Another perspective on women in China

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| Answer the following 2 questions:   1. What perspective does Xinran’s account of women in China convey? 2. How does it differ to the image of women that Mao wanted to convey? |

Source: http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat4/sub21/entry-4453.html

**Growing up with an Absent Mother in the Mao Era**

 In *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love*, Xinran wrote: As a child, I used to believe I was an orphan, because my mother gave me a life but had no time to love me, nor believed she should make any special effort to be with me. From the 1950s to the 1970s, most Chinese women like my mother closely followed the Communist Party's line concerning your "life order"” in other words, the political party came first, your motherland came second and helping others came third. Anyone who cared about their own family and children was considered a capitalist and could be punished---at the very least, you would be looked down upon by everyone, including your own family. So, exactly a month after I was born, I was sent away to live with my grandmothers, spending my time between Nanjing and Beijing. [Source: Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love by Xinran, The Guardian, April 24, 2011]

 I wasn't the only one; for millions of Chinese children growing up in that Red period, life was lived without our mothers. Their busy careers as "liberated women"---part of the victimization of the Cultural Revolution---kept them away from us. And then, when I grew up, I moved away to university and we were living in different cities, different time zones---and, finally, different countries. [Ibid]

 But I know how much I miss her, when I'm chatting to my family, writing---even when I'm on book tours around the world and in the night, I often dream of when I was a little girl. With one hand I hold the baby doll, which was taken from me by a female Red Guard on the first day the Cultural Revolution took place at my town; with the other hand I hold two of my mum's fingers. In the dream, she always wears the purple silk dress she had on in my first real-life memory of her, when I was five. [Ibid]

 My grandmother took me to a railway station to meet her there---she was on a business trip. "This is your mother: say 'Mama', not 'Auntie'," my grandmother told me, embarrassed. Wide-eyed and silent, I stared at the woman in the purple dress. Her eyes filled with tears, but she forced her face into a sad, tired smile. My grandmother did not prompt me again; the two women stood frozen...This particular memory has haunted me again and again. I felt the pain of it most keenly after I became a mother myself and experienced the atavistic, inescapable bond between a mother and her child. What could my mother have said, faced with a daughter who was calling her "Auntie" [Ibid]

**Xinran and Messages from an Unknown Chinese Mother**

 Lesley Downer wrote in the New York Times: “Xinran was a radio journalist in Nanjing until moving to Britain in 1997. Before her departure, her program for women, “Words on the Night Breeze," had millions of listeners: at that time, few Chinese owned televisions and many were illiterate, so radio journalists reached far more people than their colleagues on television or at newspapers. Xinran received hundreds of letters and phone calls, and told some of her correspondents’ harrowing stories on air.

 Her program---and her 2010 book *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love*“gave a voice to some of the poorest women in Chinese society, whose stories would otherwise never be heard. Among them are women like Kumei, a dishwasher who twice tried to kill herself because she'd been forced to drown her baby daughters. When a child is born, Kumei explains, the midwife prepares a bowl of warm water---called Killing Trouble water, for drowning the child if it's a girl, or Watering the Roots bath, for washing him if it's a boy.

 Xinran also investigates Chinese orphanages, for many of which the word “Dickensian” would be totally inadequate. The children abandoned there are almost always girls, and they regularly arrive with burns between their legs, marks made as the midwife holds the newborn under an oil lamp to check her sex. Mothers forced to abandon their babies often leave mementos in their clothing, hoping the children will be able to trace them later on, but the orphanages routinely throw these sad tokens away.

 Separated from her mother by the Cultural Revolution, Xinran grew up with her grandparents and considered herself an orphan. Years later, she founded a charity called the Mothers’ Bridge of Love for Western families who adopt Chinese children. Downer wrote *Message From an Unknown Chinese Mother*is full of heart-rending tales. “They are raw and shocking, simply told and augmented with passages that provide information about matters like the one-child policy, the history of orphanages and Chinese adoption laws."

 Book:*Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love*by Xinran, translated by Nicky Harman Scribner in the U.S., Chatto and Windus on the U.K., 2010