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# Her Power in War: Women's Mobilisation via Guangdong Women during the Sino-Japanese Conflict

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**Abstract:** As a local monthly magazine founded during the period of united front cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, Guangdong Woman has strong characteristics of the times. The rising influence of women provided both a favorable context and a strong driving force for their mobilisation by both the Kuomintang and the Communist Party during this period. By analyzing the background, content and social impact of this periodical, we can better understand the unique role of Guangdong women in the historical process during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the complexity and far-reaching impact of women's mobilisation, as well as the important role that women played in the destiny of the country and the nation.

**Keywords:** anti-Japanese war; women's mobilisation; Guangdong women; nationalist and communist parties

## 1. Introduction

With the awakening of women's consciousness in modern times, women have taken an increasingly active role in history, and their power should not be underestimated. During the period of Nationalist-Communist co-operation, the Communist Party of China (CPC), as the mainstay of the anti-Japanese war, made full use of her "power" and actively mobilised Guangdong women.

Women played a vital role in the War of Resistance against Japan, with the Guangdong women's movement forming a significant chapter in its history. Guangdong women supported the war by participating in production, rescuing the wounded, propagating the anti-Japanese cause and organising women's groups, etc. They responded positively to the call for extensive participation in the anti-Japanese national salvation movement and made important contributions to the war effort.

As an important propaganda tool for the women's movement at that time, the Guangdong Women's Monthly not only recorded the course of women's participation in the war of resistance, but also inspired more women to join the anti-Japanese war to save the country. Taking Guangdong Women as an example, this article analyses the role and contribution of Guangdong women in the Anti-Japanese War and explores the unique charm of "her" power.

## 2. Historical Background to Women's Mobilisation

### 2.1. Mobilising Guangdong Women in the Anti-Japanese War: Historical Context, Necessity, and Enabling Factors

#### 2.1.1. Guangdong during the Anti-Japanese War

During the Anti-Japanese War, Guangdong was of great strategic importance as an important battlefield in the national war of resistance. Under imperialist aggression and feudal oppression, it was imperative to mobilise the general public, including women, to

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resist the foreign enemy. Guangdong's unique geographical location near the South China Sea made it a frontline of the war of resistance and inspired women's determination to join the war of resistance. This, together with Guangdong's glorious revolutionary tradition and deep mass base, created favourable conditions for women's mobilisation.

#### 2.1.2. Imperialist Aggression and Feudal Oppression Made It Necessary to Mobilise Guangdong Women to Join the War Effort

After the July 7th Incident in 1937, Guangdong became one of the first regions to suffer Japanese aggression. The Japanese army committed widespread atrocities, including the use of bacteriological weapons and poison gas, causing immense suffering among the civilian population. According to the 4 November 1938 "Xinhua Daily" reported: "Hui-zhou Feiguling stationed more than 3000 enemy troops, daily looting, rape of women, urban and rural residents were spared. In the Danshui generation, captured more than 600 women, arbitrary rape and defilement, a little unsuccessful that is to be killed by gunfire. The cruelty of the situation, compared to other fallen areas have been." From this we can see that the women of Guangdong suffered greatly from the Japanese invasion. They not only lost their homes, but also faced threats to their lives. Against this background, the mobilisation of Guangdong women for the war was particularly necessary and urgent [1-3].

During the Japanese invasion, women workers and peasants were in a miserable situation. They suffered not only from imperialist national oppression but also from the long-term constraints and devastation caused by feudal forces. Guangdong women faced the plight of low economic, political and social status, unequal education, unequal education, restricted marriage, and limited employment opportunities, and were also forced to abide by the feudal rites of the three virtues and the superiority of men over women.

As oppression intensified, the resistance among Guangdong women also grew stronger, driven by a deepening awareness of national and social injustice. In the face of the brutal reality of the struggle, Guangdong women are full of national hatred and class hatred, driven by a strong sense of national duty and determination to defend their homeland.

#### 2.1.3. Geographical Location and Revolutionary Tradition as Favourable Factors for Mobilising Guangdong Women to Actively Fight the War

Strategically located in southern China near the South China Sea, Guangdong's geography made it a crucial frontline in both trade and conflict, which directly influenced the mobilisation of women. Since the Opium War, the rural economy has been overburdened under the oppression of imperialist powers and feudal warlords. Most of the men travelled overseas to make a living, and the women had to shoulder the heavy burden alone. They had to work as farmers and raise their families, and thus developed a character of hard labour, which fostered a deep resilience that prepared them to confront enemy aggression with strength and resolve.

The glorious revolutionary tradition is a unique human factor in mobilising Guangdong women to actively resist the war. As a window to the outside world, Guangdong women were exposed to Western democratic thinking at an early stage, and their democratic and revolutionary ideology is deeply rooted. Many early struggles of modern Chinese people against foreign imperialist aggression and feudal rule had roots in Guangdong. For example, during the Sanyuanli People's Struggle against the British in 1841, Liu, the wife of Lei Chengxing, who was only 24 years old, became the first woman in modern China to sacrifice her life in the fight against invasion. During the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, women comrades were actively involved in the planning work, such as transporting, liaising, covering up, raising money, sewing flags, and so on. The glorious revolutionary tradition of Guangdong women compelled them to join the resistance without hesitation when Japanese militarism invaded [2,4,5].

Imperialist aggression and feudal oppression made it inevitable to mobilise Guangdong women to join the war effort, while their unique geographical location and glorious revolutionary traditions provided favourable factors for mobilising Guangdong women to actively fight the war and contributed to the emancipation of their thinking, which strongly awakened their revolutionary consciousness [6].

## 2.2. *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Women's "She" Power*

The rise of "her" power was an important practice of Guangdong women's transition from silence to voice, while the emancipation of Guangdong women's thinking and the founding of groups and organisations were important symbols and manifestations of this. In this process, Guangdong women not only gained spiritual independence, but also showed unprecedented courage and determination in their actions, playing an important role in the war period.

### 2.2.1. "Conforming to the Trend of the Times": The Emancipation of Women's Thinking in Guangdong

After the Xinhai Revolution, the Guangdong women's political participation movement reached a climax, and the emergence of the first female provincial councillors in Guangdong marked a milestone in the struggle for women's political rights and a significant chapter in the history of China's women's movement. With the rise of the New Culture Movement and the introduction of Marxism during the May Fourth Movement, these new ideas and concepts had a great impact on Guangdong women [7,8]. At the same time, for the first time in China's history, mass activities were held in public to commemorate International Women's Day on the 8th of March, with proposals such as "advancing women's liberation from systemic economic inequality", "demanding women's right to labour", "equal right to education", "equal right to education", "women's suffrage", "abolition of prostitution", and other slogans closely related to women's daily lives. "Demand for women's labour rights", "equal education rights", "women's suffrage", "exclusion of concubinage and polygamy", "abolition of prostitution" and other slogans closely related to women's daily lives, strongly encouraging large numbers of women to participate in social and political action. These slogans greatly stimulated the participation of women and contributed greatly to the awakening of women's thinking and the progress of the women's movement, which also laid the ideological foundation for the founding of women's periodicals [3,6,9].

### 2.2.2. "Resistance to War and National Salvation Is the Responsibility of All Women": The Founding of Guangdong Women's Organisations

The aggression of Japanese imperialism and the oppression of feudalism, combined with growing awareness and social changes, gradually contributed to the awakening of liberation consciousness among Guangdong women, leading to a flourishing women's movement in the early years of the anti-Japanese resistance. With the strong conviction that "it is the responsibility of all women to resist war and save the country", women set up various women's groups and organisations. In 1937, the first Women's Joint Conference was held in Guangzhou to organise and carry out anti-Japanese salvation work. Under the favourable situation of the Nationalist-Communist Co-operation, in order to strengthen and expand the women's anti-Japanese united front, a female activist was appointed to prepare for the establishment of the Guangdong Province Women's Association for Resistance to the Enemy, to prepare for the establishment of Guangdong Province Women's Comrades' Association for Resistance to the Enemy. 1938, Guangdong Province Women's Comrades' Association for Resistance was formally established. In 1938, the Guangdong Provincial Women's Comrades' Association was formally established. The Association issued its founding declaration, which established the aim of "mobilising the people to participate in the war of national liberation". Through these organisations,

Guangdong women were greatly united and mobilised to support the front line materially and to support the front lines materially and boost morale among the people. They wrote war songs, published journals, organised lectures and other forms of activities to disseminate knowledge of the war to the public and to stimulate patriotic fervour [2,7,8].

### *2.3. Mobilisation for the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression in the Perspective of Guangdong Women*

As a local monthly magazine in Guangdong, Guangdong Women has, since its inception, taken on the mission of "taking the world as its own", and has used various forms of propaganda to mobilise support for the war effort.

#### *2.3.1. "Taking the World as My Own": The Birth of Guangdong Women*

In 1939, the Provincial Women's Committee of the New Movement founded the monthly magazine Guangdong Women in Qujiang, Guangdong Province, which was dedicated to cultural propaganda and the mobilisation of women to join the anti-Japanese cause [10].

The journal had as its central objective the mobilisation of women for the war. The "Editor's Room" in Volume 1, Issue 12, states: "It is the unwilling slaves of the whole country who support the Chinese war of resistance, and women are one of the main forces among them. At a time when the prospect of victory in the war of resistance is not far away, in order to carry out a wider women's mobilisation in the future, the journal should take up the responsibility of stepping up its propaganda work."

The editors and writers of Guangdong Women were members of the provincial New Movement Women's Committee and patriotic intellectuals, most of whom were highly educated women. These intellectual women, most of whom had received higher education and embraced progressive Western ideas, shouldered the historical responsibility of Chinese intellectuals to reform society and strengthen the nation and hoped that the Chinese nation would turn from weak to strong. At the same time, they deeply understood the significance of the women's liberation movement from a female point of view, and with their high cultural level, they propagated the idea of women's liberation and discussed women's issues through the press. In Volume 1, Issue 10 of 1940, Guangdong Women stated, "All contributions on women's issues, women's life, the status of the women's movement, opinions on the work of the women's movement, and introduction of women's academic knowledge are welcome." Guangdong Women became a bridge connecting women with the destiny of the country, and Guangdong women gradually transitioned from domestic roles to active participation in public life and became an important force in the war of resistance and national salvation.

#### *2.3.2. "Rich and Varied": Forms of Mobilisation of Guangdong Women*

As a women-focused periodical covering current affairs, Guangdong Women has a wide variety of columns. In the first period, there were only three columns: thesis, newsletter and literature, but since the 10th issue, there have been many new columns, such as women's work experience and mailboxes. In addition, there are also columns based on major social events or important festivals, such as the March 8 Women's Day special edition and the July 7 commemorative column. With the mobilisation of Guangdong women at its core, the magazine was integrated into the united front of the war, covered a wide range of topics and actively explored women's issues [11-13].

In Guangdong Women, a variety of narrative techniques are used to describe the women's groups in Guangdong Province, not only the background and environment of their lives, but also the current situation of the women's groups, presented with a strong narrative tone and analytical depth. For example, the article "Daughters of Gaoliang" uses employed a contrastive rhetorical technique, initially criticizing the women of Gaoliang for enduring feudal norms, and then praising those who broke free, first criticising the

women of Gaoliang for their willingness to live under feudal morality and endure pain, and then praising some of the women of Gaoliang for breaking away from the stifling life and putting on their backpacks to engage in social services. The words are sincere, trying to mobilise more women to join the war effort. In addition, the "Readers' Letters" section conveyed women's demands and helped to diversify the forms of women's mobilisation.

Drawing on contemporary theories of marriage, child-rearing, and education promoted by reform-minded elites during the war period, and adapting them to the specific needs of rural women in Guangdong, and taking into account the specific situation of rural women in the Guangdong area, Guangdong Women has developed a set of concepts and corresponding social activities that are relatively coherent as a whole.

### 3. Social Impact of "Her" Power

Reflecting the far-reaching social impact of the "she" force, the monthly magazine Guangdong Women has played an important role in promoting the anti-Japanese rescue and mobilisation movement and exploring the emancipation of rural women through this medium and platform.

#### 3.1. *The Guangdong Women's Campaign for Anti-Japanese Salvation Mobilisation*

Guangdong Women focuses on guiding women to develop correct concepts. Through the publication of enlightening articles and reports, the magazine stimulates the patriotic fervour of the women's community and their awareness of participation in the war. Most of its reports focus on women cadres with noble qualities and dedicated work attitudes, who cared for "everyone" and demonstrated qualities of resilience, leadership, and dedication that aligned with the demands of national resistance, and were played an indispensable role in supporting the resistance efforts. In the reports of Guangdong Women, women not only participated in rescue, propaganda and education at the front line, but also organised production support and material collection activities at the rear. These reports not only enhanced the social status of women, but also encouraged more women to participate in the war of resistance. It was through these vivid reports that Guangdong Women succeeded in transforming the patriotic fervour of women's groups into practical action, and injected a strong impetus into the anti-Japanese salvation movement.

In addition, by reporting on the heroic deeds of women in the war of resistance, Guangdong Women set an example of patriotic resistance and national salvation, and inspired more women to join the war of resistance. Focusing on propaganda and praising positive people and events, the coverage of women's figures was mostly in the form of praises. It acknowledged the contributions made by women's groups in social production and military construction, the advancement of typical women as individuals, as well as the promotion of women's political and social status, and promoted the mobilisation campaign for anti-Japanese resistance and salvation.

#### 3.2. *Guangdong Women Provides Avenues for the Exploration of Rural Women's Emancipation*

During the period of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Guangdong women's liberation movement was always closely integrated with the national liberation movement. The women's work of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party in Guangdong during the period of the all-out war of resistance, on the one hand, greatly contributed to the awakening of Guangdong women, and on the other hand, strongly supported the war of resistance against the Japanese in Guangdong [12].

Guangdong Women focuses on political mobilisation of women compatriots. In terms of propaganda and public opinion, the monthly magazine actively mobilised women to participate in the revolutionary struggle. In January 1941, when the discussion of "women going home" was still hot, Guangdong Women published Guohua's "On Wom-



en's Occupation" and Lei Jie's "On Women's Occupation in the War of Resistance", encouraging more women to take up occupations, broaden their horizons, and gain economic autonomy and independence.

As a public opinion propaganda tool for the mobilisation of women by the Kuomintang and the Communist Party during the war of resistance, *Guangdong Women* demonstrated the rise of women's "she" power in the context of the war of resistance in Guangdong. This not only had a profound social impact at the time, but also provided valuable experience and strategic insight for the post-war women's liberation movement in South China.

### 3.3. Expanding the Boundaries: Media as a Gendered Tool of Resistance

While *Guangdong Women* served as a propaganda outlet for both the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, its deeper significance lies in how it symbolically redefined women not as passive recipients of political directives but as proactive participants in national defense and reconstruction. The magazine functioned as more than a publication — it served as a platform where women's identities were constructed, contested, and channelled into collective action.

Articles often reframed traditional feminine virtues — diligence, sacrifice, motherhood — into instruments of national utility. Women were urged not only to sew military uniforms or cook for soldiers but to participate in "intelligent resistance", such as espionage support, public education, or logistical coordination. By doing so, *Guangdong Women* played a subtle but powerful role in shifting the discourse from "supportive wives" to "national comrades", legitimizing women's political presence in wartime society.

Moreover, the magazine reflected and reinforced the broader political messaging strategies of the time. It did not just showcase heroic individuals; it carefully curated exemplary figures in alignment with party values. This created a symbolic model for readers, elevating rural peasant women, revolutionary martyrs, and young female volunteers as role models. In doing so, *Guangdong Women* demonstrated the power of curated representation in shaping public sentiment and mobilising collective consciousness.

### 3.4. Class and Regional Dynamics in Women's Mobilisation

A critical aspect that deserves further attention is the intersection of gender and class in mobilisation narratives. While *Guangdong Women* often highlighted stories of rural resilience and patriotic commitment, the magazine's editorial board and key contributors were mainly urban, educated women — intellectual elites with access to resources and ideological training. This gap influenced not only the language used but also the scope of its reach [14,15].

Many rural women, while praised for their labor and sacrifice, lacked the literacy or leisure to read such publications. As a result, actual mobilisation among rural populations relied heavily on local oral culture, grassroots networks, and face-to-face organisational efforts. *Guangdong Women*, therefore, functioned as both a symbolic representation of national unity and a practical communication tool for the more educated urban women, creating a two-tiered communication structure — elite-driven written discourse alongside grassroots oral mobilisation — within the broader women's movement.

Geographically, although rooted in Guangdong, the messages and frameworks adopted by *Guangdong Women* were echoed in sister publications across other provinces, particularly in the southwest and central wartime rear areas. Its content helped standardise a nationwide women's mobilisation discourse, contributing to the later institutionalisation of women's work under the CCP after 1949.

## 4. Conclusion

As the longest-running and most influential women's periodical in Guangdong during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, *Guangdong Women* played an

indelible role in both the anti-Japanese mobilisation effort and the broader women's liberation movement. It not only reflected the spirit of the times, but also actively shaped it — transforming propaganda into practice and discourse into concrete mobilisation.

Through in-depth analysis of its historical context, content strategies, and social impact, this study demonstrates how Guangdong Women served as a multidimensional platform. It was simultaneously a propaganda tool, a record of female agency, and a medium for challenging traditional gender norms and redefining women's social roles during a time of national crisis. The magazine played a vital part in redefining women not just as caretakers or supporters, but as strategic actors in national survival — an important conceptual shift in modern Chinese history.

More broadly, the case of Guangdong Women reminds us that female mobilisation in wartime China was not a uniform process. It was shaped by geography, class, education, and ideology. These findings invite further exploration into how state power, gender discourse, and media institutions collaborated — and sometimes conflicted — in constructing modern Chinese womanhood.

In the contemporary era, when media once again plays a central role in shaping social participation, revisiting this "her power" of the 1930s and 40s offers not only historical insight but also strategic reflection. It underscores how communication tools can both amplify marginalised voices and serve state objectives, a dual role still highly relevant in today's digital society.

Future research could expand this study by comparing Guangdong Women to similar publications in other regions, or by analysing how post-war political shifts influenced the continuity or rupture of women's public roles. The story of Guangdong Women is not just a local media case — it is a chapter in the broader narrative of China's modernisation, gender politics, and the evolving definition of citizenship.

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