organizer Lu Xiangxian called for postal and telecommunications workers throughout Taiwan to unite, leading to the establishment of the Taiwan Provincial Postal Workers' Union on August 10, 1946.³⁸ As awareness of the inequality grew, the workers formally requested integration into the

mainland Chinese workers' system on January 20, 1948, with workers in Taichung specifically demanding unconditional integration by January 12, 1949.³⁹ The gap in compensation between workers from China and Taiwan reflected the social stratification among these groups, prompting Xu Jinyu to address the issue of unequal pay. Xu was elected the union representative and actively participated in the first postwar labor rights march in Taiwan to advocate for equal pay for Taiwanese postal employees.⁴⁰ Throughout this activism, Ji Meizhen provided encouragement and support.⁴¹

Xu's approach to labor organizing reflected her commitment to worker self-emancipation, a principle central to leftist thought. She recognized that regarding the separate compensation systems, she and her fellow workers, especially the Taiwanese, had to rely on themselves and assert their position.⁴² This approach closely echoed the bottom-up model proposed by Marx in the rules of the First International, which emphasized that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves."⁴³ On March 26, 1949, led by Ji Meizhen and Qian Jingzhi, members of postal unions from across Taiwan gathered in Taipei to march and petition for equal pay.⁴⁴ When the march arrived at the Provincial Government office, three representatives were selected to negotiate, of whom Xu Jinyu was the only woman.⁴⁵ Ultimately, the issue of unequal pay was resolved, but Xu was reprimanded and transferred to a post office near Taichung.⁴⁶ In February 1950, Ji and Qian were arrested, and Xu was sentenced to fifteen years in prison on charges of rebellion.

Beyond political organizing, Ji's mentorship of Xu shows how women's relationships fostered personal transformation that enabled political leadership. Ji not only influenced Xu's politics and actions but also had a profound impact on her character. Xu attributed her transformation from a shy, reserved individual into someone who spoke up for herself and her colleagues to Ji's decisive influence on her view of life.⁴⁷ This transformation was evident during the postal union's leadership elections, when Li Alu, a male candidate seeking reelection, snatched and tore up a list of names of women workers compiled by Xu and other female colleagues when they discussed potential candidates who could energize women workers. Xu and Ji later exposed Li's disrespectful actions at the full union meeting, resisting gender discrimination within the movement itself.⁴⁸ Through these actions, Xu demonstrated her agency as both a political subject and a female subject, identities that mutually reinforced each other. Her activism helped expand the left-wing female political spectrum in Taiwan, inspiring other women to recognize and challenge both class and gender oppression.

ZHANG JINJUE, YE TAO, AND OTHERS: NETWORKS OF
POLITICAL RECRUITMENT AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Women's political networks created vital interconnected webs of recruitment and activism that strategically linked labor organizing with cultural resistance. Having met Ye Tao under Japanese colonial rule, Zhang proceeded after the war to join the Taiwan Provincial Work Committee of the CCP as well as a union for drivers. She became a pivotal character who brought together numerous women activists. Zhang participated in work slowdowns organized by the drivers' union and, alongside Lai Qiongyan, mimeographed and distributed the underground newspaper *Illumination* (*Guangming bao*).⁴⁹ Influenced by Ye Tao and Lin Qingyan, Zhang recruited several women activists to unionize, expanding the female presence in labor organization.⁵⁰

Family connections often provided crucial access to leftist intellectual circles, creating intergenerational pathways for political development. Zhang's paternal uncle, Zhang Dongliang, had opened a bookshop in Taichung, while she frequently visited his wife there. In addition, she also visited the nearby Shouyang Farm owned by the prominent leftist writer Yang Kui, to help her aunt purchase flowers.⁵¹ It was at Shouyang Farm that Zhang had the opportunity to meet Ye, Lai, and others. At the farm, she also obtained from Yang Kui a copy of his story "Newspaper Boy," a poignant tale that exposed the economic exploitation and political oppression faced by Taiwanese people.⁵² Having been introduced by Yang Kui to Liao Ruifa, Zhang was later approached by Liao and recruited to join the Communist Party.⁵³ Because of her connection with Ye Tao, a family elder who had actively participated in the Taiwan Peasants Union during Japanese rule, Zhang found herself more inclined toward left-wing ideology during that period. Zhang's political trajectory thus shows how socialist ideals embraced during the Japanese colonial period could evolve into formal underground party membership after the war.

The multiplier effect of women's political recruitment created expanding networks of activism that extended far beyond initial mentorship relationships. Through Ye's network, Zhang developed a closer affinity with left-wing thought of the period. Another influential figure in Zhang's life was her sister-in-law, Lin Qingyan.⁵⁴ In addition to family members, Zhang's political lineage also included several key activists who themselves established connections with others. Beyond her involvement with the drivers' union, Zhang also held a leadership position in a women's union, through which she further expanded the web of female activism.⁵⁵

Female leadership in labor movements directly challenged both economic exploitation and gender hierarchies within traditional organizing spaces. Zhang participated in the founding of the drivers' union on February 19, 1947, and sought idealistic youth to bring into the CCP.⁵⁶ In the winter of 1948, many drivers of city-operated buses and transit workers were frequently laid off without cause and went unpaid for months. In response, drivers and conductors engaged in "work slowdowns" to fight for the prompt payment of back wages, an eight-hour work day limit, and subsidies for their official uniforms. In the end, their demands for outstanding wages and uniform subsidies were granted.⁵⁷

Theoretical engagement with Marxist concepts provided crucial analytical frameworks that informed women's understanding of exploitation and guided their organizing strategies. Zhang encountered Kawakami Hajime's *The Second Story of Poverty*, through which she learned about dialectical analysis of economic systems. Kawakami's critique centered on how capitalists intervene in the labor process, workers labor under capitalist control, yet the products of the process of labor belong not to the laborers but to the capitalists.⁵⁸ The actions organized by the drivers' union reflected this idea of labor exploitation.

XU YUELI, MS. HOTTA, YE TAO, AND HER FEMALE FELLOW INMATES: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS AND PRISON SOLIDARITY

Cross-cultural feminist alliances created vital channels for transmitting socialist thought across national boundaries and through periods of political repression. Xu Yueli's female political genealogy brings together Zhang Jinjue, Ms. Hotta, and Ye Tao, forming a transnational network of political consciousness. As a member of the Workers' Assistance Association, Xu espoused Marxist thought and emphasized women's emancipation as inseparable from collective societal emancipation. Xu met Zhang Jinjue through their mutual acquaintance with Liao Ruifa, through which Zhang was informed of Xu's father's anti-colonial resistance activities.⁵⁹ During Japanese colonization, Xu's father had engaged in cultural resistance that profoundly influenced Xu Yueli, who later joined the Workers' Assistance Association and the Peasants Union. Following the February 12, 1929 crackdown that resulted in the arrest of over three hundred peasants, the Peasants Union reorganized, with its leader Jian Ji establishing a new office in Taipei under Xu Yueli's, showcasing her organizational capabilities management.⁶⁰

Women's labor activism often took place in response to industrial disasters that exposed the expendability of workers' lives under capitalism. Xu's involvement with the Association positioned her to respond effectively when a devastating explosion at a fireworks factory killed and injured numerous employees, leaving families without support. Rather than viewing it as merely a tragic accident, Xu recognized the structural negligence involved and took concrete action. She personally visited the affected families and organized efforts to seek reparations from factory management. This intervention marked a significant labor initiative at the time that connected immediate humanitarian concerns with structural critique.

Women contributed to leftist movements by connecting women's emancipation to broader social transformation. Xu Yueli, responsible for the affairs of the women's department of the Workers' Assistance Association, observed that female professionals were rare at the time. Her analysis of women's oppression focused on social structures rather than individual factors. For Xu, the key reason for women's oppression lay in the organization of the economy and the social order itself; thus, she argued that women's inequality would be resolved naturally if the problems of society were worked out.⁶¹ This contrasted with the position of Xie Anü (Xie Xuehong), who during a 1923 protest gathering of the Taiwan Self-Governance Association in Shanghai had emphasized women's participation in the worker's movement as necessary for revolutionary success.⁶²

Transnational feminist connections provided crucial intellectual resources for Taiwanese women's political development. Xu Yueli also shared links with left-wing women from Japan. In 1927, when Wang Shilang and others were arrested in the Black Youth League Incident and were sentenced the following year by Judge Hotta Masaru, Xu and other members of the Workers' Assistance Association attended the trial, where she met Hotta Masaru's daughter, Ms. Hotta.⁶³ Upon finding that Xu had left school, Ms. Hotta, a socialist herself, volunteered to tutor Xu in Japanese without charge and introduced her to proletarian economic principles through socialist texts.⁶⁴ This mentorship demonstrated how women created alternative educational pathways when formal institutions were inaccessible. Unfortunately, Ms. Hotta's own leftist activities led to her arrest by the Japanese authorities, illustrating the risks faced by women activists.

Women formed support networks across political movements that sustained activism even under conditions of repression. During the Japanese colonial era, Xu's home became a refuge for arrested members of the

Peasants Union during their trials. When a political criminal was on trial, friends would join family members in attending court proceedings regardless of specific affiliations.⁶⁵ Through these shared experiences of support, Xu Yueli and Ye Tao developed meaningful connections. After the February 28 Incident, Xu was arrested for making contact with Liao Ruifa of the Taiwanese Communist Party and Jian Ji of the Peasants Union. Even in prison, Xu continued to form female bonds. Her cellmate, a female convict from China, provided her with essays by Xu Zhimo, Yu Dafu, Zhu Ziqing, and Xu Dishan as Chinese language learning materials.⁶⁶ After the war, Xu continued her activism as head of the women's department of the Workers' Assistance Association, maintaining her belief that women's problems stemmed from broader societal issues.

FENG SHOU'E, XIAO SUMEI, AND JI MEIZHEN

Political mentorship networks infiltrated into prison settings, transforming spaces of confinement into sites of feminist education and organizing. In her own female political genealogy, Feng Shou'e both influenced others and was herself influenced through a web of relationships. She recruited and mentored Xiao Sumei (1930–), while later being shaped by Ji Meizhen during their time in prison. Xiao Sumei, who was convicted in the same case as Feng, later married Yang Zibeng, the son of leftist writer Yang Kui, whom she met at a meeting of political victims after her release from prison.⁶⁷ This connection illustrates how political networks created personal relationships across generations of activist families. Feng facilitated further political connections by introducing Xiao Sumei to Guo Xiucong, expanding their circle of influence.⁶⁸ Feng, Xiao, and Chen Jinxuan maintained an active intellectual community, regularly discussing current events. In an interview, Xiao confirmed the depth of their political relationship—Feng and her had both joined the Communist Party, engaged in extensive intellectual debates, and were ultimately arrested simultaneously.

Women created parallel organizational structures within leftist movements that addressed gender-specific concerns while maintaining connections to broader revolutionary goals. Xiao and Feng were classmates who sustained academic exchange while also sharing formal organizational affiliations within the underground party. According to Feng Jinhui, Feng directed the women's department of the Yilan regional branch of the Taiwan Provincial Work Committee, where both Chen Jinxuan and Xiao Sumei were members.⁶⁹ This leadership position reflected Feng's deep commitment to women's

issues, which stemmed from her personal experiences of gender inequality and the influence of contemporary thought. During her trial proceedings, Feng explicitly stated that her motivation for joining the party was to pursue gender equality. Xiao Sumei, for her part, discussed livelihood issues in meetings. She too cited women's emancipation as her primary reason for joining the Communist Party, demonstrating how these women saw leftist politics as a vehicle for achieving gender justice.⁷⁰

Women's political mentorship encompassed practical organizing principles alongside ideological education, creating a comprehensive approach to revolutionary consciousness. The practical dimensions of Ji's mentorship became evident in everyday prison interactions. When Feng took on the burden of cleaning the spaces for fellow prisoners, Ji offered an important political lesson about collective responsibility. She cautioned that excessive individual self-sacrifice could ultimately encourage selfishness in others rather than building collective consciousness. Taking this guidance to heart, Feng instead proposed that prisoners jointly organize their shoes—a seemingly small suggestion that embodied deeper principles of shared responsibility and communal organization.⁷¹ Even their prison experiences demonstrate how these left-wing women's political genealogies operated through continued education and practical organization.

Conclusion

The political activism of these left-wing women exemplifies a distinctly gendered form of bottom-up socialism of these left-wing women rooted in lived experience. Their left-wing female political consciousness cannot be separated from their female identities—shaped by their birth families, their experiences of gender-based vulnerability, and their firsthand encounters with labor exploitation. The various forms of collective action they organized—from labor marches and work slowdowns to underground publishing—directly addressed the material conditions they faced: unequal pay, excessive working hours, dangerous working conditions, and the monotonous nature of work assigned to women. Their activism thus demonstrates how women's personal experiences of both gender and class oppression provided the foundation for their revolutionary consciousness and guided their political strategies.

Despite their diverse life trajectories, these four women shared significant commonalities that illuminate the gendered dimensions of Taiwan's leftist movements. First, they all lived through the period from the Japanese

colonization through the early postwar period, when socialist thought flourished. Second, each woman articulated clear linkage between her female identity—whether as an adoptee, a witness to reproductive suffering, or a child caregiver—and her personal-is-political concerns. Their political analysis consistently maintained that women’s liberation is inseparable from the transformation of society as a whole. Third, the networks of mentorship, friendship, and organizational support they created demonstrate how women’s relationships constituted a crucial but often overlooked dimension of Taiwan’s leftist movements. The interconnected stories of Xu Jinyu, Zhang Jinjue, Xu Yueli, and Feng Shou’e show how female friendship networks served as vital channels for political genealogy, transmitting revolutionary knowledge and sustaining activism even under conditions of severe repression.

Notes

1. This is an abridged version of the eponymous article published in *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 18.2 (Dec. 2021), 75–148. This chapter is based on the findings of the project 106-2410-H-037-014-MY2 funded by Taiwan’s Ministry of Science and Technology.

2. The Taiwan Garrison Command verdict (no. 2099) shows that Xu Jinyu was convicted of rebellion in the case against Ji Meizhen. See also Lan Bozhou’s *Good Women of Taiwan*.

3. “Case of Zhang Jinjue, et al.,” *Taiwan Garrison Command Verdict*, Case Ref. No. B3750187701/0040/1571/11238020.

4. Xu Xueji, ed., *Prisoners Outside Prison: Interviews with Female Family Members of White Terror Victims; Taiwan Garrison Command Verdict Anjie No. 1764* (Aug. 4, 1950); and “Case of the Rebellion of Lu Shengquan, et al.,” *Taiwan Garrison Command Verdict*, Case Ref. No. B3750347701/0039/3132022/22.

5. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 88.

6. “Case of Chen Jiquan, et al.,” *Taiwan Garrison Command Verdict*, Case Ref. No. B3750187701/0039/1571/75294480/143/096.

7. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Shengzhou, in *Oral History Interview Project with the Members and Related People of the Taiwan Mutual Aid Association for Political Victims*, 215. Li Zhongzhi (originally named Li Jincai) was arrested and shot to death on Dec. 31, 1949. See Zhang Jinjue, *The Ups and Downs of Life: Confession of a Former Prisoner*, 21.

8. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Zhijie, in *Papers and Oral History of the Symposium on Political Cases during Martial Law*, 300–2.

9. See documentary *A Dark Night’s Passing: Feng Shou’e*, prod. Association for the Handling of the Political Events During the Martial Law Period of Taiwan, Republic of China.

10. Lu Xiangxian, *The Nine Three Story*, 179.
11. Both “Oral History of Liu Jianxiu” and “Oral History of Li Yingtai” by interviewer Chen Po-chien mention that readings in the Mandarin training classes included essays by Lu Xun and others; both in *Investigative Research and Oral History of the Post and Telecommunications Administration Incident in the 1950s* (hereafter *Investigative Research and Oral History of the PTAI*), 152–60 and 172–75, respectively.
12. Examples included Cai Rongshou; see the documentary *Tribute to Mr. Cai Rongshou*. For the reorientations of other political prisoners such as Wang Songyue, Wu Shengrun, and Qiu Bingbiao, see He Jingtai, *File of White Terror: Collection of Photography by He Jingtai*; “Recollection of Wu Shengrun” in *A Compilation of Historical Data on the Political Cases in the 1950s*; “Investigation into the Qiu Bingbiao Incident,” in *A Compilation of Historical Data on the Political Cases in the 1950s*, 63–64, respectively.
13. Xu Xueji and Yang Lizhu, “Interview of Feng Shou’e,” in *Prisoners Outside Prison: Interviews with Female Family Members of White Terror Victims* (part 1), 18.
14. Xu Xueji and Yang Lizhu, “Interview of Feng Shou’e,” 10–19.
15. The title of this third essay is variously recorded as “On Education in China” in *Fiery Youth: Testimonies of the White Terror in the 1950s* by Wang Huan, and as “On Education in China and Japan” in the interview by Xu Xueji and Yang Lizhu in *Prisoners Outside Prison: Interviews with Female Family Members of White Terror Victims* (part 1).
16. Wang Huan, “Still Love the Motherland: Xu Jinyu,” in *Fiery Youth: Testimonies of the White Terror in the 1950s*, 75–76; *A Dark Night’s Passing: Feng Shou’e*, prod. Association for the Handling of the Political Events During the Martial Law Period of Taiwan, Republic of China.
17. Wang Huan, “Still Love the Motherland: Xu Jinyu,” in *Fiery Youth: Testimonies of the White Terror in the 1950s*, 140.
18. Lan Bozhou, *Spring: The Roads of Xu Jinyu and Gu Jinliang*, 36.
19. Lan Bozhou, 72.
20. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Zhijie, in *Papers and Oral History of the Symposium on Political Cases During Martial Law*, 287; Hu Huiling and Lin Shiyu, *White Seal: Testimony of the Human Rights Struggle in the White Terror of the 1950s*, 107.
21. Xu Xueji and Yang Lizhu, “Interview of Feng Shou’e,” in *Prisoners Outside Prison: Interviews with Female Family Members of White Terror Victims* (part 1), 7; Wang Huan, “Weathering This Severe Winter: Feng Shou’e,” in *Fiery Youth: Testimonies of the White Terror in the 1950s*, 69.
22. “Interview of Feng Shou’e,” interview by Lin Huiyu and Liang Hongbin, in *Lost in the Dark Night*, 53.
23. Wang Huan, *Fiery Youth: Testimonies of the White Terror in the 1950s*, 81.
24. For the transcript of Feng’s interrogation, see “Suspected Treachery of Lu Shengquan, et al.”
25. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 81.

26. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 90–91.
27. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 91.
28. Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*.
29. See “Case of the Rebellion of Ji Meizhen, et al.” for Qian Jingzhi’s interrogation transcript.
30. *Investigative Research and Oral History of the PTAI*, 68–70; Zeng Wenzhen, “Spring: The Story of Xu Jinyu: A Conversation with the Female Political Criminal,” 3.
31. Lu Xiangxian, ed., *Soul of Taipei*, 2; Chen Po-chien, *Radical 1949: Record of the Post and Telecommunications Incident during the White Terror*, 142; Liu Jianxiu, *Seven Thousand Days of Suffering and Three Thousand Miles of Exile: The Survival Story of Liu Jianxiu*, 19.
32. Wang Huan, “Still Love the Motherland: Xu Jinyu,” *Fiery Youth: Testimonies of the White Terror in the 1950s*, 142.
33. Wang Huan, “Still Love the Motherland.”
34. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 211.
35. Zeng Wenzhen, “Spring: The Story of Xu Jinyu; A Conversation with the Female Political Criminal,” in *Forum in Women’s and Gender Studies* 67, 1–7.
36. Xu Jinyu, “Remembering Teaching Ji Meizhen,” in Lu Xiangxian, ed., *Soul of Taipei*, 54.
37. According to Chen Po-chien’s research, there was a significant disparity in compensation between employees from Taiwan and those from mainland China. Taiwanese workers at the section chief level earned approximately one-tenth of their counterparts from mainland China, despite holding the same rank. See Chen Po-chien, “A Preliminary Study of the Succession and Development of the Postwar Organized Labor Movement by the Old Taiwan Communist Party and the Provincial Work Committee (1945–1950),” 109–53.
38. *Investigative Research and Oral History of the PTAI*, 68–70.
39. See Chen Po-chien, “A Preliminary Study.”
40. Lan Bozhou, *Spring: The Roads of Xu Jinyu and Gu Jinliang*, 78–79.
41. Lan Bozhou, *Spring*, 78–79.
42. Lan Bozhou, *Spring*, 94.
43. Karl Marx, “General Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen’s Association.”
44. Lu Xiangxian, *The Nine Three Story*, 179; Lu Xiangxian, ed., *Soul of Taipei*, 1.
45. Lu Xiangxian, *The Nine Three Story*, 182.
46. Lan Bozhou, *Spring*, 113.
47. Lan Bozhou, *Spring*, 83.
48. According to military intelligence records, Li Alu provided information to authorities. See File No. T0653_B_07_0006, Bureau of Secrets, Ministry of National Defense. This chapter draws on the military intelligence files copied in *Investigative Research and Oral History of the PTAI*. See also “Oral History of Xu

Jinyu,” interview by Chen Po-chien, in *Investigative Research and Oral History of the PTAI*, 162.

49. *Illumination* was first published in 1948, when novelist Lü Heruo served as the newspaper’s chief editor while engaging in underground campaigns. After the February 28 Incident in 1947, *Illumination* advocated for publishing material to analyze the incident’s background and to promote its stand on the incident. Subsequently, the Keelung Junior High School Incident occurred, during which thirty individuals were arrested. “Zhang Jinjue: Influential Woman of the Provincial Work Committee,” in *White Seal*, interview by Hu Huiling and Lin Shiyu, 117.

50. Zhang Jinjue, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, 3.

51. Peng Hsiao-yen, ed., *The Complete Works of Yang Kui*, 14:29.

52. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Zhijie, in *Papers and Oral History of the Symposium on Political Cases during Martial Law*, 290–91. See chap. 1 of this book for details of the story.

53. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue”; Zhang Jinjue, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, 4.

54. Hu Huiling and Lin Shiyu, *White Seal*, 109–10.

55. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Shengzhou, in *Oral History Interview Project with the Members and Related People of the Taiwan Mutual Aid Association for Political Victims*, 218.

56. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” 216.

57. “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Zhijie, in *Papers and Oral History of the Symposium on Political Cases during Martial Law*, 306; Zhang Jinjue, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, 15; “Interview of Zhang Jinjue,” interview by Lin Shengzhou, in *Oral History Interview Project with the Members and Related People of the Taiwan Mutual Aid Association for Political Victims*, 217; “Zhang Jinjue: Influential Woman of the Provincial Work Committee,” in Hu Huiling and Lin Shiyu, *White Seal*, 116.

58. Kawakami Hajime, *Introduction to Das Kapital*, trans. He Zhongmin, 471.

59. Zhang Jinjue, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, 9.

60. Yang Du and Jian Mingren, *Revolutionary with a Violin: Jian Ji and the Peasants’ Movement*, 145.

61. Xu Yueli, “Endless Nights: Confession of a Taiwanese Woman in an Era of Suffering,” in *Chinatide Forum*, 97.

62. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 90–91.

63. In *Good Women of Taiwan*, Lan Bozhou mentions that Wang Shiliang was arrested in 1927 because of the Black Youth League Incident and was sentenced the following year by Judge Hotta. Criminal verdicts No. 680, 1252, 1253, and 1256 from the year 1927 in the Taiwan Colonial Court Records Archives list three judges assigned to the cases, one of whom was surnamed Hotta, suggesting the “Ms. Hotta” she references was his daughter. See “Taiwan Colonial Court Records Archives,” http://tcra.lib.ntu.edu.tw/tccra_develop/record.php?searchClass=all&cid=ru201010039935.

64. Xu Yueli, “Endless Nights,” 98; Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 91.

65. Xu Yueli, "Endless Nights," 99.
66. Lan Bozhou, *Good Women of Taiwan*, 125; Xu Yueli, "Endless Nights," 103.
67. "Case of Feng Shou'e, et al.," *Taiwan Garrison Command Verdict Anjie No. 1764* (Aug. 4, 1950); "Interview of Xiao Sumei," interview by Yang Cui et al., in *Achievement Report on the Oral History Interview Project on Political Cases During the Martial Law Period*, 363; Transcript of the interrogation of Feng Shou'e in "Suspected treachery of Lu Shengquan, et al."
68. *A Dark Night's Passing: Feng Shou'e*; "Interview of Feng Shou'e," in *Prisoners Outside Prison: Interviews with Female Family Members of White Terror Victims*, 5.
69. "Suspected treachery of Lu Shengquan, et al."
70. Transcripts of proceedings of the trials of Lu Shengkun, Xiao Sumei, Lu Shengquan, and Chen Wenzhang in "Suspected Treachery of Lu Shengquan, et al."
71. Feng Shou'e, "The Teacher Ji Meizhen I Knew in Prison," in Lu Xiang-xian, ed., *Soul of Taipei*, 72.

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