

Defy(N)ing Modernity: Women in Shanghai's Early News-Media (1872-1915)*

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Modern? New? ...

What does it mean?

It is the wish to get rid of the old (欲革其舊).

“新說” (On the new), *Shenbao* 申報 6.2.1897

Modernity?

The old is dying and the new cannot be born.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), *Letters from Prison*

Much ink has been spilled over a definition of the term “modernity.” In China, this term came into self-conscious prominence in the late 19th and early

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20th centuries, a time-period that witnessed an unprecedented and dramatic increase in the use of the term “new” in Chinese writings. Suddenly, then, the novel, the unheard-of, scored major goals: Chinese began to read “new papers *xinbao* 新報,” they would dress in “new cloth *xinbu* 新布,” they would train “new armies *xinjun* 新軍,” and develop “new education *xinxue* 新學,” they would pose as “new citizens *xinmin* 新民” and write “new poetry *xinshi* 新詩” in order to facilitate—the ultimate grand goal—the formation of a “new culture *xin wenhua* 新文化.” The prevalence of this term during the last decades of the Qing-Dynasty shows the urgency to “reinvent postures of rhetoric,” and to produce something “recognizably new.”¹

In many ways, the debates about the value of newness, or modernity for China echoed centuries of European discussions on the value of the ancient vis-à-vis the modern. The idea of modernity (from Latin “modo: just now”) implies both a radical criticism of the past and a definite commitment to change and the values of the future. The story of European modernity is therefore

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- 1 David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor. Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford, 1997), p. 5. By providing a close reading of the Shanghai newsmedia in the waning years of the Qing, this essay offers one more small facet to an extensive and constantly growing body of scholarship on the particularities of China’s modernity and, in particular, the function of treaty port cities such as Shanghai in its formation. A few of the more recent titles be mentioned: Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); Li Hsiao-t’i 李孝悌, *Lianlian hongchen: Zhongguo de chengshi, yuwang yu shenghuo* 戀戀紅塵：中國的城市欲望與生活 (Love of this World: City, Life and Desire in China) (Taipei, 2002); Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937* (Stanford, 1995); Lu Han-chao, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, 1999); Luo Suwen 羅蘇文, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui* 女性與近代中國社會 (Women and modern Chinese society) (Shanghai, 1996); *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick (Honolulu, 2000); Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xixue dongjian yu wan Qing shehui* 西學東漸與晚清社會 (The dissemination of Western learning and late Qing society) (Shanghai, 1995).

deeply polemical. To be modern is to shock and not to be accepted.² The modern is always the opposite, the contrary: it articulates a sense of difference.³ Adherents of modernity are committed to otherness and change, their entire strategy is shaped by an “antitraditional tradition.”⁴ They are confident in the final victory of time and immanence over traditions that try to appear as eternal, immutable, and transcendently determined.⁵ In their definition, modernity is transitory, fugitive, contingent. It is constantly subject to renewal, it marks out shifting ground.⁶

In China what was “new” had been discredited for millenia. It was despicable in its negation of venerated classic ideas, passed down from the great sages. There was, therefore, initially, great opposition in China—perhaps more than there had been in Europe—to accepting that what was new was also to be better. Only the desperate situation in which China found herself in the last decades of the nineteenth century, under pressure both from within and from without,⁷ meant that several *xinpai* 新派, modernists of different colours and convictions, became an increasingly powerful voice in the debate over China's future.

As modernity thus became a spiritual adventure for China,⁸ woman became its most powerful symbol. Woman came to stand for all that was weak

2 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham, 1987), pp. 95, 68-69, 40.

3 Briony Fer, “Introduction.” In *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Francis Frascina et. al (New Haven, 1993), pp. 3-49, 8 argues that modernity is created from this sense of difference, or put differently, that the modern is in itself a form of difference.

4 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 66. Cf. also William Eadie, *Movements of Modernity. The Case of Glasgow and Art Nouveau* (London, 1990), p. 5 cited in full below in n12.

5 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 95.

6 Cf. Briony Fer, “Introduction.” In *Modernity and Modernism* (q.v.), p. 10.

7 For a particularly interesting description of these pressures see James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

8 See Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, p. 54.

and “wrong with China,” and at the same time woman was seen as the locus of social change, as the embodiment of what “modernity” could mean for China.⁹ It was argued that the impending doom for China as a nation could only be averted by a change in the situation of women. In an attempt to recover China’s position as one of the “civilized countries” of the world, a position that was seen to have been endangered by the fact that China did not educate her women and instead adhered to “barbarian practices” such as footbinding and concubinage, women’s issues became the focus of major public debates.¹⁰ Teaching the mother of China’s future citizens (*guomin zhi mu* 國民之母), and opening the doors to public activity for her, were declared to be some of the most urgent national issues. The overt discourse on women was a covert discourse on saving China’s national independence and international equality.

Debates on the position of women found their focus in magazines and newspapers, new media imported from foreign countries that had taken roots in China during the course of the nineteenth century.¹¹ In the following discussion

- 9 Much has been written on the question of Chinese women and modernity recently. Most relevant in this context are Rey Chow, *Women and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between East and West* (Minnesota, 1991), here, esp. 39; Ying Hu, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899–1918* (Stanford, 2000); Lee, *Shanghai Modern*; and, most thoroughly, Luo Suwen, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui*.
- 10 For the self-conscious remarks in the early print media on foreign views of China’s treatment of women see e.g. “述西人論中國貴男賤女之俗” (Westerners discussing the Chinese practice of considering men more worthy than women), *SB* 17.4.1882. This editorial warns that China, because of the country’s abominable treatment of women, has already become a laughingstock to foreigners.
- 11 The seminal works on the establishment of these media in China are still Ge Gongzhen 戈公振, *Zhongguo baoxueshi* 中國報學史 (A history of newspapers in China) (Shanghai, 1928), Reprinted—Shanghai (*Minguo congshu* 民國叢書 2, no. 49) 1990; and Roswell S. Britton, *The Chinese Periodical Press (1800–1912)* (Shanghai, 1933). Recently, a plethora of publications have appeared. To mention just a few: Fang Hanqi 方漢奇, *Zhongguo jindai baokanshi* 中國近代報刊史 (History of newspapers in modern China), 2 vols. Taiyang, 1981; Xu Zaiping 徐載平 and Xu Ruifang 徐瑞芳, *Qingmo sishinian*

I will therefore concentrate on depictions of women in the newsmedia of Shanghai—pictorials, women's magazines and newspapers—in their graphic, editorial, reporting or advertising output, in an attempt to illustrate how women became both the agent and the symbol of modernity in China. I will show that the portrayal of “new women” had the power to shock: they violated earlier norms of space, class, and time. Simply by appearing on the pages of the public media, and in spite of the fact that in many ways these images were the continuation of more or less traditional norms, and obviously subject of contested discourses, these portrayals called for a “disruptive renewal of perception.”¹² I will argue, therefore, that the fate of women in the media discourse of the last years of the 19th and the first years of the 20th century was marked by the very opportunities as well as oppositions, contradictions and ambiguities so characteristic of modernity.¹³

“*Shenbao*” *shiliao* 清末四十年申報史料 (Materials on the *Shenbao* in the last forty years of the Qing), Beijing, 1988; Qin Shaode 秦紹德, *Shanghai jindai baokan shilun* 上海近代報刊史論 (On the history of the newspaper in modern Shanghai), Shanghai, 1993; Song Jun 宋軍, *Shenbao de xingshuai* 申報的興衰 (The rise and fall of the *Shenbao*), Shanghai, 1996; Ma Guangren 馬光仁, *Shanghai xinwen shi* 上海新聞史 (A history of newspapers in Shanghai) (Shanghai, 1996); Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: “Shibao” and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford, 1996); Natascha Vittinghoff, *Die Anfänge des Journalismus in China (1860-1911)* (Wiesbaden, 2002); Andrea Janku, *Nur leere Reden: Das Genre “Leitartikel” in der chinesischsprachigen Tagespresse Shanghais (1884-1907) und die Revolutionierung des “Weges der Rede”* (Wiesbaden, 2003); and my own *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in Shanghai's News-Media, 1872-1912* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), which contains a fuller discussion of women in chapter 4.

- 12 Eadie, *Movements of Modernity*, p. 5: “‘Modernism’ is usually understood as a distinctive mentality and range of activities fundamentally preoccupied with the disruptive renewal of perception in a society which engenders routinized experience.”
- 13 See Li Hsiao-t'i, *Lianlian hongchen*, chap. 3. Cf. also Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford, 1994), p. 120.

Depicting Women

As early as the 1880s already and ever more prominently since the turn of the century, women come into sight in pictorial magazines such as the *Dianshizhai huabao* 點石齋畫報, founded in April 1884, or the *Tuhua ribao* 圖畫日報, starting in 1909.¹⁴ Here, women are shown to appear at restaurants, in tea houses with entertainment, at horse races, at school or at public speeches. They are seen selling flowers, brooms, or jellied beancakes. And they are portrayed as the most typical travellers on rickshas, pushcarts or even bicycles.¹⁵ By thus depicting women in space and territory which was once almost exclusively male, these are shocking images of negation: they prescribe a new, a public role and function for women who were once characterized as *neiren* 內人, or “inside-persons” according to the *Rites of Zhou* (Zhouli 周禮). This idea—most prominently a marker of class, since only gentry families could and did make their *distinction* visible by rendering their women invisible—was reconfirmed in Neo-Confucian writings, and prominent in didactic literature for women throughout the ages.¹⁶ These pictorials therefore suggest that the view of the “proper place of respectable women changed from that of wives and mothers within the family to that of educated, informed, and active contributors to a wider society.”¹⁷ How radically different this view was from traditional

14 For a discussion of female images in the *Dianshi zhaihuabao*, see Burglind Jungmann, “Traditionelle Muster und westliche Einflüsse in der *Tien-shih-chai hua-pao*, untersucht am Beispiel der Darstellung von Europäerinnen und Amerikanerinnen,” M.A. thesis (University of Heidelberg, 1980).

15 Paola Zamperini, “But I Never Learned to Waltz: The ‘Real’ and Imagined Education of a Courtesan in the Late Qing,” *Nannü* 1, no. 1 (1999):107-144 reproduces one of the bicycle pictures from the *Tuhua ribao*.

16 See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters. Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley, 1993), esp. 25 and Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, 1997), passim.

17 Charlotte Beahan, “The Women’s Movement and Nationalism in Late Ch’ing,” Ph.D.

attitudes towards women, is made particularly explicit in one picture in the *Tuhua ribao* which shows three women, the woman of the past, a *neiren* (inside person) in the house behind the lowered curtains bashfully peeping out, the woman of the present, taking a ride in a ricksha, and the woman of the future, strolling out on the streets, unashamedly talking to the man at her side (ill. 1, *THRB* 1909 10/9: "Past, Present and Future of the Female World"). Another such "evolutionary" image portrays the women of the past curtsying each other, the women of the present reading a newspaper together and the women of the future going out to serve in the army (ill. 2, *THRB* 1909 12/9: "Changing Customs in the Women's World").

In both these illustrations, the juxtaposition of women from the past and present makes explicit the radical opposition, the sense of difference that makes and breaks modernity. The inclusion of women of the future in the threesomes, on the other hand, illustrates modernity's ever-transitory nature. In the rhetoric of change that is modernity, these images of "new women" who read the newspapers and take rickshas, who aspire to discuss with men in public and join the army just like men, impersonate a radical break with a negated and ridiculed past that confined them to curtsies at home, a past that must—obviously—be gotten rid of. These women are, quite openly, presented as positive role models. For as a whole, these threesomes are testimony to the modernist belief in evolution, the eventual victory of time: the women of the future depicted here are the women to be.

Discussing Women

And yet, such images would not be true images of radical modernity did they appear uncontested: quite a number of editorials published in reputedly the

most successful daily of the late Qing, the Shanghai newspaper *Shenbao* 申報, founded in 1872 by British tea merchant Ernest Major (美查, 1841–1908), discuss the disadvantages as well as the advantages of allowing female presence in public.¹⁸ In an article of January 1873, the editorialist complains bitterly about an uncouth habit that has apparently become fashionable in and around Shanghai: sociable meetings between men and women.¹⁹ He begins with a quote from “the ancients” who stated that contact between man and woman had never been intimate and that there were numerous and strict rituals and rules regulating their contact. The author complains that contrary to this ancient knowledge, men and women in Shanghai spend entire nights together, sitting so closely to each other that one was no longer able to distinguish their shapes one from another. One could even forget that one was a man, the other a woman. The editorialist grumbles that this type of behaviour would result in disastrous effects such as women starting to use bad language. He warns of a continuation of this practice: it could be detrimental to the well-being of the entire people and the country. This complaint is echoed in a commentary published about a month later, in February 1873, and entitled “A man shamed by a woman” (“男遭婦辱,” *SB* 19.2.1873). It begins: “Between ruler and minister there is propriety, between father and son there is love, between husband and wife there is obedience, and these are what are called the Three Bonds.” But although the whole world might agree with these principles, the concessions in Shanghai are an exception: “Of ruler and minister, father and son, we won’t even speak, but

18 See e.g. “虹口禮拜堂中國男女接親” (Chinese men and women meet in Hongkou church), *SB* 11.4.1873; “論禮別男女” (On the fact that the rites distinguish between men and women), *SB* 9.8.1878; “婦女不宜輕出閨門” (Women should not leave their boudoir frivolously), *SB* 21.8.1893; “男女分教合教平議” (Discussion on separate-sex-and coeducation), *SB* 22.6.1906; “兩女士權利之競爭” (Two ladies competing for their rights), *SB* 21.5.1912.

19 “嚴責趾頭風俗論” (On serious punishments for the habit of social intercourse), *SB* 21.1.1873.

as for the bond between husband and wife, it seems as if it, too, can be dispensed with completely." After this moralizing introduction, the writer reports a couple's quarrel he had observed in a teahouse the day before. Suddenly, the woman had slapped the man on the cheek. The author (as well as everyone else) was quite shocked at this unseemly, callous, indeed barbarous behavior. The report ends with a warning: China is doomed, for "this behavior of women indicates that the cart is already upset."

Similarly, in June 1884, an editorial "On banning women from opium dens and teahouses" ("煙館茶樓宜禁婦女說," *SB* 23.6.1884) warns of an increasing and accelerating loss of morals. The unmistakable sign of this is the loss of women's modesty and restraint: they now appear everywhere in public. The problem is difficult to deal with because of foreign jurisdiction in the concessions. However, differently from foreign men and women, so the editorialist argues, Chinese had never learned to interact in public. Therefore, it was to be scorned if Chinese women simply strolled on the streets like Western women.

These articles testify to the shock and consequently the opposition to the emergence of new women, now visible in public, as agents of modernity. The arguments proffered in these articles are reminders of traditional male fears of a catastrophe caused by women "let loose" (a phenomenon called *nūhuo* 女禍).²⁰ This traditional fear was enhanced by the fact that apparently—not just in the

20 For the making of this trope see Louise Edwards, "Representations of Women and Social Power in Eighteenth Century China: The Case of Wang Xifeng." *Late Imperial China* 14, no. 1 (1993): 34-59, esp. 36-37; and Emily M. Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women." In *Women in Chinese Society* *Women in Chinese Society*, Ed. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford, 1975), pp. 169-90. On *nūhuo* in the late Qing, see Beahan, "Women's Movement and Nationalism," pp. 72-73; Lin Yutang, "Feminist Thought in Ancient China." *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 1, no. 2 (1935): 127-50; and Roxane H. Witke, "Transformation of Attitudes Towards Women During the May Fourth Era of Modern China," Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1970), p. 227. Witke aptly calls it the "legacy of doubt about the moral stability of females."

portraits presented in illustrated magazines and newspapers—women in Shanghai, where the newsmedia I discuss flourished, were breaking free from old orders of behaviour.²¹ In contrast to the general situation of women elsewhere in China during the late Qing, a good part of the workforce in Shanghai was female: silk-factory workers, courtesans and entertainers, mission workers, servants and soldiers, but also bankers and journalists, nurses, and doctors.²² These adventurous new women, emblems of modernity, formed an antitraditional tradition which did not leave the editorial observer untouched. His responses hover between admiration and dismissal: what if all women renounced, and so defied, the old?

One important matter that contributed to opening up the world outside the house for women was the introduction of schooling. Foreign missionaries had first opened schools to female students in the middle of the 19th century.²³ The first Chinese school for women (the China Girl's Academy 中國女學堂), was founded in Shanghai in 1897 by revolutionary martyr Tan Sitong's (譚嗣同, 1865-1898) wife.²⁴ In a monthly assembly at this school, students had to debate

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- 21 For the historical situation in Shanghai, see Luo, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui*.
- 22 See e.g. Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford, 1986); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, 1997); Christian Henriot, *Belles de Shanghai: Prostitution et sexualité en Chine aux XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris, 1997); Han-chao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*; Margaret Chu, "Biographical Notes on Lady Xie Yao Zhilian," in *Zwischen Tradition und Revolution: Lebensentwürfe und Lebensvollzüge chinesischer Frauen an der Schwelle zur Moderne*, ed. Monika Übelhör (Marburg, 2001), pp. 218-222; Li Xiting 李西亭, "Minchu nüjizhe Liu Yunqin" 民初女記者劉韻琴 (Liu Yunqin, a female journalist in the early Republic), *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* 新聞研究資料 no. 41 (1988): 43-44 and Hu, *Tales of Translation*.
- 23 See Luo, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui*, pp. 113-67; Witke, "Transformation of Attitudes," p. 219; and the essays in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford, 1996); and *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, eds. Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe, and Lu Yongling (Ann Arbor, 2001).
- 24 Mary Rankin, "The Emergence of Women at the End of the Ch'ing: The Case of Ch'iu

a pre-assigned topic. Teaching the art of public speaking was a radical innovation in the training of young women who were traditionally hardly ever seen, let alone *heard* outside the confines of the home.²⁵ The ideal graduate of this school was prepared to become a public figure. Two more such schools opened in 1898 and 1899 but had to close in 1900 by imperial decree.²⁶ In 1902 the Shanghai Patriotic Girls' School 愛國女學校 was started by the Chinese Education Association. By July 1907, the *North China Herald* could report some 100 girls' schools in Shanghai alone.²⁷ With the official endorsement of girls' schools in 1907, the number of students rose exponentially, to reach several hundred thousands by the May Fourth Movement in the late 1910s, when even universities began to admit women.²⁸

By the 1910s, then, the figure of the girl student, one of the most important variations of the "new woman" had become commonplace especially in treaty-port cities such as Shanghai. And again, these modernizing developments were accompanied by a heated debate in the newsmedia about the need for women's education.²⁹ While most of the *Shenbao* editorials openly advocate

Chin," in *Women in Chinese Society*, eds. Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford, 1975), pp. 39-66.

25 See Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, 1997), p. 89.

26 Beahan, "Women's Movement and Nationalism," pp. 151, 327.

27 *NCH* 18.7.1907.

28 Relevant figures are given in Luo, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui*, pp. 131-132, 137, 156.

29 See e.g. "論女學" (On girls' schools), *SB* 30.3.1876; "論振興女學" (On supporting girls' schools), *SB* 20.1.1893; "論中國欲人人識字必先以婦女識字為始, 並推言婦女不讀書之害" (Discussing the fact that if one hopes for general literacy in China one must first make women literate and elaborating on the harm of not educating women), *SB* 17.1.1897; "申論中國婦女宜皆讀書識字之益, 並議中國宜設女學校開女科第頒女法律" (Extending the discussion on the fact that women ought all to be educated and literate and further suggesting that China ought to establish girls' schools, have women's state examinations and promulgate laws for women), *SB* 23.1.1897; "論中國宜廣設女學塾" (China ought to broaden its efforts to establish girls' schools), *SB* 30.4.1897; "興

women's education, they all tend to acknowledge, or later play with, traditional stereotypes and conceptions about women. While encouraging revolution and change, *Shenbao* editorials continuously reflect a certain uneasiness—fears, perhaps, again—about a possible reversal of gender roles. Paradoxically, however, these vague apprehensions, never articulated clearly in dailies such as the *Shenbao*, are openly performed exactly in those media specifically targeted toward women: women's magazines.

Addressing Women

One such women's magazine, the *Funü shibao* 婦女時報 (Women's Times), founded in 1911, argues that a woman may go to school, but that there, she should be trained for the things she would have to be doing during the greater part of her life, and those are the tasks of the family.³⁰ Her place is in the family and only by securing a proper family education (rather than by going out to work) can she help avoid that China should sink further into darkness and obscurity.³¹ This idea is repeated again and again, sometimes supported by a classical quotation from the *Great Learning* (大學 *Daxue*): 家齊而後國治 (If the family is in order then the country will be ruled perfectly).³² The magazine also argues that if women are too concerned with education, they tend to go well past their marriageable age, and even after their marriage, they will neglect the household and the education of the children and all that is important in

女學說” (On the establishment of girls' schools), *SB* 12.10. 1903. All of these articles are discussed in chapter 4 of Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?* See also Natascha Vittinghoff, “Diskurs und Geschichte: Frauen in der Öffentlichkeit in Chinas langem 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Zwischen Tradition und Revolution* (q.v.), pp. 11-45.

30 See e.g. “女子之學問與時代之要求” (A woman's knowledge and the needs of the time), *FNSB* 1911 vol.2.

31 “家庭教育論” (On family education), *FNSB* 1911 vol. 1.

32 E.g. “家政根於教育說” (Family management is rooted in education), *FNSB* 1911 vol. 2.

household management, only in order to continue their studies.³³

One author relates the story of a girl in his village who had been a very good student. After her marriage to a high official, she would get up in the morning and, without combing or washing, sit down with her books. The window paper would be torn, the furniture dusty, and all the while she would be studying. She had no idea about thriftiness and economizing and therefore, even though her husband was earning a lot of money, they fell into poverty within a few years. Soon, they both died, with no reputation to their names. The author concludes that women really ought to take care of their household first and thus complement what men do.³⁴

Quite clearly, according to the *Funü shibao*, not every type of education benefits a woman. We can see how at a time when the girl student is no longer just fiction but has become a tangible reality in Shanghai and many of the other bigger cities in China, she is immediately circumscribed and restricted by the discourse in women's magazines. A new type of misogyny appears here, directed against this new figure—the modern woman—who, in her very modernity, negates all that has been before. It is misogyny in modern attire—one article on female psychology, for example, finds scientific explanations for each negative traditional stereotype ever ascribed to women³⁵—but at the same time, it is misogyny based on rather traditional ideas of a woman's proper place inside the house (the *neiren* 內人 concept), too. The transitory quality of modernity is apparent in these articles, then: woman as the locus of change is assigned a complex role, combining simultaneously elements from the past, the present and the future.

This becomes blatantly evident in another story from the *Funü shibao*,

33 “女子之學問與時代之要求” (A woman's knowledge and the needs of the time), *FNSB* 1911 vol.2.

34 Ibid.

35 “婦女心理學” (Female psychology), *FNSB* 1911 vol. 4.

entitled “The ideal new family.”³⁶ This article is constructed in two parts, a shorter introductory frame and a longer story. The two parts function as mirror images of each other. They illustrate the figure of an ideal girl student once in negation and once in glorification. In the first part, the author receives a visitor who begins asking a number of polite questions about his family. When the visitor enquires “Where did your mother study?” the answer is: “She did not study, she was just a regular girl, with no education, from a village family.” Suddenly, the visitor appears rather angry, slaps on the table and shouts: “I knew it: girls’ schools are simply harmful.”

Greatly surprised, the author asks for the reason for this outbreak and while the visitor is at first reluctant to tell, he finally comes around to relating his own story. The year before, he had married an educated girl. Being the head of a girls’ school, he had expected to continue to run the school together with his wife. But unexpectedly, after the marriage, his wife did not want to carry on with the school. She even told her husband that he ought not to waste his money in managing the “useless girls’ school.” Days went by and they fought and disagreed and their love diminished ever more. Moreover, his wife loved to dress up and spend money on clothes. She would go out frequently and sometimes she would not come back even at night. And she would use bad language all the time and bicker so that there was never peace for her poor husband. When he finishes his story, his face is ashen.

The author is perplexed and tries to console his visitor. But he retorts: “If this is what girls’ schools lead to, how would I not be crying?” The author argues that girls’ schools today should have no other aim than creating “wise mothers and good wives” (*xianqi liangmu* 賢妻良母). But, so he admits, many a school is worried about enrolments, and therefore, they use all kinds of modern methods and tricks as baits and incentives to attract students. Unconsoled, the

36 “理想中之新家庭”(The ideal new family), *FNSB* 1911 vol. 4.

visitor eventually leaves and the author, as if to exorcise the experience, turns to writing a utopian story about an ideal household and an ideal girl student.

This frame-story with its negative image of the girl student who is selfish enough to consider her own education important but not that of others, who does not care about the concerns of her husband and instead talks back at him all the time or who simply escapes him, roaming about outside, spending his money,³⁷ takes up on a number of traditional concerns about women: they are supposed to be filial and devoted to their husband and parents-in-law, not selfish; they are supposed to remain in the house and keep the household in order; and they are supposed to hold a stiff hand over the family's finances. Traditionally, however, women have been said to be prone to break all of these rules. In spite of her education—and unlike the author's mother, the woman from the past who was able to keep the household harmoniously as a good woman should—the “modern” girl student here described is one such woman, who commits all these “traditional” faults.

In the utopian story which follows, we encounter the image of an ideal new woman in sharp contrast. The story is set in an idyllic scenario: a “place like heaven: 左山右水然景也,” where dogs and chicken could be heard—a hackneyed image—from the neighbouring village. The place is described as *taoyuan* 桃源, a Chinese paradise, and likened to a dream. The story then zooms in on a building in the south of the village: it is a primary school in which—here we have a first reminder of the 20th century—boys and girls are coeducated.³⁸

37 Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, pp. 123-124 shows that this complaint about the “mediocrity and fickleness of female taste” and of their position as “integral to the culture of consumption” is not restricted to China. See also “論貴族婦女有革除妝飾奢侈之責” (On the fact that rich girls have a responsibility in getting rid of extravagant adornments), *FNSB* 1911 vol. 4, which deals with female spendthrifts.

38 Coeducation remained one of the most controversial subjects throughout the period discussed here. As late as 1906, one particularly outspoken article condemned it as immoral and therefore dangerous for the future of China. See “男女分教合教平議” (Discussion on separate-sex and coeducation), *SB* 22.6.1906, also discussed in Mittler, *A*

Hearing the peaceful sounds from this school, the voices of children reading, singing, dancing, “one forgets to return home” as the narrator asserts in another traditional phrase. Another zoom and we are seeing the head of the school: a woman, but an incredible scholar, beautiful and good as a bodhisatva, too. Predictably, perhaps, in this traditional paradisaical setting, this smart and graceful woman could have stepped right out of Chinese fiction, a scholar and beauty romance in particular (*caizi jiaren xiaoshuo* 才子佳人小說). She is both modern, but at the same time stereotypically traditional *jiaren* 佳人, and she is married to a worthy talented man, a veritable *caizi* 才子. He is the top graduate from a military academy (another reminder of the twentieth century), who cares for the country’s affairs, and—working for his nation’s benefit—is away from home quite often.

The setting is complete: we have been introduced to the place of action, described in clichéd traditional terms as a paradise and the two major protagonists, again portrayed in clichéd phrases as two most admirable people. Now, the story unfolds: a day is described when the beautiful woman receives a letter which turns out to be a love-letter from her husband. In reading the letter, she is described in traditional terms of propriety as bashful, blushing in happiness. The letter contains news that her husband is about to return home. She keeps this news to herself, but in the days before he is due to return, she is restless. Sometimes she strikes her zither, the 7-stringed *guqin* 古琴, the instrument of the literati, and sings a song. And while people admire her musical skills, they do not know her true emotions.

By use of this *guqin*-motif, the woman is depicted as an accomplished female literata who puts her emotions into music. Nobody among the people in the village, however, is her *zhiyin* 知音, her bosom friend, who understands these emotions through her music—only her husband, whom she obviously

married out of love and, more importantly, her own free will—once more, a modern trait in the story—seems to be capable of this. The *guqin*-motif serves two purposes: it characterizes the woman in her exceptional (traditional!) talents and the nature of her relationship to her husband. At the same time, it also causes a retardation in the storyline. The aside on her *guqin*-play delays the entrance of her husband, which is now expected with suspense not just by the woman but by the reader as well.

Finally, the husband returns, and the story-teller records the couple's conversation: he is tired, not hungry, and immediately, she is concerned about his health, indeed his life. He tells her not to worry, goes to bed and wakes up with a fever. She becomes ever more anxious, while he instructs her what medicine to boil for him. Having taken the medicine he goes back to sleep, while she stays awake all night. The next morning, he wakes up, sees her still awake, and admonishes her to go to sleep immediately: not to sleep a full night is unhygienic, or rather, as he puts it in hybrid terms, not "the proper way (the *dao* 道) of hygiene" (一夜不合眼大非衛生之道). In this part of the story, the husband is described in a mixture of old and new terms, he knows about medicine as a Confucian scholar would and he knows about hygiene as a well-educated "new man" should. His wife, the "new woman," on the other hand, is depicted in terms well familiar from traditional lore: she is overly emotional and frightened, and always in need of instruction.

The story continues: her husband gets up and walks over to the window. He opens it, breathes in the fragrant village air and marvels at the idyllic environment, immediately feeling stronger and better. Of course, his wife does not go to bed. Instead, she combs her hair and then goes to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Meanwhile, her husband unpacks a number of new books, gifts for her: "I only have this for you, I completely forgot about clothes and accessories," he says. Pretending a rage, the wife replies: "Who do you think I am?" and inspects the books, one by one. They turn out to be the most recent

publications on household management, and kindergarden teaching methods, as well as children's psychology. She thanks her husband: "Now I can increase my knowledge of new things."

In this section of the story, we are provided with yet another set of clichéd images contained in the toolbox for creating the fair-sexed ideal of the "new woman": she cares about her appearance, combing her hair, but she is, of course, not obsessed with herself, because it is only in jest that she would insist on being presented with new clothes and make-up by her husband. Moreover, she is interested in learning "new things" but almost exclusively those appropriate for women: such as child-care and household management. Clearly, this "traditional" girl student commits no "modern" faults.³⁹

After breakfast the couple go out together to visit some of the villagers. They teach everyone that the family is the basis of the society and the country: if the family is happy and well, the country will be so, too (they have memorized their *Great Learning* well). The article then concludes, describing the couple and their village as *xixi haohao* 熙熙皞皞,⁴⁰ a classical phrase

39 For a number of illustrations of such specific literature for women, see the cover images in Luo, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui*. A similar example from Republican times (from 1929) which illustrates the perpetuation of the trend, is given in Susan Glosser, "The Truths I Have Learned': Nationalism, Family Reform, and Male Identity in China's New Culture Movement, 1915-1923," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, eds. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley 2002), pp. 120-148, 136.

40 The locus classicus for *xixi* 熙熙 is *Laozi* 20 (People are happy and contented, just like when they are enjoying the sacrificial feast of the ox). The term is used similarly in the *Shiji* (in the chapter on "Money Makers" *Huozhi liezhuan* 貨殖列傳) for an orderly empire in which the people are happy because benefits arrive, uncountable in number. *Haohao* 皞皞 first appears in *Mencius* 7A13, which establishes the figure of the ideal ruler. Accordingly, *haohao* is used as a topos when depicting a people living in happiness under such a ruler. The use of such classical phrases, allusions to or even full citations from the Classics is to be observed frequently in the Shanghai newsmedia even into Republican times. See chap. 2 in Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?*

depicting happy life under a perfect ruler. It ends with the hope that this utopia will soon become reality.

The family ideal advocated here is, shockingly new: it is that of the small conjugal family (*xiao jiating* 小家庭), defined by its sense of negation of the traditional joint family (*da jiating* 大家庭). Husband and wife live removed from each of their original families (not mentioned even once throughout the story).⁴¹ This conjugal family is based not on an arranged marriage but on a love-relationship—a fact that is highlighted particularly through the *guqin* motif. Their marriage is an alliance between two individuals based on equality between the sexes. Husband and wife are bound to each other in a monogamous union. Each for himself—the husband in the army academy and the wife in the village school—are responsible for the economic upkeep of their family. Each for herself, they continue to pursue their profession after marriage, and obviously, they live in the spirit of mutual cooperation.⁴² This family, then, is defined by opposition to everything the traditional joint family (*da jiating*) stood for: arranged marriage, polygamy, patriarchy and economic dependence of wives on their husbands. The ideal family portrayed here is a modern family, indeed. Yet, in the argumentation proffered in the last paragraphs of the story, it becomes apparent that this idealized family is, first and foremost, the primary unit whose prosperity will ensure the prosperity and success of the nation-state. In this way, although opposed through rhetoric, in its ultimate aim and purpose, this idealized *xiao jiating* is closely related to and an apparent continuation of the old joint family whose significance to the state was once authoritatively

41 A thorough theoretical and historical discussion of the genesis and importance of the *xiao jiating* in modern China is Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley, 2003).

42 The preceding description follows the definition of a *xiao jiating* given in the article “An opinion on the marriage problem” published in the journal *Family Research* 家庭研究 *Jiating yanjiu* vol. 1, no. 4 (1921): 46 as cited in Glosser, “‘The Truths I Have Learned’,” pp. 131-132.

formulated in the *Great Learning*. Thus, the writer of this article (and many of his/her colleagues at women's magazines of the time) already advocated the ideal of the *xiao jiating* if not in name, predating theorists of the Republican era by almost a decade when, in journals such as *Family Research* (Jiating yanjiu 家庭研究), founded in August 1920, this family ideal would become the central point of discussion. And these later advocates of the *xiao jiating*, in the same way as the writer of the *Funü shibao* a decade earlier, also continued to believe in the central importance of marriage and family to the social and political order of China.⁴³

While it is clear that the second part of the article is out to draw an idealized picture, a utopia, an unattained future, and therefore resorts to descriptions of a paradisaical setting and heroic characters, the ideal *xiao jiating* described is not all dream and imagination, but contains enough realistic stuff to be taken very seriously by contemporary readers. In the first decades of the twentieth century, teaching in primary schools became one of the prime occupations for young women, for example.⁴⁴ The husband's nationalist inclinations and activities, and his choice to work at a military academy, are timely occupations, too.⁴⁵ The particular and gendered interests and knowledge of the husband-wife team, in household-planning or childcare and science and medicine, respectively, and based on foreign as well as Chinese sources, bear out some of the educational patterns developing in the first two decades of the 20th century.⁴⁶ And finally, the conjugal family described here—made up of

43 See Glosser, "'The Truths I Have Learned,'" p. 140.

44 See figures given in Luo, *Nüxing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui*, pp. 158-159 and 162-163.

45 See e.g. *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913*, ed. Mary C. Wright (New Haven, 1968).

46 See *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*; Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (London, 1995); Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley, 1999).

husband and wife whose relationship is one based on “free love” rather than arranged marriage—is an institution that found increasing (practical) support in the final years of the Qing, especially among urban youth.⁴⁷

The same mixture of fact and fantasy can also be observed in the dystopian description of the dismal present in the first part of the article. It presents a sad and disappointing story in all but exaggerated, indeed caricatured fashion, touching, nevertheless, on realist elements and experiences as well. The type of woman criticized here would come into greater prominence during the Republican period as well. She was the predecessor of what would later be called “grand lady” (*taitai* 太太)⁴⁸ in Republican-style discourse: these were women who were generally well-educated but still depended on their bourgeois husbands for a comfortable and consumerist life. Some of these women may not have chosen this life out of convenience alone, but partly because of (traditional) societal constraints that did not approve of women continuing to work after marriage. On the other hand, these women were criticized constantly for being only half-baked, or even “fake” (*wei* 偽) new women. The caricature presented in the first part of this article, of a lazy, indolent spendthrift, would remain an oft-cited figure in women's magazines of a later period, too.⁴⁹

47 See Jon L. Saari, *Legacies of Childhood: Growing up Chinese in a Time of Crisis, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); and *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*, eds. Bonnie McDougall and Anders Hansson (Leiden, 2002). The topic was discussed incessantly on the pages of the Shanghai newsmedia, too. See e.g. “新女界雜詠” (In praise of the new female world), *SB* 1.5.1912; “離婚之習俗” (The habit of divorcing), *SB* 8.5.1912; “自由女之新婚談” (On the new marriages of the ‘free girls’), *SB* 19.9.1912; “自由結婚” (Free-style marriage), *SB* 3.10.1912.

48 For this expression and its definition cf. Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, pp. 20 and 73, ft. 14.

49 The pocket-size illustrated women's magazine *Linglong* 玲瓏, for example, founded in Shanghai in 1932, was particularly outspoken in its criticisms of the *taitai*. See e.g. “新四德” (The new four virtues) *LL* vol. 24 (1931): 861; “新三從” (The new three followings) *LL* vol. 31 (1931): 1185-1186; “國事與新裝” (National affairs and new clothes) *LL* vol. 31 (1931): 1192; “怎樣才是新女性” (How to be a new woman after all),

The fantastic as well as the realistic elements in the two parts of this article all serve their purpose. Indeed, the article is constructed in marked didactic fashion: by presenting the New Woman first in negation and then in apotheosis, it contrasts a disillusion with an illusion for good effect. Significantly, the woman's own voice hardly appears in either part. It is the (male) voice-over of the author-cum-storyteller and of the husbands of the good and the bad wife which describes female qualities and which advises the implied reader what to do and how to act.⁵⁰ Here, woman is always the object, never the subject of change.

Significantly, the article again presents a simultaneity of past, present and future by discussing three women: the author's mother, from the past; the interlocutor's wife, from the present; and the ideal wife, from the future, thus highlighting, once more, the transitory nature of modernity. The amount of space allotted to each one of these women is significant: while the author's mother is only mentioned in a few lines, the story about the visitor's wife takes up several paragraphs, that about the ideal woman a good two thirds of the entire text. Obviously, it is the author's concern to promote the new woman of the future.

And yet, a clear break with tradition is nowhere apparent in this article: it

LL vol. 58 (1932): 339-342; “怎樣才是摩登女性” (How to be a new (modern) woman after all) *LL* vol. 62 (1932): 531-532; “新家庭與新婦女” (The new family and the new woman) *LL* vol. 269 (1937): 88-90; “新婦女的矛盾現象” (The new woman, a contradictory phenomenon) *LL* vol. 276 (1937): 648-650; and the discussion in Barbara Mittler, “In Spite of Gentility: (New) Women and (New) Men in *Linglong*, a 1930s Women's Magazine,” in *Perceptions of Gentility in Chinese Literature and History*, eds Daria Berg and Chloe Starr (ms.).

50 This mediating practice is also common in advertising for women's medicine as analysed below. Cf. also the observations for American soap-operas in the 1970s in Gaye Tuchman, “Introduction: The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media,” in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, eds. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene K. Daniels, and James Benét (New York, 1978), pp. 3-38, esp. 17.

does not promote the new woman as an antitraditional tradition. Otherwise, the woman from the past could not have come across as a positive figure: in spite of her lack of formal training, she ensured the happiness of family life, whereas the woman of the present, who has attained to a modern education, does not put it to proper use; and the aims of education for the woman of the future is conceptualized in terms that resonate with traditional ideas of womanhood. Both the woman from the future and the woman from the present appropriate new terms and developments, but both are also constructed through a number of rather clearcut traditional conceptions of female roles and characteristics. These women appear (in traditional terms) as potentially vulgar, capricious and unpredictable, they are seen to be rather simple and interested only in household and family, even if they are, by modern standards, accomplished scholars and independent workers themselves. As traditionally, women tend to be overly emotional and worry too much, they care about their appearance and are potential spendthrifts.

It appears, then, that in the context of women's magazines the "modern" figure of the girl student, potentially a shocking negation of traditional ideas, of women as inside persons, appears as always already negotiated. She may leave her house to go to school but only in order to come back and be a better housewife and mother. The figure of the girl student in its partial break with the past thus defines and defies idea of the "new woman." It thus incorporates both the opportunities as well as the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in modernity—not just elsewhere but in China, too.

Advertising Women

A similar observation can be made about the "new woman" to be met on the advertising pages of the Shanghai press. A great number of advertisements in the 1870s already deal with products for women "*funü* 婦女." This, however,

does not mean that the text is indeed targeted toward a female audience of new women. The rhetorical structure of such advertisements suggests otherwise. In “婦女第一” (The best women’s medicine, *SB* 30.4.1877), for instance, a husband is introduced telling the story of “my wife” (余婦), who had not become pregnant for more than ten years and only bore a son after special treatment with the advertised medicine. The different phases of her illness and treatment and her several consultations with the doctor are vividly described. But although her questions are not heard, the doctor always answers in direct speech. The text is a male-dominated monologue. The reader hears the voice of the woman mediated through her husband’s story and through the answers of the doctor. Female discourse appears, once more, domesticated in male words. This construction conveys a mirror-image of the situation of reception for this text: a woman may be “reading” the information through her husband’s reading it out aloud to her.

Indeed, many an ad during this time indicates that the “new woman” was not yet expected to read the advertisement addressed to her problems herself. This is the case in an advertisement for a pill against so-called white flow (a yeast infection) “神效白帶丸” (Magic pill against white flow, *SB* 26.5.1882), for example. It begins with an elaborate explanation of the significance of different days of a woman’s menstruation, warning that if menstruation is not regular or women start to have white flow, they are unable to produce children. The presentation of all of these facts and the wordy explanations suggest that the implied reader is one who has no personal experience with the bodily functions of a woman, a husband who is told how to recognize certain symptoms of an incapacitating disease in his wife and who is told what to do in case such symptoms appear. Here again, the discourse is male-dominated, the advertisement only appeals to the female addressee through the mediation of her husband or other male members of her family.

Around the turn of the century, however, the target of these advertisements

shifts: An advertisement appearing in 1902, entitled “古今第一婦科” (The best women's medicine of past and present, *SB* 23.5.1902) talks to “凡婦人望子者,” to “all the women who want to have children.” Women are here approached directly. As more and more frequently the texts mention or directly address “(all) you women,” ((凡) 婦女), the “new woman” thus addressed is now clearly one who reads the newspaper herself. An advertisement for “A pill for every month” (每月丸, *SB* 30.5.1907) talks of and thus to “someone who has such and such (=XXX) a disease or discomfort” (XXX 之人 L. 4/5) and advises that “someone” to take the advertised pill. Evidently, a man could never be the “someone” since the discomforts here described are specific to women: menstrual pain, blood-clotting, irregular menses and the like.⁵¹ This presentation no longer objectifies the different female ailments and explains them to the reader but rather personifies them by attributing them to the subjective implied reader. There is thus a definite and evident change in addressing women as readers in these advertisements especially after the turn of the century, a change which becomes ever more pronounced in the early teens: to be a modern woman meant to read a newspaper and especially the ads addressed to her.⁵²

51 The scientific presentation of the female sexual processes in these advertisements predates developments in the Republican Period that Dikötter's *Sex, Culture and Modernity* discusses. For a study of medical advertisements into the Republican period, see Huang Kewu 黄克武, “Cong *Shenbao* yiyao guanggao kan minchu Shanghai de yiliao wenhua yu shehui shenghuo” 從申報醫藥廣告看民初上海的醫療文化與社會生活 (Looking at Shanghai's society, culture, and medical situation through medical ads in the *Shenbao*). *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* vol. 17 (1988): 141-94; and Patrick Hess, “Anzeigen für westliche Heilmittel in der Shanghaier Tageszeitung *Shenbao*, 1872-1922,” M.A. thesis (University of Heidelberg, 1995).

52 This is not to say that all advertisements for women's medicine were now directly addressed to women. The advertisement for “Pink Pills for Pale People” (“余妻王氏” [My wife, Ms. Wang], *SB* 31.5.1912) reminds one immediately of the first advertisement introduced in this section, which was mediating a female voice through the voice of her husband (see above, *SB* 30.5.1877).

And yet again, this radical restructuring and denial of traditional gender roles—the consequence of women being directly addressed in advertisements so that they would go out and buy goods, thus becoming public women—was accompanied by an affirmation of these very roles. For the observed change in implied readership does not lead to a change in the implied values presented. The tenor of these advertisements was and remained to ensure the production of offspring. The switch in implied readerships thus only changed the interlocutor for these demands. The value-structure—although now presented directly to women—did not shift as a consequence. The ideological content of these advertisements was to remind women of their reproductive functions and to reduce their importance and responsibilities to the preservation of this very function. Very clearly in these ads, there is an equation between a woman's health and her "duty": the family.⁵³ This ideology is advocated in the advertisements both through rhetorical and through visual means: time and again, women appear holding or nursing their children.⁵⁴

An ambiguity of purpose can be observed, readerships are retooled but not values. Advertisements for female medication prescribe by implication not just

53 In 1912 (SB 16.5.1912), the Japanese medical tea 中將湯 (Chujoto) was advertised under the title "婦女之責任" (A woman's responsibility). The text reads: "Health is a treasure. Everybody's wife must always be searching for health." The text then turns to the implied reader, "all you women who desire health (欲期康健之婦女)": you "should not consider this lightly." It is through health alone that women could ensure household duties and the upbringing of their children, and all this was, after all a "woman's responsibility." Advertisements in the Commercial Press publication founded in 1915, the *Funü zazhi* (Women's magazine), too, advocated this demand. The advertisement in vol. 1, 1915 for "Pink pills for pale people," ("婦女疾病" [Women's maladies], *FNZZ* vol. 1 [1915]) for instance, reminds the implied reader that "the health of the (female) body is the happiness of the family."

54 "保赤靈丹," (A pill that preserves red blood particles), *SB* 17.5.1907, shows a woman with child; an ad for "Scott's Emulsion," ("產婦" [The lying-in woman], *SB* 3.5.1912), shows a nursing woman; the ad for Japanese medicinal tea Chujoto, *Funü zazhi*, vol. 2 (1915) again shows a woman with child.

any but a very specific ideal of the female reader: the mother of citizens. The new woman who breaks free from objectification and establishes herself as a reading subject of the newspaper around the turn of the century, is at the same time circumscribed by restrictions on the subject matter on the pages of the newspaper that is said to serve her interests. Thus, woman obviously is the locus of change in the late Qing, she acquires a qualitatively different presence on the pages of the Shanghai newsmedia. But she is tamed and domesticated as an agent of modernity: the spiritual adventure that modernity could entail for her is intercepted (though not necessarily against her will!).

Reporting Women

A similar shift from object to restricted subject can also be observed in depictions of women in the news reports of the Shanghai media: a first and sizeable group of news dealing with women are “records of bitterness.” They tell of the “苦 ku,” the bitter and miserable situation of women, of how they are assaulted (虐待 *nuedai*), kidnapped (拐 *guai*), or killed (被殺 *beisha*).⁵⁵ Cases of adultery (姦) also appear regularly.⁵⁶ In many of these early reports woman becomes the object of the (not always and necessarily male) gaze rather than a reading subject with whom the text will communicate. Women are talked about rather than talked to.

This is especially true for a news report such as “孕婦踏斃” (Pregnant woman trampled to death, *SB* 13.5.1882). The article relates a brutal happening

55 See e.g. *SB* 10.5.1872, *SB* 31.5.1872, *SB* 7.5.1877, *SB* 26.5.1877, *SB* 8.5.1882, *SB* 10.5.1882, *SB* 13.5.1882, *SB* 20.5.1882, *SB* 23.5.1882, *SB* 24.5.1882, *SB* 25.5.1882, *SB* 27.5.1882, *SB* 28.5.1882, *SB* 17.5.1892, *SB* 14.5.1902, *SB* 31.5.1907, *SB* 15.5.1912, *SB* 16.5.1912. Crimes and brutalities committed against women were also frequently illustrated in the *Dianshizhai huabao* and in the *Tuhua ribao*.

56 See e.g. *SB* 29.5.1877, *SB* 11.5.1882, *SB* 18.5.1882, *SB* 19.5.1882, *SB* 31.5.1882, *SB* 22.5.1907.

at the Fuzhou port: a group of careless boatmen had, on their way to shore, trampled a pregnant woman who apparently died of her wounds. She *apparently* did so. The title of the report suggests it and a certain Mr. Chen, who takes charge of the investigation, also gets to know that “a life had been involved in the matter.” Her death is a serious matter, indeed, but still, “a life,” not “her life” has been lost. The woman is objectified, she is not conceived of as a real person. In fact, the report, some seven lines long, only mentions the woman and what happened to her in a third of a line. The bulk of the article deals with the corrupt stage of the port-management. The woman’s death is not the point of this article.

Nevertheless, the article is titled “A pregnant woman trampled to death.” This is a very obvious example of the attraction of “sex and crime” for potential readers. Her death, a crime, is a first signal and her pregnancy a second. If death has not lured the reader’s attention, death in pregnancy certainly will. Women are good for scandals, and scandals are good for a newspaper’s sales.⁵⁷ There is ideological method in the choice of these news. They reinforce the traditional image of the weak female sex which needs male support to save herself from bitter assaults. Woman is gazed at, in well-known habitual modes of vision.⁵⁸ Such news reports do not openly talk to a female reader. They might still attract a female readership, scandals are interesting to both men and women. But many a news report is probably put under “feminine” headings first to make sure to

57 Only in the 1930s did this use or abuse of women as object of news interest become a heated point of discussion. The 1934 movie by Cai Chusheng *The New Woman* was “at the nexus of a controversy over the responsibility of the urban newsmedia—as the modern creators of ‘public opinion (*yulun*),—towards women and society.” It “reiterated the question of woman and modernity on the screen, serving as a two-fold critique of traditional constraints on women and of the mistreatment of women in the mass media and urban society” (Kristine Harris, “‘The New Woman’: Image, Subject, and Dissent in 1930s Shanghai Film Culture,” *Republican China* 20, no. 2 (1995): 55-79, 56-57).

58 Cf. Tamar a Garb “Gender and Representation,” in *Modernity and Modernism*. (q.v.), pp. 219-290, 223.

attract the male readership.⁵⁹ The inclusion of women in reporting is not primarily a democratizing device, it is not meant to induce radical change in the position of women, and indeed, due to its contents, it may well do the opposite.

And yet, as could be expected, such images which appear to reinforce tradition and the status quo do not remain uncontested. Another “record of bitterness” is the story of a certain Mrs. Chen (“陳女苦志” [A record of Ms. Chen’s bitterness], *SB* 31.5.1872). She is praised as extraordinary with the remark: “To keep one’s chastity is the glory of womankind, but to stake one’s life on it is not something the common can attain to.” Mrs. Chen is the wife of the younger son in the Huang family. When her husband dies, she is determined to keep her chastity. Mrs. Huang dotes on her other daughter-in-law, the wife of her elder son. The latter secretly dislikes Mrs. Chen and suggests to her mother-in-law that Mrs. Chen be expelled from the house. Mrs. Chen is an orphan. The only refuge she has is her elder brother’s family, but they are not able to help her, either. So Mrs. Chen returns to her husband’s home and commits suicide by taking an overdose of a “foreign drug” (洋藥, i.e. opium). Fortunately, she is saved. When her parents-in-law learn the reason for her action, even they praise her chastity.

In this report, Mrs. Chen is depicted as a *lienü*, a traditional heroine 烈女, and a female exemplar 列女.⁶⁰ Mrs. Chen is exemplary because she is chaste. Chastity became the cardinal virtue of womanhood in Song times and remained

59 See John A. Lent, *Women and Mass Media in Asia: An Annotated Bibliography* (Singapore, 1985), p. v.

60 The *Biographies of exemplary women* (列女傳 *Lienüzhuàn*, conventionally ascribed to Han scholar Liu Xiang [劉向, ca. 79-8 BCE]) became the model for the writing of biographies of female exemplars as an established part of the dynastic histories. See Marina H. Sung, “The Chinese Lieh-nü Tradition,” In *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, eds. Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen. (Youngstown, N.Y., 1981), pp. 63-74; and Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany, N.Y., 1998).

so well into the Qing.⁶¹ Indeed, in its early years, the *Shenbao* was quite devoted to this topic.⁶² Mrs. Chen's method for becoming a traditional heroine, however, is modern: she takes the foreign drug opium. Moreover, the stock characters of traditional storytelling, the evil mother- and sister-in-law, are presented in the modern medium, the newspaper. On the surface, already, this early news item mixes foreign and Chinese elements.

If we dig deeper into the text, we find signs of stress between these divergent elements. The stock figures, their stock behavior, and the happy ending seem to owe more to fiction than to news reporting (a phenomenon that can be shown to be typical of *Shenbao* and other Chinese newspaper's).⁶³ The predominance of recorded speech by women in a text that is praising the submissive qualities of women is striking, too: the conversations between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and Mrs. Chen and her sister-in-law occupy over half the body of the text. It may not be unusual for a newspaper to record conversations; newspapers are, after all, the typical medium for reprinting interviews. But the depiction of women through dialogue as deliberating their different cases, as manipulating and organizing—long forgotten since the days of the *Lienüzhuan*—is certainly a novelty, especially in a public medium that claimed to attain the Truth and wanted to be taken more seriously than

61 For a discussion of cardinal female virtues and their use and abuse by the state since Song times, see Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 111-52.

62 See "金節婦傳" (Biography of chaste Mrs. Jin), *SB* 6.5.1872; "烈女殉節" (A heroine dies for chastity), *SB* 13.9.1872; "馬烈女行" (Heroine Ma's conduct), *SB* 8.10.1872; "李烈女金烈婦合傳" (Joint biography of heroines Li and Jin), *SB* 10.10.1872; "張貞婦傳略" (Short biography of chaste Mrs. Zhang), *SHXB* 19.12.1872; and "余節婦傳" (Biography of chaste Mrs. Yu), *SB* 7.9.1877.

63 See the analyses of literary style in the early Hong Kong newspaper *Qiribao* in Elizabeth Sinn, "Emerging media: Hong Kong and the early evolution of the Chinese press," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, pt. 2 (2002): 421-465 and those of the *Shenbao* in chap. 1 of Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?*

traditional works of fiction where outspoken women also occur—is exceptional.⁶⁴ A news report such as this, by representing their activities, publicly acknowledges women to be forces even outside the household. However faithful this may have been to the actual situation in China, it was not the kind of truth that was supposed to appear in print: although “good speech” was one of the four attributes of women listed in the *Rites of Zhou*, later Confucian teaching would insist that women’s speech was not to be heard publicly, in order not to threaten the established order.⁶⁵ In the late Qing, women’s speech was generally considered “gossip” and “long-tongued women” *changshefu* 長舌婦 (already mentioned in the *Book of Songs*) were to be suppressed. Arguments between sisters-in-laws, in particular, were seen as one of the main irritants in the traditional joint family (*da jiating*),⁶⁶ and generally, women’s speech ought not to be heard outside the women’s quarters (內言不出

64 The manipulating women who appear in Yuan and Ming dramas and in prose works such as the *水滸傳 Shuihuzhuan* and some of the early scholar and beauty romances are very particular (and probably all the less “real”) women. Indeed, Keith McMahon (“The Classic ‘Beauty-Scholar’ Romance and the Superiority of the Talented Woman,” in *Body, Subject and Power in China*, eds. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago, 1994), pp. 227-252, 227) explicitly calls them “a deviation ... from the discourse of obligatory male and female roles.” Speaking women appear with increasing frequency in late Qing fiction. In David Wang’s view, as scenes of speaking women “surface again and again,” in this fiction, they provide “the interlocutory conditions under which a new woman can be fashioned” (*Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, 166; for more examples, see *ibid.* 172). It can be argued however, that even as late as the 1930s it remained uncommon to create a “strong female narrative voice” (see the discussion of *The New Woman* in Kristine Harris, “‘The New Woman,’” p. 58).

65 See Mann, *Precious Records*, pp. 89, 101, 119; and Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, 1994), p. 145.

66 Madeleine Yue Dong, “Communities and Communication: A Study of the Case of Yang Naiwu, 1873-1877,” *Late Imperial China* 16, no. 1 (1995): 79-119, 90. The heated discussion of women poets recorded by Susan Mann (*Precious Records*, p. 77) illustrates why speaking and writing women had been considered potentially disruptive: women’s poetry upheld Confucian honor while voicing the very passions and sentiments that threatened to violate it.

門外).⁶⁷ Indeed, even the *Shenbao* itself, carried moral tales of the terrible fates of women who turned out to be too outspoken: one of them even has to see her body rot for being too cheeky to her father-in-law, for example.⁶⁸ Given this social background, the dialogues of women in the public medium of the newspaper function as carnival, they present a “second Truth,”⁶⁹ they “relativize the primary language system,” and thus they create the type of polyphony that is typical of and crucial in times of change such as modernity.⁷⁰

Once again, voices of the old and the new appear together here. However reinforcing the return to traditional values at the happy ending of the article may be, the carnivalesque element of the dialogues is a harbinger of the future. In these articles, as earlier, in the illustrations and the women’s magazine articles discussed, past, present and future meet and contend with one another.⁷¹ The issue at stake in this article is not whether it “resembles” and “calls to mind” the tradition of heroic women exemplars (which it most certainly does). What matters occurs beyond this type of canonical resemblance. The obvious reaffirmation of traditional ideology can be read not as another instance of a

67 Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 89.

68 “記逆婦慘報” (Recording the tragic story of a rebellious wife), *SB* 20.3.1873 is a typical tale of retribution. Since her marriage, the woman in question had treated her father-in-law badly. The reporter quotes some examples (in direct speech) of the wife’s retorts when scolded for her behavior. She comes across as witty and outspoken. When the old man dies, however, she argues that this was only just and fair since he gave her such a hard time. In the winter of the same year she falls ill. When her limbs begin to rot, she realizes that she will die soon. Resigned, she wants her fate recorded to ensure that “the rebellious women of the world hear what happened to me, and all change into filial wives. For only thus can my misdeeds be slightly redeemed.”

69 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais und seine Welt: Volkskultur als Gegenkultur*, trans. of *Tvorcestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaja kul’tura srednevekov’ja i Rennsansa* (Gabriele Leopold tr.), (Frankfurt, 1987), pp. 9, 14.

70 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), p. 368.

71 See Michail M. Bakhtin, *Probleme der Poetik Dostoevskijs*, trans. of *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (Adelheid Schramm tr.), (Munich, 1971), p. 101.

familiar and immediately comprehensible ideological closure but as a possible rupture and point of departure for a different discourse, thus signifying a distance from that ideology.⁷² The many signs of stress within the text may presage the changes that would eventually allow women to talk not only *on* but also *over* the page of a newspaper.

Another “record of bitterness” appearing some thirty years later, in May 1902 bears witness to the fact that such changes had indeed taken place.⁷³ Carnival has become—at least textual—reality. It is the three-line story of a boatman who drowned in the Pu River. The news item records that the younger sister of the dead man had gone to the Department of Streets and Public Works and had reported the case. In her report—which is given as direct speech—she accuses three men of causing her brother’s death by insulting him while he was trying to punt across the river: he had become so nervous that he lost control of the boat and fell into the river. This woman is of course acting as a woman should: she is supporting her male relative. Thus, she is adhering to certain traditional social norms. But she is also depicted engaging in revolutionary acts: not only is her complaint recorded in the public medium of the newspaper, but it is a complaint made at a public office, not simply in her home. She is an active, self-confident, fearless woman who is willing to accuse men openly and by name, and she is successful, too, as her accusation is transferred up to higher authorities. Clearly, she no longer follows the old dictum that women’s speech ought not to be heard outside the women’s quarters.

Admittedly, the great bulk of *Shenbao* articles cannot be said to depict women as active makers of their fate. But such calls do appear more and more frequently. These reports form a powerful counterpoint to the dominant message of the sufferings of women. Most obviously in the early 1910s, after the

72 See Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity* and the classic Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley, 1958, 1964, 1965).

73 “女 (illegible character) 訴苦” (A woman proclaims her bitterness), *SB* 14.5.1902.

foundation of the Republic of China, news items concerned with women no longer dealt merely with sex or crime. There were numerous articles on new, egalitarian concepts of marriage and divorce, for example women's economic independence, the suffragettes' movement and women's participation in politics, and physical activities were all discussed.⁷⁴ Women who had once appeared in the public arena only in reports of bitterness were now visibly participating in all kinds of activities and functions. They were no longer defined by their family affiliation as wife 婆 or future daughter-in-law 養媳 but by their membership in the "new female world" 新女界 (e.g., *SB* 1.5.1912), they were now "female lords (or ladies)" 女公子 (*SB* 8.5.1912) or, most frequently, "female scholars" 女士 (*SB* 21.5.1912). Thus, even in name, women had gained acceptance as public figures in a world once exclusively reserved to men.⁷⁵

Modernity and Women

By giving this short overview over the types of women encountered in readings of the Shanghai newsmedia, Set out to illustrate that women did indeed

74 See e.g. on new-style marriage *SB* 7.5.1912, *SB* 8.5.1912, *SB* 19.9.1912, *SB* 3.10.1912; on political participation *SB* 26.1.1912, *SB* 24.3.1912, *SB* 25.3.1912; on physical exercise *SB* 22.12.1912 (illustrated with a woman on a bicycle); on economic independence *SB* 24.9.1912.

75 Rankin ("Emergence of Women," p. 45) remarks on the frequent use from around the turn of the twentieth century of the term *nūshi* (female scholar) almost as a title. In fact, *nūshi* is not a new term. It was used at least since the late Ming for the respectable domestic woman, and then for the courtesan, crowning her as an honorary man. The term acknowledges that women somehow had to become men in order to do certain things. Whoever gained "real acceptance" in the world of men, by being able to talk and write poetry, would eventually be honored with that name (see Dorothy Ko, "The Written Word and the Bound Foot: A History of the Courtesan's Aura," in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, eds. Ellen Widmer & Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford, 1997), pp. 74-100, 80; Mann, *Precious Records*, p. 67; and Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, pp. 117, 139ff).

become the symbol of modernity in the late Qing. Numerous illustrations, editorials, advertisements and news reports in the Shanghai newsmedia document some of the changes in the perception of women during this period. Their prominence testifies to the importance assigned to the creation of a "new woman" for "new China." It appeared, however, that the message conveyed in different types of texts in the newsmedia was by no means one and the same: illustrations depicted and advocated public women as subjects since the 1880s while editorials and news reports debated them as objects, since the 1870s and into the 1910s, often critically and morally judgemental, although they did also contain carnivalistic strains that featured female agency; advertisements invited women as reading subjects around 1900, while prescribing only particular roles to them; women's magazines in the 1910s deliberated the girl student, and—while accepting her ultimate success—still attempted to mold and direct her toward femininity rather than feminism.

"Woman" as created in the newsmedia is a complex figure, full of ambiguities. There is a strain of conservatism to be observed in the ideal woman, in spite of her obvious break with the past. She may be described in traditional terms as a "good wife" who is chaste and faithful to her husband, or as a "wise mother" who knows that to care for her own health is most important in order for her to ensure the continuation of the family line. But she may also appear in radically different terms as a strong lady, no longer confined to the limitations set by the walls of her boudoir, but indeed a "babe on bike,"⁷⁶ enjoying herself in tea-houses and parks outside, accusing men at public offices, or studying books once reserved to men alone. In further deconstructing these sharply contradictory types of "woman" on the pages of the Shanghai press, one finds that each one of them in itself again bears its own contradictions: the traditional type of the "chaste wife" commits a traditional act, suicide, but she does so by

76 See Zamperini, "But I never learned how to waltz."

making use of a new tool: the foreign drug, opium. Moreover, her case is recorded in a new medium, the newspaper. The modern type of the “girl student,” independent and involved in a free and equal marriage, on the other hand, is attributed with traditional interests in domesticity and beauty. Thus, polyphonic elements can be traced both in “traditional figures” showing a potential for change, and in “modern figures,” demonstrating an inclination to old convictions and prejudices. This textual ambiguity is supported by visual evidence to be found on the pages of the Shanghai newsmedia as well: trendy short-haired women are shown wearing traditional gowns (see ill.3, *SB* 3.4.1912), and thus become ridiculed visual markers, stand-ins for the general insecurities of the times. Constant unrest, fragmentariness and complexity lay at the heart of the modernist experience not just elsewhere in the world, but in China, too. These are captured most effectively in the ever-changing, always already different figure of the new woman on the pages of Shanghai’s newsmedia.⁷⁷

The “Chinese modernity” developing during the last years of the Qing was characterized by instabilities manifold, symbolized in the conflicting images of woman. Thus it was both a parallel and a response to the foreign modernities encroaching provocatively and more and more unescapably on China. China could see her future written in these foreign modernities—or one possible future—a future stripped (or liberated) of history and tradition, standardized, simplified, and materialistic, yet seductively efficient, functional, and prosperous. Foreign modernities provided a working version of modernity from which the Chinese would pick and choose different elements as they strove to imagine an ideal future for themselves.⁷⁸ But the conflicting images of “modern

77 Cf. Eadie, *Movements of Modernity*, p. 5.

78 I have here reformulated some of the arguments made for the function of American modernity for Germany in the early 20th century in Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, pp. 9-10.

women” to be found in the Shanghai newsmedia suggest just how difficult it was to envisage new forms of work and leisure, production and consumption, culture and gender in China. Indeed, it was not simply a question of accepting foreign modernity or rejecting it; rather, the difficulties lay in understanding precisely what this might entail and whether and how one could or should implement it.⁷⁹

As a result, the type of renewal that the many different groups of modernists—never a homogenous *xinpai* 新派—were able to advocate was, on the one hand, inextricably affected by the multilingual, crosscultural trafficking of ideas, technologies, and powers in the wake of 19th century foreign expansionism, but it was, on the other hand, bound up tightly by indigenously defined barriers.⁸⁰ Clearly, the ambiguous images of women to be found on the pages of the Shanghai newsmedia are markers of an uneasiness with the Chinese past as well as with the foreign present in China. Again, this attitude finds visual reflections, when, for example, Chinese women are shown d(r)eforming their bodies to look as buxom and thin-waisted as those of foreigners (ill. 4, *SB* 29.4.1912) or when they are shown, trying to squeeze their “modern” and unbound “big feet”大腳 into small, foreign high-heels (ill. 5, *SB* 30.4.1912). As conflicting notions, such images of women are both defying and (therefore?!) defining modernity.

The prominence of women and gender issues on the pages of the Shanghai newsmedia and the nature of the discourse on women and gender can be understood as a product of Chinese (and not just male) anxieties as well as a reflection on observable (foreign and not just) female realities. Evidently, Chinese men and women were equally haunted by the figure of the “traditional woman” as by the figure of the “modern woman.” Woman was considered the agent of modernity—for the glory of China—but at the same time she was seen

79 See Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, pp. 12-13.

80 For a slightly different argument see Wang, *Fin-de-siècle Splendor*, p. 5.

and felt to be its most frightening symbol.

Quite a few editorials dealt explicitly with the condescension that the Chinese habit of considering women lesser beings than men had raised in the West.⁸¹ China considered the European countries and America the most civilized countries in the world. Since women's liberation had become fashionable there, China had to copy it. It was the aspiration to gain foreign recognition that was at the heart of discussions on the liberation of "traditional women": footbinding, female illiteracy and concubinage were to be abolished so that the foreigners would stop regarding China as a "land of savages." This liberation was not primarily a liberation for women's sake: women were to be liberated for the glory of China.

For the sake of upgrading China's reputation, therefore, the encouragement of women's liberation was considered "a good idea." But this idea was filled with uncertainties and dangers. The strained tone and the inherent contradictions in many of the media texts and images presented here shows that the woman question was a question both of the "perils and promises of modernity" in China as elsewhere.⁸² It was frightening (and remained so well into the Republic)—both for men and for women—to break completely with the past: the achievements of the modern Chinese woman, her attempts to unbind her feet, go to school, read the newspaper, go to work and take part in public and political life, were obviously considered to be as problematic as her failing to do

81 See e.g. the above-mentioned "述西人論中國貴男賤女之俗" (Westerners discussing the Chinese practice of considering men more worthy than women), *SB* 17.4.1882; and "論中國婦女佞佛陋俗" (On vulgar habits in female Buddhist worship), *SB* 24.3.1897.

82 Biddy Martin, *Woman and Modernity. The (Life)Styles of Lou Andreas-Salomé* (Ithaca, 1991), p. 19. Cf. also Elke Frederiksen, *Die Frauenfrage in Deutschland, 1865-1915* (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 6 on the importance of the women's movement in Germany between the 1860s and 1910s: "Women's emancipation was one of the great social issues of the day; the woman's movement was bracketed with the youth movement and the labor movement as one of the greatest and most dangerous threats to the civilization and social order of their time."

so—and accordingly, many women still remained uneducated, concerned about their chastity and sense of shame, many even went on binding their daughters' feet.⁸³ War and revolution, economic crisis and new attitudes toward sexuality, political instability and emergent mass culture had altered Chinese women's positions—sometimes in ways that were emancipatory, sometimes not—and they had created enormous anxieties both about male powers and privileges as well as about women's roles and responsibilities. The very moralist tone in newsmedia's reactions to women in public and in schools shows, for example, that to engage in public activities was to open themselves up to suspicions, and to take up intellectual pursuits was “to take up a masculine, thus castrating, position in the terms of one language and to arouse the suspicion of deviance in another.”⁸⁴ Therefore, women were reminded in the Shanghai newsmedia, time and again, to “put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety.”⁸⁵ This is why men (and women) attempted to prescribe—in the newsmedia—a particular type of “new woman” in their writings: one that served primarily as a worthy housewife and a good mother of China's future citizens, one that was subdued and subservient (a point which in itself is contradictory: to advocate the continuation of more or less traditional norms in a public medium such as the newspaper—presumably also out to be read by women—was to radically change them already).⁸⁶

83 Cf. Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, p. 121. For the persistence of ambiguities in the treatment of women throughout the Republican period see Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*; and Barbara Mittler, “Verführung Emanzipation: Befreite Frauen und die chinesische 4. Mai-Bewegung,” *Figurationen*, vol. 2 no.1 (2001): 83-102.

84 Martin, *Woman and Modernity*, p. 232.

85 Ibid, p. 235.

86 Many of the early writers for women's magazines, the revolutionary Qiu Jin (c.1875-1907) being one prominent example, take up the nationalist rhetoric of saving the nation, and provide information catering especially to women's alleged interests and needs, not concerned with international politics but with internal cleaning methods. In creating the figure of the modern woman, both women and men thus write for woman

Nevertheless, this type of strategy could be interpreted as hegemonic: it was to ensure that the power over the constructed image remained with the beholder and with the writer, that man could still supervise which kind of female liberation would be taking place. In determining what kind of woman a woman should want to be (and warning of the woman she should not aspire to be), these prescriptions could be read to betray what kind of woman men would find desirable.⁸⁷ A model woman would be advocated to those who were able to read (who would in turn tell it to other women), as a method of saving men from women whose power they had always feared. This would be the reason why women frequently appear as objectifiable “desirable emasculates” and if they do become a subject, they are most often unappealing “frightening effeminates” as visualized in a caricature of 1912: a huge woman (warrior) tramples a rather cute and small (police-)man (ill. 6, *SB* 30.3.1912).

Yet, this illustration shows effectively that there are two sides to the coin: the men who fear such a woman—those interested in hegemony over the construction of the new woman—are all but ridiculed here. The mighty woman is obviously titillating and fascinating, too. And she can build on a long tradition of strong and powerful women glorified in Chinese fiction (written mostly by men)—both in martial arts novels (*wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說) and in beauty and scholar romances.⁸⁸ Indeed, the constant negotiations and reevaluations of the new woman, her advantages and even her disadvantages, also testify to her attraction and appeal and point to her power. The polyphonic discourse in the

with a “man’s gaze.” Interestingly, the writer Lou Andreas-Salomé does a similar thing in her fiction: she writes from the perspective of her male characters, and thereby succeeds in engaging what she might have called the oscillation within herself over questions of femininity and feminism. See Martin, *Woman and Modernity*, p. 177.

87 For this type of argument see Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London, 1989), p. 94.

88 For an overview over this tradition, see Roland Altenburger, “Die Schwertkämpferin (*nüxia*) in der Erzählliteratur der frühen Republikzeit.” In *Zwischen Tradition und Revolution* (q.v.), pp. 153-167.

Shanghai newsmedia—if covertly at times—ultimately acknowledges the inevitability and even advocates for woman to become a subject and no longer to remain the submissive object of once-repressed and now no longer merely utopian wishes.⁸⁹ Woman in the late Qing media was both a reassuring and a frightening bearer of meaning because she was already evidently also the maker of meaning. The voices of moderation and restraint, to be found repeatedly in the Shanghai newsmedia, are only last reminders of a past that is dying when the future is not quite, but certainly to be born. As many of the polyphonic news reports in particular illustrate, woman herself constituted the antitraditional tradition, and it was only against the better knowledge in the inevitability of evolution, that, when she was hesitatingly established in the newsmedia of Shanghai, she was always already being ideologically formed into a different, often more “traditional” image that both defined and defied her modernity.

In his *Introduction à la modernité*, Henri Lefèbvre argues that “modernity is the shadow of the miscarried revolution, its crumbling and sometimes its caricature.”⁹⁰ The new woman emerging from the pages of the Shanghai press becomes the perfect stand-in for such modernity in China, she is exactly what Lefèbvre describes: she is not the result of a successful revolution, instead, she is—at least in part—a hazy testimony to its failure, its disintegration, its carnivalization. In all her contradictions and ambiguities, she resembles a modernist collage in which “various fragments and materials of experience are laid bare, revealed as fissures, voids, unresolvable contradictions, irreconcilable particularizations, pure heterogeneity.”⁹¹ Thus, she is an embodiment of the crisis that is modernity, as Lefèbvre argues. In his view, crises constitute

89 Cf. Martin, *Woman and Modernity*, p. 4.

90 Henri Lefèbvre, *Introduction à la modernité* (Paris, 1962), p. 223.

91 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression. Notes on the Return Representation in European Painting,” in *Modernism and Modernity. The Vancouver Conference Papers*, eds. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, David Solking (Halifax, 1983), pp. 81-115, 106.

modernity: they are integral to its consciousness and image.⁹² The Shanghai newsmedia, in their different types of texts and different descriptions and prescriptions of the new woman illustrate that woman in China is such a crisis. And therefore—if paradoxically—modernity (that is, woman) in China is, as elsewhere, always accompanied by a retrogressive, even archaeological mode, by a confusion between the ancient and the modern.⁹³ Those who live in the “modern age,” be it in Europe or in China, live in two worlds simultaneously: the 19th century public can remember what it is like to live, materially and spiritually, in worlds that were not modern at all. From this inner dichotomy, this sense of living in two worlds simultaneously—probably considered perfectly normal at the time—the ideas of modernization and modernism emerge and unfold:⁹⁴ it is the very crux of modernity to be defined and defied at the same time.

92 Henri Lefebvre, “Theses on Modernity,” in *Modernism and Modernity* (q.v.), pp. 3-12, 11.

93 Ibid, pp. 1-2, 2.

94 Cf. Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), p. 17 and Li Hsiao-t'i, *Lianlian hongchen*, chap. 3.

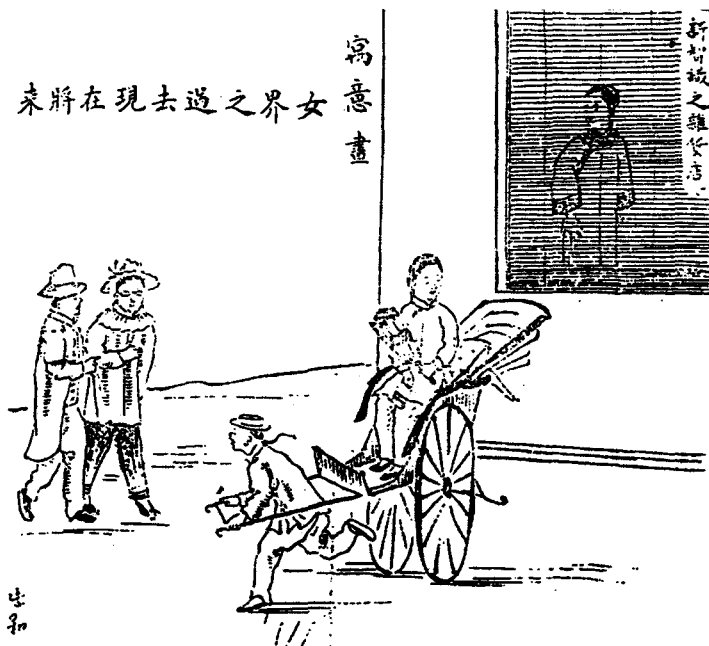


Illustration 1: Past present and future: Tuhua ribao 10/9 (1909)



Illustration 2: Changes in the women's world: Tuhua ribao 10/9 (1909)



Illustration 3: Women's short hair and gown: Shenbao April 3, 1912

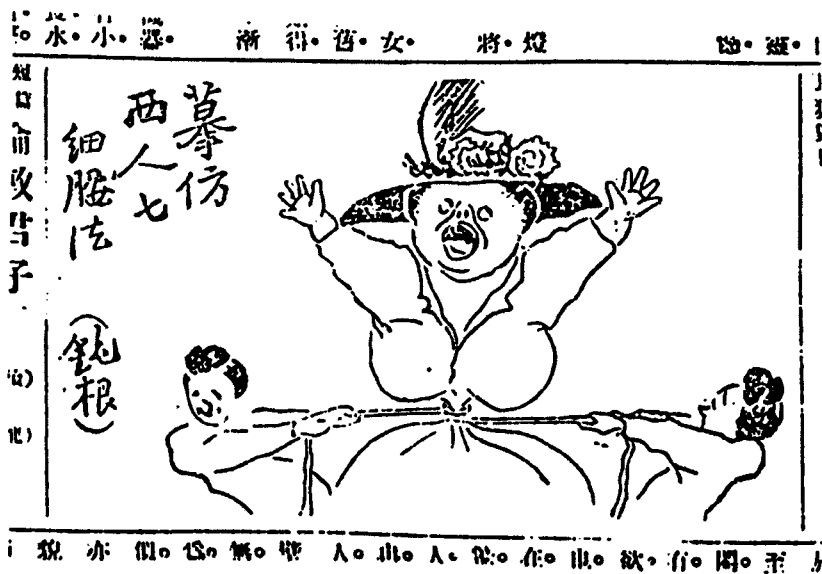


Illustration 4: Imitating westerners (waist): Shenbao April 29, 1912



Illustration 5: Imitating westerners (shoes): Shenbao April 30, 1912



Illustration 6: Woman warrior: Shenbao March 30, 1912