

向警予：中国共产党“唯一的一个女创始人”

Xiang Jingyu: The Only Woman among the CPC Founding Members

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Image: Xiang Jingyu (1895-1928)

Source: sohu.com

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Xiang Jingyu (1895-1928), one of the earliest members of the Communist Party of China, was born on 4 September, 1895 in Xupu county, Huaihua district in Hunan province. In 1919 she joined [新民学会 *Xīnmín xuéhuì* or Xinmin Society] New People's Society along with Mao Zedong and Cai Hesen. In 1922 she became a member of the CPC. Following the 2nd CPC Party Congress in July 1922, the party Central Committee appointed Xiang as the first director of the Chinese Communist Women's Bureau and the first woman member of the Central Committee. She sacrificed her life at the young age of only 33. In 1936, Mao Zedong declared Xiang to be the "only women founder-member" of the Party.

We must seek truth all our life and live for a cause

Born in a wealthy family but grew up in troubled times, from her teenage years she was always curious to know more about the ups and down of China and wanted to do something to change the fate of China. In 1912, 17-year old Xiang entered Hunan Provincial No.1 Women's Normal College. Later on, she moved to Zhounan Women's College. During this period, she changed her name from "Xiang Junxian" to "Xiang Jingyu," for she wanted to be vigilant against feudal thinking and feudal forces.



Image: Com. Xiang Jingyu Memorial Hall Xupu County

Source: trip.com

Early on, Xiang Jingyu embraced the idea "Educate to Save the Nation." After graduating from Zhounan Women's College she returned to her hometown and founded Xupu Girl's School. She also became the principal of the school. She started conducting lectures in the school on China's national condition and proactively advocated patriotism. She called on everyone to strive hard and choose a career in the service of all suffering compatriots. During this period, Xiang Jingyu's thinking was far from mature. In a letter addressed to her sister-in-law, she wrote: "At the beginning of one's career, one need not be too eager to advance. Ordinary people value life as dignified or disgraceful based on if one is a winner or a loser; but my generation is different and thinks differently. My generation seeks truth and wants to choose a meaningful career..." It is not incorrect to say, although Xiang Jingyu doesn't even understand what does a "real career" mean, but it is very evident she saw it closely linked with the future of her motherland.



我国妇女运动的先驱

向警予

Xiang Jingyu

头像包图东时影画图怀

Source: kknews.cc

In 1919, following her association with Cai Hesen and Mao Zedong in the activities of Xinmin Society, she was gradually drawn towards revolution. In the same year, she joined Cai Chang and others to set up Work-Study Programme among Chinese female students studying in France. On December 7, addressing a farewell event organized by the Work-Study Programme Students Association for those Chinese students leaving for Paris, she said: “While pursuing our studies, we must uphold the aim of serving the masses. We must also most sincerely strive to revive the spirit of the Eastern civilization.” Armed with “spirit to revive Eastern Civilization,” Xiang Jingyu left for France by the year-end to join the Work-Study programme in Paris. During her stay in France, she worked part-time during the day and studies French at night. Within a few months, she had learnt enough French to be able to study books and works such as *The Communist Manifesto* and Engel’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.



Image: Engels’ *Family, Property...* (In French)
Source: fr.wikipedia. org



Image: Communist Manifesto...in French
Source: fr.wikipedia. org

In a letter to her parents in 1920, she spelt out her dedication to revolution: “One must never disrespect one’s old piece of flesh and this drop of blood. Instead, this piece of flesh and this drop of blood must one day illuminate the world.” It was during her stay in France she consolidated her belief in communism and transformed from a democrat into a communist fighter. In early 1922, she returned to China and joined the CPC, thus becoming one of the youngest female party members. Since then, she devoted her life to the cause of liberating the Chinese people.

For the world of my women, shine gloriously

Xiang Jingyu was attracted towards feminism at a young age. In 1911, at age 16 when she was studying at Changde Women's Normal School, she had bowed to seven of her classmates including Jiang Shengmei (mother of 丁玲 Dīnglíng or Ding Ling*). Xiang Jingyu said in her bowing oath: "Seven sisters have vowed to share their wishes with each other, inspire women to fulfill their desired goals, encourage reading, strive for gender equality, and aim to be victorious – all these vows in order to realize their ultimate purpose of "educate to save the nation."



Image: 100 Women of the Year
Source: time.com

During her tenure as the Xupu School Principal, she also composed a song which had lyrics such as: Men and women are now equal, how amazing, how wonderful! How I wish my classmates are ready to shine on my women's world." Rally everyone to cheer up women's emancipation and man-woman equality; everyone rise together for revolution, rise to fight for a bright future for all women.



Image: Xiang Jingyu – a film directed by Liu Yi Ran (2018) and Produced by KO Media France
Source: filmfrance.net

In her own life, she was always at the forefront and the leading representative of the new era women. In December 1918, the deputy security in charge of Xiangxi and commander of the fifth district forces, Zhou Fanze, who was stationed in Xupu, fell in love with Xiang and sent someone to her house with marriage proposal. Xian Jingyu always despised the power of the feudal landlords and never feared the shackles of the feudal ethics/values. On the issue of her marriage, she displayed remarkable degree of tenacity as well as independent spirit. Xiang decided to visit Zhou and turn down his marriage proposal in person. Later, on their way to France, Xiang and Cai Heseng engaged themselves in long discussions on how to transform the Chinese society. The two declared their commitment to together pursue their common goal and chose each other as life partners. Hers was a completely new style wedding, based on their common belief in Marxism.



Image: With husband Cai Hesen

Source: ershcimi.com

She once wrote to her parents: “Hesen is the true love of Jiu’er (Jiu’er in Chinese is *Jiǔ*=9 and *Er*=child; Jiu’er is how Xiang Jingyu was called at home, being the ninth child), and in his thinking and worldview, Hesen is just like Jiu’er...we two are just like new comers born in 1920, and can be called as children of the twentieth century.”

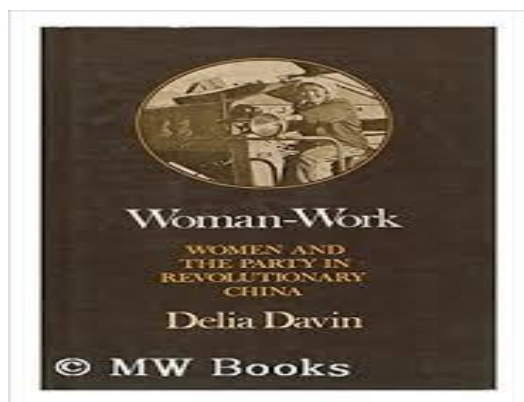


Image: The Book Review

Source: thebookreviewindia.org

In early 1922, Xiang Jingyu, returned to China, and actively engaged herself in leading the early proletariat women’s movement in China. During the 2nd CPC Party Congress, a decision to set up Women’s Bureau under the direct leadership of the Party Central Committee was taken, thus launching the

women’s movement. Xiang Jingyu was the first woman to be selected as a member of the Central Committee of the CPC and she was also appointed as the first director of the Women’s Bureau of the Party’s Central Committee. In June 1923, the 3rd CPC Party Congress passed the “Third All China National Congress of CPC Resolution on Women’s Movement,” resolution which was drafted by Xiang Jingyu. The resolution clarified the process of setting up of a United Front ideology in the women’s movement. Xiang Jingyu drafted a series of documents and resolutions on women’s movement during this period and personally took up the responsibility of editing *Women’s Weekly*. She also published a series of articles in *Women’s Weekly*, *The Guide*, *The Vanguard* and other such journals. She expounded her views on woman’s issue based on Marxist theory and also nurtured a large number of female working cadres. Xiang Jingyu also directly led the Shanghai Silk factory women workers union strike and Nanyang tobacco factory workers union strike, respectively. The two strikes broke a temporary low tide in the workers movement following the “7 February” massacre¹. This resulted in enhancing class consciousness among women workers and in making an enormous contribution in promoting

¹ The “Jinghan Railway Workers’ Strike” is a famous struggle in the history of labour movement in China. On February 7, the workers on strike were beaten up violently. In the violent suppression of the striking workers, 52 workers were killed. [*Translator’s note*]

and developing women's and worker's movement.

On International Women's day in 1939, Mao Zedong called out in Ye'nan: "One must learn from the model women leader and Communist Party member – Xiang Jingyu, who sacrificed her life during the great revolutionary era. Throughout her life, Jingyu struggled for the cause of women's liberation, emancipation of workers and for the cause of Communism."

One would die sooner or later, but death should come in the most clear and vehement way

On 20th of March 1928, Xiang Jingyu, betrayed by a traitor got arrested and was kept in a French settlement prison. Xiang Jingyu had already decided to die. In prison, the enemy used all means but was not successful in getting out any secret of the Party from her. She relentlessly kept repeating: "I would die for the Party's; there is no higher honour than that!" Since she was a beloved leader of the workers and she exerted a deep influence on the masses, therefore the reactionaries chose International Labour Day to execute Xiang Jingyu. They wanted to "make an example of her." On her way to the execution ground, she kept singing the song *The International* to the onlookers, and kept raising slogans. The enemy hurriedly put stones inside her mouth and forced a belt around her cheeks.



Image: TV drama Xiang Jingyu
Source: line.17qq.com

On 1st May 1928, Xiang Jingyu was executed at the *Yu Jili Kongping* Execution Ground. Before dying, she left her last testament which read: "human beings must value their life, and when one reaches the stage one is unable to value it, then one must bravely sacrifice one's life. Sooner or later one will die, but death should come in the most clear and vehement way."

Poet Yang Yazhi, composed a poem with a heavy heart to express his sorrow, "Brave words vehemently flow through the *Xangjiang* River, loving words entangle the *Zhejiang* River, *Han Gao* (name of a mountain in the northwest of Xiangyang, Hubei) is buried in blue blood with lasting pain, and it is difficult to ask the sea to adorn itself in red." When Cai Hexin heard the sad news, he wrote an article to grieve: "great Jingyu, brave Jingyu, you are not dead, you will never die. You are not just the lover of Hesen (name of her husband), you are the eternal lover of the proletariat class!"

Embracing genuine faith and upholding exciting spirit until death; this is the real portrayal of Xiang Jingyu. In a letter to her parents, she once said: “Why am I in so much hurry?” “True knowledge and true ability are the only promises, the only hope for the country, for the parents, siblings and for oneself?” “For this promise and hope I am ready to commit the crime of being not filial and unfriendly, if I have nothing to offer, how can I be at peace?” To sacrifice everything for the cause of the Party and for the ideals of Communism, for this “promise and hope,” including even one’s own life – this was the oath taken by Xiang Jingyu during her life and she lived by her oath all her life.



Image: Xiang Jingyu

Source: Zhihu.com

[Series editor: Hemant Adlakha]

The views expressed here are those of the original author and not necessarily of the translator or of the Institute of Chinese Studies

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