

EXCERPTS FROM "DESTROYING THE FAMILY"
By Han Yi (Pseudonym)

Introduction

Beginning around 1917, Chinese intellectuals began to engage each other in serious discussion and debate on culture, history, philosophy, and related subjects — all with an eye to the bigger problem of China's weakness and the possible solutions to that problem. This period of intellectual debate, labeled the "May Fourth Movement," lasted to around 1921.

The essay below was published in 1907, before the May Fourth Movement. It is an example of the intellectual ferment that had begun before the May Fourth period. The piece was published under the pseudonym Han Yi ("a member of the Han race"). The author may have been Liu Shipei, who (like Sun Yat-sen and others) favored a Han revolution to overthrow the Manchu Qing dynasty.

Selected Document Excerpts with Questions

From *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From 1600 Through the Twentieth Century*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufano, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 394-395. © 2000 Columbia University Press. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from "Destroying the Family"
By Han Yi (Pseudonym)

All of society's accomplishments depend on people to achieve, while the multiplication of the human race depends on men and women. Thus if we want to pursue a social revolution, we must start with a sexual revolution — just as if we want to reestablish the Chinese nation, expelling the Manchus is the first step to the accomplishment of other tasks. ... Yet, whenever we speak of the sexual revolution, the masses doubt and obstruct us, which gives rise to problems. In bringing up this matter then we absolutely must make a plan that gets to the root of the problem. What is this plan? It is to destroy the family.

The family is the origin of all evil. Because of the family, people become selfish. Because of the family, women are increasingly controlled by men. Because of the family, everything useless and harmful occurs (people now often say they are embroiled in family responsibilities while in fact they are all just making trouble for themselves, and so if there were no families, these trivial matters would instantly disappear). Because of the family, children — who belong to the world as a whole — are made the responsibility of a single woman (children should be raised publicly since they belong to the whole society, but with families the men always force the women to

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on
EXCERPTS FROM "DESTROYING THE FAMILY," BY HAN YI (PSEUDONYM)**

raise their children and use them to continue the ancestral sacrifices). These examples constitute irrefutable proof of the evils of the family. ...

Moreover, from now on in a universal commonwealth, everyone will act freely, never again will they live and die without contact with one another as in olden times. The doctrine of human equality allows for neither forcing women to maintain the family nor having servants to maintain it. The difficulties of life are rooted in the family. When land belongs to everyone and the borders between here and there are eradicated, then there will be no doubt that the "family" itself definitely should be abolished. As long as the family exists, then debauched men will imprison women in cages and force them to become their concubines and service their lust, or they will take the sons of others to be their own successors. If we abolish the family now, then such men will disappear. The destruction of the family will thus lead to the creation of public-minded people in place of selfish people, and men will have no way to oppress women. Therefore, to open the curtain on the social revolution, we must start with the destruction of the family.

Questions:

1. On what grounds does the author criticize the family? Are his criticisms justified? What counter-arguments does he not consider?
2. How do the author's ideals compare to those articulated in the Taiping movement's plans for the ideal society?
3. What problems does the author see with the status of women in the Chinese society of 1907? What solutions to those problems might there be, other than the solution that the author proposes?